

Desmond Francis

May 3, 2023

Interviewer Donna Coombs-Montrose

Camera Don Bouzek

DF: I was born in Jamaica, West Indies, basically from the middle of the island, which is... district, Jamaica, West Indies. Clarendon, Jamaica, West Indies.

Q: You grew up in Clarendon?

DF: Yeah, until the age of 19. I left after high school.

Q: Did you observe any industries in Jamaica when you were growing up?

DF: Yeah there was at that time the cane sugar industry. There was citrus also and later on bauxite.

Q: Did you ever work in the bauxite industry?

DF: No, I never worked in the bauxite industry. At that time I was still going to school when they started all those things.

Q: What is bauxite?

DF: Bauxite is the red dirt that they dig up from the ground and process it to become aluminum. The red dirt, after they put it through the chemical, becomes white, and that's aluminum, which is used for just about everything. They use it to make foil; they use it to make engines, foil paper that we use here up to now. They're still doing that in Jamaica. Citrus and sugar industry, they usually send sugar to England in exchange for that much money at a time. They usually export sugar and white rum to Newfoundland and in turn Newfoundland usually sends sole fish to the island.

Q: Does the bauxite industry play a strategic role in government?

DF: Yeah.

Q: But you never had an opportunity to train for any positions in that industry?

DF: No, because I was going to school at the time when all those stuffs were going on. After I was graduated I tried to get – before I migrate, I was 19 years old – I tried to get in there. But it was a construction going on so I really didn't have a skill at the time. Basically I was doing even tutoring to a trade school, and that's how I picked up my trade.

Q: What trade did you pick up?

DF: Welding.

Q: Were you certified as a welder before you left Jamaica?

DF: Actually I was still an apprentice, but I was coming to Canada to go to school and basically I was doing college in Toronto. Things happened. I got involved with having a kid. So I had to leave school and start welding again and get my papers in Toronto. Then I left Toronto. In Toronto it was hard to get a job, just like anywhere else you go. They advertise that they need welders, and you'd go and management will ask you if you have Canadian experience. My thing is when I say to them, no I don't have Canadian experience but a trade is a trade is a trade. All you have to do is give me a test, and if I make the test then you can put me to work. No, you have to have Canadian experience. So I worked in factories and then I'd go to evening class so that I could get some background in welding for Canadian standard, which is the same as anywhere else. After that I was working. I got a job in an industry boilermaker shop in Toronto. The name of the shop was Toronto Iron Works. Back up a little bit. But before I get into Toronto Iron Works I was working in this factory that made Jacuzzis, all Jacuzzis for pool and all that stuff. They saw that I could weld and all that stuff. So they gave me a maintenance job in the factory to look after all their equipment and to do all the fine welding that they needed to get done. It's a conveyor belt; so when the stuff is rejected, because they have a machine that

does the welding, but sometimes you have bad work so you have to go and do it manually and fix it so that they could still polish it off and send it out. Then I got a job at Toronto Iron Works; they call it TIW.

Q: Was it a union job?

DF: Partially. The field work that Toronto Iron Works does was unionized. The shop wasn't really unionized; we had a union but it wasn't the same as the pipefitter or the ironworker union. They just have a union for the shop, a shop union they call it, a house union.

Q: How long did you stay there?

DF: I stayed at Toronto Iron Works for maybe about six years or four years, about four years and a little bit I stayed there before I left and come out to Alberta in '76. So I was there in '72.

Q: What made you decide to come to Alberta?

DF: Basically they were looking for welders out in Alberta. They were making more money than I was making in the shop at the time.

Q: Did you have friends out here?

DF: No, I didn't know anyone out here.

Q: Did you see ads or something?

DF: Yeah, I had a couple of friends who we were always working together, and they decided to come out here. When they got here they gave me a call and said, well you need to come out here; you'll get a job. The pay was twice as much as I was getting in Toronto.

Q: What was that like?

DF: The pay structure here at the time when I came here was \$12.47 and in Toronto I was getting \$6.75 in the shop.

Q: And the field was more?

DF: The field was more; about \$10 they were getting at the time in 1976.

Q: Did you jump on the first bus?

DF: Actually no, three of us came out here. My friend, he's dead now, he had a car.

Q: What was his name?

DF: His name was Valentine Young. He got his car and the next guy that come with us is Edmond Gillard.

Q: Is he still here?

DF: Yeah, Eddie's still here. Then basically before we get here there were these other three guys leave about three days before us. It was Glen Ison, Brownie, Robert Brown, and Peter Ramdin.

Q: Peter came out here?

DF: Yeah, Peter Ramdin. You know him?

Q: He was my neighbour growing up.

DF: Oh okay, Peter Ramdin. I think he's in Calgary. He was in Peace River and then he moved to Calgary.

Q: He's been here a long time.

DF: I know he was here and then he left and went. They came a couple days before us. Then basically we couldn't find a place to live; it was hard at the time.

Q: What kind of experience did you have with that?

DF: Oh the three of us first stayed at the Y for about three weeks. Then a friend, I saw this coloured guy downtown when we were walking in and around the YMCA. I saw this guy and called him and said, hey man, how you doing? He answered. He stopped and he said, you're Jamaican? I said, yeah. I said, we don't have any place to live. He said, well where I live there is a little room. I said to him. . .

Q: What's his name?

DF: His name is Harvil. He died of heart failure. I think his name was Harvil Green. He died. I said to him, well could you see if you could get that room for us, because we're living at the Y and you have to pay so much every day for it. So he said, yeah, okay he'll go and talk to his landlord. So the following day he came down to the Y because I told him and he said, yeah you can get it. I said, it won't be for too long because we're looking into a job to go up north. He said, no problem.

Q: What did you know about the north?

DF: He didn't know much about it but I knew that they were building Syncrude at the time. Suncor was there already before Syncrude, but Suncor wasn't hiring anyone. Suncor had its crew of people already. But they were building Syncrude and that was a brand new refinery, Syncrude. So he said yes; so we went. To my surprise, I thought it would be a fairly big room like 12 by 12 or so. It was only like about 8 by 5. They have one little single bed that takes up the whole room. You only have a little space like 2 feet or so after the single bed in that room. So we rented it. There were three of us and a single bed. Can you imagine? Three grown men and a

single bed. Two guys' heads were up at the head of the bed and one had to turn his head at the foot of the bed. The three of us slept on that bed but you got to sleep at the side.

Q: You made it work.

DF: Yeah, we had to. Then Eddie first got a job. They were building stuff for Syncrude and he got a job in the shop first. Then I got a job, me and my friend got a job with the ironworkers first. We went up north for the ironworkers. He went for the ironworker; I went for operator engineer welding.

Q: Explain what that job was.

DF: Welding, in welding we were basically working on plates. We were working on, they call it a dragline; we were working on dragline number one and dragline number two.

Q: Were you supervising welding?

DF: No, working as a welder.

Q: And he as an ironworker, what did he do?

DF: Basically the same--he was working as a welder too.

Q: And the third person?

DF: He went back to Toronto to visit his family for about three weeks and then he came back. Then he get a job up north too with us working at Syncrude too. Actually it wasn't Syncrud. The project was Syncrude, but we were working for Bechtel, Canadian Bechtel at the time.

Q: Did you ever meet Peter Kokaram?

DF: I can't remember.

Q: Tell me about the dragline.

DF: The dragline is like a big machine, big equipment. They put it piece by piece together. What the dragline does is dig the earth and put it on a conveyor belt. The conveyor belt would take it and dump it in an area, and then they have the bucket wheel that would take that dirt or the sand, put it in the next dragline that takes it into the building. It goes into a kind of wash and it spins; then it separate the oil basically from the dirt. After that is finished, then it would go into they call that where it goes, they call it the extraction. It goes from there into a tumbler and then into like a boiler. Then it's still liquified until it passes through all the process and then it becomes gas. It becomes the crude.

Q: So the welding you did was to keep the dragline operating?

DF: Operating, yeah. The dragline, after it's all finished, that's what the dragline does in the welding. Then, after that I basically, after about a year with the operator engineer welding, I went to the pipefitters.

Q: Was that a higher rate of pay?

DF: Yeah it's a little bit more pay but it's also a better type of welding, better type of job, more cleaner. You don't have to go through all this intricacy of using a gouger, because when you work on plates they wanted a hundred percent X-ray. When you finish one welding the first section of it, you've got to go on the backside, and you have to use a gouger to clean it back down to pure metal. Then you have to weld the backside again. So basically you've got to do two in the front and the back. You have to gouge that out, the old seam, and then you reweld it back up again. With the pipe, all you do once you get the root in, proper root in the pipe, you clean it out. Then you keep on welding until it fills up; then they X-ray it. Same thing but it's smaller because you welt from 2 inch to 48. When they go to 62 inch, it's bigger, basically like doing the same as you would do the plate. You have to go inside and clear it out. Then you

reweld it. But it's not as much as you do with a plate, because some of the plate is like 5 inches or 6 inches thick. That's the thickness of the plate that we work on, 5 and 6 inches thick. With the pipe, some goes to maybe about 3 inches and some goes from 16 gauge to an inch and a half. But most of the time it is 7/8ths to an inch and a half, and it doesn't take a lot of time to do a 6 inch weld or 12 inch.

Q: What interested you in welding?

DF: Basically, welding is like you make money from welding. A nurse will go and do one, two, three years before she gets a certificate. You have to do the same thing with welding. But with welding, first you start as an apprentice. You do your first year and then you have to go to school. Then you finish that year, then you do the second year and you have to go to school; then your third year you go to school for the final time. Then you do both theory and practical.

Q: Is that here or there?

DF: Here. Even though you're a welder, you have to go through the same process. Everybody has to go get their journeyman.

Q: Does the apprentice do the same job?

DF: Yeah, until you get to journeyman, it's the same thing. You know what the intricate part of welding is, in and out and what you do if you have a bad joint and all that stuff. Then after that you do another year, and then you have to do a practical and also a theory to get your B class B pressure.

Q: That's additional?

DF: Yeah.

Q: So you have a journeyman license?



DF: Yeah, and a B pressure.

Q: Are those the only tickets you require?

DF: Yeah, for welding.

Q: Do you have to renew it at any point?

DF: Yes, you have to renew your B pressure. It used to be every year. Then they changed it to every two years.

Q: So that's all the training you need forever – you don't have to go and refresh?

DF: No, but you can go further if you want to do tungsten welding, tungsten iliac they call it. It's tungsten with argon gas. They call it TIG.

Q: You need a ticket for that too?

DF: Yes, you need a ticket for that so that you can weld stainless steel, Inconel, aluminum.

Q: So without that, you can't do stainless steel?

DF: You can't do stainless and Inconel. It's a type of metal that they use. Without that you cannot participate in that type of work. Basically it's more so in pipefitting work that they use a lot of those so that the fuel that passes through it doesn't eat them out as fast as it would do with mild steel. It corrodes and breaks down. So they have to shut down every year to fix those. They've got to check them to make sure that it's-- with mild steel every year the inspector comes out and he would grind a section of the pipe to find out how much wear and tear is on the inside. He'll come to this thing and he'll hit it and he'll look on his gauge and it will tell him,

okay this is how much the thickness is down. So they would say then, okay next shutdown they'll take out that section of pipe and put in a new section.

Q: And then you weld it?

DF: Weld that back together, yeah.

Q: So you have all these tickets?

DF: Oh yes I do. Otherwise I couldn't be at the job. I go all over to work. If you don't have a ticket, you can't. You have to.

Q: Where do you go to work? All over where?

DF: All over the province and out of province or the States. I work in the U.S.

Q: You spent time initially in Fort Mac?

DF: Yes, I spent from 1976 to '81.

Q: What was your rotation like?

DF: There was nothing like that before. Before they start getting rotating hours we were working 40 tens and an eight. You were 40 hours at ten hours a day and eight hours on Friday, because you leave Friday evening to go. You'd get double time for anything over eight hours, because your days are eight hours a day that you are supposed to work. When you work ten you get two hours extra double time in the evening. Those are all double time hours.

Q: That's every week?

DF: Every week.

Q: Would you come down every weekend?

DF: Yeah, if they don't ask you to work Saturday and Sunday. If they ask you to work Saturday and Sunday, you can say yes or you can say no. It wasn't that much that you have to, not like now they tell you that you've got to work. The union, that was how it usually is.

Q: Were you in a union at that point?

DF: Yes, I was in the union, 488.

Q: When did you join the union?

DF: I joined the union in '77 June.

Q: Did you ever hold any office?

DF: No, just on committees. I'm always on committees, like now, I'm still on committees.

Q: What kind of committees?

DF: First I was on the examining committee that goes through all the applications for people want to join the union. They call that the examining committee.

Q: Is it open to anybody?

DF: For anybody. Then after that I've been on the, okay I'm just trying to see which one first I've been on. I went on the election committee. I was on the election committee for about 15 years.

Q: To elect whom?

DF: I was on that committee that looks after-- after a certain two years then they have to go up for election to see if they...their position. So I was always on that committee. On that committee I was serving on the building trade committee.

Q: What did that committee do?

DF: Like whatever action they need to get done to look after both from the union and also the body that looks after all the other unions in the building trades. I have been on that for two times. Then I'm on the political action committee. I'm on the PAC. I was on there for first maybe about six years and then I stepped away for a little while, and now I'm back at it again. That's why I'm going to Ottawa.

Q: Because of the political action committee?

DF: Yeah.

Q: Is there a convention?

DF: They always have this little three day convention, yeah. As a matter of fact, Rachel Notley was down this morning too. She passed by and spent about 15 or 20 minutes there.

Q: So... Building Trades supports political parties?

DF: We support. But to be honest with you, you always have a bunch of guys who always want the Conservative. Even though you're a union, it's like half and half. Their views are different from my views, but we try and let them see the light at the end of the tunnel. But they can't see, because every unionized company that's in Alberta tries to break up the union. They will have a union; they call it double breast. They would have a union side and a non-union side. What they do is they let the union side go in and bid. Then the same people go in and bid a little bit lower so that they could get the job. They call it double breasting, which they should not have done. But way back I think in Klein days or a little before Klein days they started doing that.

Then when Klein got in, it just got rampant. Sometimes what happens is they take them to court a couple of times. The union said we get the job; so we'll be totally non-union. But it's because it's the same company. So they're making more money. A couple times we went down to the Legislature and talked to them, and some of the guys in the Progressive Conservatives acted like they didn't know what we're talking about. We've basically been there about three different times on the political action committee. Then they say they understand, but they still do the same thing. The only time things were basically getting real was when Rachel got over when the Conservatives just basically fall on their face. Then they got Kenney to come back in and say, wait. That's why I will never ever trust Danielle Smith. If she had stayed with the party they could be basically the party at that time that would be in Alberta, the Wild Rose. But she stepped away and brought all these other people with her to Kenney when Kenney came in. That's why we.... But some of the people still can't forgive her certain things that she did.

Q: So you're saying Danielle Smith's people influence the union?

DF: No, but you'll always have people who figure the Conservative is doing good. Conservative is basically for the rich man; it's not for the poor man. What she stands for right now, even though we're getting away from what we were talking about, what is happening right now is she's basically lying to the people again. What she's doing is, is like when Mandel was mayor here and they were going to build Rogers Place, she was the head of Wild Rose at the time. She said you cannot put taxpayer money to build with this other guy that was building Rogers Place; so they've got to go out and find things. She was dead against it. Now she didn't even get a good mandate to be the premier. Now she wants to give Calgary money to build. She's not giving the people their direct figure anyway. For example, if you give them say \$10 million and the business people put \$10 million, that's still not enough to build a stadium. They still got to come back to the government, to the Conservative, to get more money to build, and it's going to come out of your pocket because they're going to tax the hell out of us to build that. But you know, I guess we'll all see what's going to happen.

Q: Have your committees been important in guiding the union?

DF: It is. As a matter of fact, all the committees together basically appoint the business manager to run the union. The executive board is the main action for the union, the executive committee. They are the one who puts things together, and the business manager has to follow.

Q: Anything else you're doing with the union?

DF: Actually I ran to be a business agent, but I didn't get in. The time that I could get in, I didn't want to. I was already 70 years old. I don't want to travel back and forth to McMurray. I know I would win but they would stick me up in McMurray. McMurray now is not like what it used to be before. When you go to McMurray, to Syncrude is okay, but then you still have to go another 150 miles to the others outside of Fort McMurray to go to the other jobs in the bush. That's why they were doing this fly-in and fly-out; you go in for two weeks. Another thing that I didn't like too is when they say they go 21 and 7 or 14 and 7, every time you leave the camp you gotta take all your stuff out of the room. Before, you didn't have to. You get your room in camp, and your room is your room until you either get fired or you quit or the job comes to an end. Your job come to an end and you get laid off, you take your stuff from your room and you go. These days, you come out of the room and somebody else goes in the room. You gotta take all your stuff out. You're in there for 21 days or 14 days. So everything that you bring in, you can't bring a lot of stuff, you gotta take it out. I don't know for sure, but they say they have some place that can carry your stuff and you leave it; so, when you come back, you go and pick up your stuff and take it back to a different room. They say it's like hot-bedding. I never did like that. I was on a committee then when they started doing that, and my reaction was no, you can't do that. If you've got a room, you've got a room. All the committee had to get together. Most of us guys said no, but it got to go to the general body. When it goes to the general body, the business manager kind of butters it up. Even though I go up and tell the guys, guys, it's not what it seems; you should not accept this deal because this is bad. What they do, instead of a ballot to vote, is they have a show of hands. They look at it and they say, it's close. I said, it's close; well let's do it this way then. I said, the people who are for it would go on one side and then you count them, and the people who aren't for it go on the other side. They counted maybe about ten more people. So it went through. There's nothing you can do.

Q: So they supported moving their belongings every time they left?

DF: Yeah, because that was part of the contract too; that was in the contract. I haven't been on one of them jobs since that anyway, because I retired.

Q: So the working conditions were in the contract?

DF: Yeah, most of the working conditions are in the contract.

Q: Is the employer Syncrude directly, or a subcontractor?

DF: Subcontractors under Syncrude.

Q: Who was your subcontractor?

DF: Well, they have lots of different ones. First was Bechtel, PCL; some of the people do all kinds of different jobs. It was Catalytic. Catalytic was maintenance. Then they got their Stearns Catalytic. So it changes all the time. But you still have PCL, Maloid, Catalytic.

Q: Catalytic converters?

DF: No but they were a contractor. That's the name of the company.

Q: Is Bechtel still there?

DF: No, Bechtel is gone. Brown and Root is gone. Toronto Iron Work is gone. You've got new contractors coming in now. Because I'm not out there, sometimes I hear about it but I don't really give too much. I used to go to the hall every day but I don't go there anymore because they kind of changed how they do things.

Q: When you went to the hall every day, you were still holding your position?

DF: Yeah, oh yeah. But going there every day you'd find people come in and they'll tell you what's happening. You go when you have a general meeting, because you have a general meeting every three months. You voice your opinion and you tell them what is happening and you say you heard from John Brown or you heard from one of them guys that is working on the job. Why is it this way? Why is the business agent not seeing what's happening?

Q: The business agent is located in Fort Mac?

DF: The business agent, they go wherever they need to go. You have a business agent that deals with Fort Mac; you have two business agents in Fort Mac. But we had a business agent too around the city and around the province of Alberta basically. You've got six business agents in different areas.

Q: That's just for your union?

DF: Yeah.

Q: Three in Fort Mac?

DF: Two, two in Fort Mac. The rest they divide up the province. You have some guy look after Peace River, you have some guy look after Joffre area, you have people look after the lakes, like Wabamun and Sundance. They have other guys who will look after the area in Rocky Mountain House and all that. So they divided up the work. And people will look after Redwater. So you have different business agents for different areas.

Q: How did you happen to go to Texas?

DF: The reason why I went to Texas is Constance got a job in Texas. She got a job first. I was still working here at Dow because everything was kind of turned down. For nursing they were kind of short; so she went to Texas. She got a job from here to Texas and getting all her things paid



and everything. They give her an amount of time that she had to spend to get all those things. I think it was three years she had to work in their system to get her bonuses that they were going to give her.

Q: Did you work as well?

DF: Yeah, I went down. I worked for the union down in San Antonio.

Q: When was this?

DF: In 1994.

Q: How long did you stay there?

DF: Five years.

Q: Which company were you working for?

DF: First I was working for the union. I was working with a company that did boiler work. Then I was working at the hospital in San Antonio in the boiler room, welding and fitting in the boiler room, doing mechanical in the boiler room.

Q: Is that the job you had until you came back?

DF: No. Then I got a job with the union. That was a non-union job, because I couldn't get a union job then; they said they didn't have any job. Then I phoned my business manager and my business manager phoned the business manager in Texas, and they get me a job at Motorola.

Q: That was a union job?

DF: Yeah.

Q: Were your rates comparative to what you got here?

DF: Yeah.

Q: But in U.S. dollars.

DF: Yeah.

Q: How did you find the climate there?

DF: Climate in Texas? It was great. It was good.

Q: Not the weather – the racial climate.

DF: Oh. You know, how should I put this? With the American Black and the Black from the Caribbean, they basically treat you different. They know that you're not from there, and basically people from the Caribbean don't put up with nonsense. So if you say something, you gotta tell them right away so they know they can't really mess around with you. You're not going to tell them; you're not going to slap them – if they want to draw their gun, too bad. But you're gonna set them straight right away so they don't really come on to you. The way I see it sometimes they talk to the American Black and the way they talk to me is way different. If they say something to me that I don't like, I'm telling you straight up – don't say that to me; I'm not going to put up with you and your nonsense. So more or less working with them was okay with me. But as I said, with the American Black, they take too much advantage of them. But they were chicken too with most of the people from the island really. From the moment you don't put up with the nonsense, they just leave you alone and they try to friend you more or less.

Q: So you came back to Edmonton.

DF: Yeah.

Q: In 1999.

DF: Yeah in 1999.

Q: And you went back to your industry?

DF: Yeah.

Q: Where are you now? When you came back, did you go to Fort McMurray?

DF: No, I went to work for PCL in the city here out by Nisku.

Q: In what position?

DF: I was welding.

Q: Was it a union job?

DF: Yeah.

Q: Were they contracted to Fort McMurray then?

DF: What they were doing, they were not McMurray at the time. They were making modules for Joffre. They were making modules for Joffre. I think it was both Joffre and Syncrude at the same time. Syncrude was just about at the end and Joffre was really picking up.

Q: That's Joffre?

DF: Joffre.

Q: What position did you have?

DF: Just a regular welder.

Q: Did you see any familiar faces?

DF: Basically at Joffre I had two tickets. Then so I left when Joffre was finished about a year and a half later. They wanted to give me a job in Fort McMurray but I didn't really want to go to Fort McMurray at the time. About three months after, I went back to Fort McMurray for PCL.

Q: You went as a welder?

DF: Fitter. I went up as a fitter.

Q: How is that different from a welder?

DF: Once you put the stuff together, the welder has to weld the joint. You do all the measurement and everything and you put it together, then get the welder and the welder comes and welds it. But at that time too I was also a job steward on the job. I forget about that. Most of the job, I've been job steward too.

Q: When did you first become a job steward?

DF: I was a job steward for, I can't remember, but I was job steward for maybe, the last six years. I know I was job steward for the last six years on the job. I was job steward at KBR yard and then job steward at Redwater, and before that I was job steward for PCL. I've been job steward for maybe about 15 years on different jobs.

Q: Fifteen of the last years of your working life?

DF: Yeah.

Q: Are you still working?

DF: No, I retired 2019 April. They called me back but I would never go back to work, no sir.

Q: Why?

DF: Why? Because all them young guys now have a different mentality. Quite a few of them know me but I wouldn't want to be out there. My son is a pipefitter; he's a welder too – pipefitter and welding. He always being supervisor, he always wants me to go. No. He says, you can come and do work. I say, I do not want to come out and do no work. I said to him, you know what I say,, I'm not coming back. But dad, you can help us.

Q: Help?

DF: Yeah, like show them, help them supervising and like the actual hands on work. But I said, no I can tell you from here what you can do.

Q: Is he in Fort Mac?

DF: No. If he calls me I say what I think about certain things and I tell him.

Q: Is the job difficult?

DF: No, not really. Sometimes you'll get some difficult people to work with, especially when you're a foreman. You give them a job and you know how long a job takes to finish. You work on the tool. So they can't tell you what you know. You give them a job; you know that that's supposed to take two or three hours. You go back and half of it is not done. You'll say, what happened? You're not working. You're probably watching to see when I'm coming back. You go and talk to your friend, and when I'm coming back you get back there. I said, don't pull that with me. I know what it takes for a job to get done.

Q: How long were you a foreman?

DF: I've been foreman at different jobs.

Q: For about 15 or 20 years?

DF: No, not that long. Certain people did that, but it's like if you know a superintendent and the superintendent you work with for a period of time, then he'll always call you and say, well then if you want to come.

Q: So your last job, you were a foreman?

DF: The last job, no I was job steward.

Q: Is that higher or lower than a foreman?

DF: It's separate. You take care of all the people at work, all the issues that they will have with the foreman and superintendent and other people on the job. You have to look after that area. You have to constantly go into upper management to resolve the problem. Sometimes you can't even go to the superintendent;, you have to go to the Labour Relations Board. You tell them what's happening with the foreman and the GF and also with the superintendent, because they're all linked together. You get all your information and go and talk to the GF. The GF most of the time is sticking up for his foreman. When you talk to him, you just bypass him. You take the concern from your worker, your person that you're looking after, and you bypass them. You talk to him and if they don't listen you bypass them and go to Labour Relations. Labour Relations has got to call them and call me, and we sit down and talk about it.

Q: That's how you settle a grievance?

DF: Yeah.

Q: How many foremen did you have?

DF: I had maybe more than 10 years. . . . They say when you go to some convention they give you--this is standard ethics. I have all different types because we go to different conventions. I've been to the States four times for convention; I went to a Toronto conference convention; I went to Newfoundland, and I go to Ottawa. I usually go to Banff, not Banff but Lake Louise for conferences too.

Q: What about your community involvements?

DF: Oh community. I have been with the Jamaica Association, the National Black Coalition. First it was Antilles Cricket Club.

Q: This is back in the '70s when you first came?

DF: Yeah.

Q: Why did you have a cricket club?

DF: Oh there were lots of cricket clubs here, lots. Lots of West Indian, lots of Caribbean people that play cricket, lots. We usually have maybe about, okay let me try and see if I can remember. There's the Sportsman, Antilles, Scona. We usually have a St. Vincent cricket club too. You have Edmonton Cricket Club.

Q: Was this mostly Caribbean or Bangladesh or Indian?

DF: After, we were getting people from other places, but it was chiefly West Indians playing cricket.

Q: What about soccer?

DF: I didn't play much soccer. There were other people playing soccer but I didn't play soccer. Cricket was the main thing at the time.

Q: What did having cricket clubs do for you?

DF: Oh well, we've been on a few trips you know. We usually go to Calgary; we go to Winnipeg. Some of them guys went to Toronto; I didn't go to Toronto but the same guys went to Toronto. I didn't go down to Toronto because I was working. So I couldn't. We go to B.C.; we went to B.C. a couple times to play cricket.

Q: Did this result in some bonding in the community?

DF: Oh yeah, that was major bonding time when we played cricket, because after cricket we always have a party and play dominoes. That was the next big thing that we do after cricket.

Q: That's how some guys found a wife.

DF: Yeah a lot of people do. . . . I try to get a lot of people to join our different organization, but a lot of people don't want to give the time. They'd like to get your time when they need something to get done, but they don't want to put in an ounce of their time. But they always, always want you to do something for them or want the organization to do something for them, when they don't come around to help or anything. As soon as they have some catastrophe or some major thing in their family or their friend that they know, they'll be calling the organization or they call me. I said most of the time, I'm not the president or the vice president; I'm only a member, and I'll usually be on some of the committees. So you have to call them. Lots of times I said to them, it's only when you need something you call. You don't know the association when you don't need anything. I said, you have to come and put in some time to do anything, help in anything. But a lot of people, you know that too. I don't know what we can do to get the younger generation to come in to the association. If they do come in, basically the younger generation, what I notice, because I've got a few of them coming, they want to take



over and they don't know how to do anything. They want to tell you how to run your stuff, how to do stuff. They don't coming in and sitting and listening and seeing what you're doing. They want to do it their way, and before you know it, you won't have an association. That's how a lot of associations fall, lots – not only one, not only two, lots of them. It's because they say, well then okay the younger generation will say they're going to do it, but they can't do it. They need basically our expertise or a little knowhow to continue, but they don't. So I don't know what's going to happen when most of us pass by, what they're going to do. The other thing is this younger generation too don't want to do anything for free. Everything they do they've got to get paid. I never get paid to do nothing in any of my associations, none of the associations that I worked with. I never asked for a penny. I put in my time and I put in money, but I never get anything from an association. But everybody wants pay now. Most associations usually have a little dance here, a little dance there; then they usually make a little money. But now you can't even do that because the younger generation, what they did, they come in and they say they can do this and do that, then they start with a little dance that you usually have, they start fighting and cause disruption in the place. So, most places don't want to rent you the hall to do anything. We did have a place. They sold it, because so many bad things happened down there. Basically the Jamaica Association and the National Black Coalition should never have sold the building that they had at 124<sup>th</sup>. Just after they sold it there was so much grant going around you could get it and fix most of the problem that was there. It was a struggle too because they could've got a better building. But there were too many people that, I hate to say it, but too many educated fools. Every one of them know everything and they don't know nothing; that's why they didn't get a place by Leons, because it was just \$1.2 million and they paid \$800,000 and some for the one that they have. The one at Leons you get a lot of land plus there were about five kitchens in that place. But everybody arguing and saying this and that. I was there.

Q: Do you get the impression that big companies are running the industry in Alberta?

DF: The industry, how should I put it?

Q: Are most of the oil industry companies owned by multinational companies?

DF: They run it and the government of Alberta charges them so much for every gallon or they call it every barrel. They charge them so much per barrel to get it. But it's not really the province or the government. At one time in McMurray they were digging up and leaving big craters. Then the government got in there and said, you've got to refill those holes so that it will grow for the wild animal to come back. So they have to fill those holes. In Jamaica they dig up all the holes but they don't refill them; they don't do anything. They've got a big crater, big holes down there still. If they'd done like Pierre Eliot Trudeau or one of them said, they'd have to refill the holes that they're digging up. It was lots of craters, lots of big holes, but they have to fill them back up now.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to add?

DF: Yeah okay. I gotta go back to when we came here in 1976 and going up to Fort McMurray. The road was just a two way road, a small road. You didn't have a lot of side; you didn't have a lot of shoulder. The road basically from Edmonton to Grassland was paved, and when you hit Hwy 63 most of it was gravel all the way until you reach, what's that little town named after Grassland? It was paved three miles to the little town and then three miles past, and then it's gravel again. Then you go to Wandering River and it's the same thing: you get a little bit of pavement. Mariana Lake, you didn't have no pavement in Mariana Lake until you get to just outside of Anzac. You get a little bit paved because Anzac is close to the airport. So you have a little bit of pavement from Anzac going about half a mile past the airport. Going into McMurray town was gravel. When you reach the bridge they'll do a little bit to the bridge, and once you cross the bridge just gravel already all the way to Syncrude. Even McMurray town it's just Franklin Street that was the only part of it that was paved. All the side road were not paved;, it was just gravel. . . . In the wintertime and in the spring you always lost your muffler. Muffler going, and when you get it fixed in McMurray and come down you lose it again, because the road was so bad and you have to drive.

Q: So you didn't take the bus?

DF: They didn't have a bus until after a period of time. There was this guy who came on site and started a bus going from McMurray to Edmonton. You usually paid \$12 on the bus.

Q: You had to pay for it yourself?

DF: Yeah, you paid \$12 one way; so \$24 it usually cost you to go on the bus. You could pay \$48 on the plane both ways. But you don't have a lot of plane flights to McMurray. You only have Pacific Western. So they only have so much. It's much easier to travel on the plane than to drive, but every time you phone it's already full. The plane is already full and they only have one flight going down and that's it, Pacific Western.

Q: One flight a day?

DF: Not even every day: mostly on the weekends, because people are coming in and going out on the weekends. They drive from Syncrude and come here you don't want to, because it's 40 or 50 miles from the town to go to Syncrude on the jobsite. From Syncrude to the airport is a good almost; because of the road, it takes you almost 45 minutes to an hour to get there.

Q: Anything else you'd like to add?

DF: Well in those days in Syncrude it was one big club; they call it the Tamarac Club. It holds about 2,500 people at any one time. That's the biggest, and they always sell beer and rum in there.

Q: Did people go there often?

DF: Every night it was full of people after work. Remember now, when you get going there were over 7,000 people on the job. Every night it was packed. But I never usually go there. Some guys will say they are going, I'll go in and have one or two beer and then I'll get out. You can't see anything; everybody's smoking – it was full of smoke.

Q: What about drugs?

DF: Drugs? It was always drugs in Syncrude. There were people coming in just to sell drugs.

Q: How would they get in touch with the workforce?

DF: They're also members of a union and they come in. But the thing is to sell drugs and to use drugs. They never got searched coming in or going out like they're doing these days.

Q: They do that now on the worksite as part of safety?

DF: Yeah. They usually bring in drugs; they usually bring a whole bunch of booze. Some guys' room all they have in there and in the car is drinks all the way to the ceiling, and they sell it to people on the job who don't want to go to the pub. A guy will come in and buy a box of beer or two boxes of beer. They'll go to their room and they'll drink it. They buy a bottle of Crown Royal and that's all they do. There were not many ladies at the camp at that time; it's mostly men. So that's all they do is drink. I know this guy who usually drinks a bottle of Crown Royal, any hard drink, every night. Sometimes you walk up in the morning you'll see him sitting out and he's going to work; you'll see him sit by the camp step with his bottle. He's a welder from 488; his name is .... You say, aren't you going to work? Ah yes man. He'll go put on his things and he's coming on the job drunk, and he still works. I don't know how he does it. I work alongside him; so I know. He was a welder.

Q: Is he still alive?

DF: I'm not sure. Next time I go to the hall, I'm going to go down there tomorrow, I'll find out. I'm gonna go tomorrow evening. I got a meeting down there tomorrow evening at 6:30, political action committee meeting again.

Q: Did you meet a lot of other Caribbean workers?

DF: Oh yeah, but there were not all that many Caribbean people in the union at the time. Now it's more.

Q: Stennie?

DF: Stennie was with the boilermakers/ pipefitters.

Q: Who else do you know?

DF: You got Glen, Amos Henry, you have Frank Santiago.

Q: Frank was a supervisor?

DF: Frank was always supervisor. Amos Henry was always supervisor too most times on the job. Those guys were here early; so they come and they work at GCS, Great Canadian Oil Sands before they changed the name.

Q: Is Amos Henry still alive?

DF: Yeah. He went away; he went to Trinidad. He come back. He was in Toronto and now he's back up here in St. Albert. They call GCS Suncor; they named it Suncor.

Q: Do you see...?

DF: The only time I saw him was when his brother died. I haven't seen him since.

Q: Anybody else you know?

DF: They're all gone now; they're not here anymore. Some of them have gone down and some of them have gone away. Jan Brown left for Jamaica. Ivan MacFarland left for Jamaica. Jen Calder went now; he's gone. The next one's name is R.S. Brown. I think he's on there too.

Q: Ken Jacob?

DF: Ken Jacob come in the union later. He wasn't in the union. He's a member too. He's a member of 488. Another one named Simon, he's doing his rig now. . . . he's a little bit older than me. ...

Q: I think he's 488 too.

DF: Yeah, in a wrecking truck, wrecking rig, Fort McMurray. . . . He's moving slower and slower now, I see last time.

Q: Anything else?

DF: One time, I should tell you this, one time I was coming from McMurray, one afternoon I leave work early. There was an accident on the road and it's a bunch of Native people. They were crossing the road and a truck was coming. It was one with farming equipment, and they ran into it. The truck run into the farming equipment. There were about 12 people on the side of the road, bleeding and all that stuff. I got there just as it happened. So three of us stopped the car and came out. One guy was walking back and forth looking and seeing. So I said, do you need some help? It's a Native, big Indian guy. He said to me, why don't you get on your f'ing way? To be honest with you, I looked at him and said, is that the way somebody needs to help you people dying on the road? I said, you all should be f'ing dead. I jumped in my car and drove away. I stopped to help them, because basically he's the only one and the thing is over there like he's trying to get an ambulance to come.

Q: Did you ever see any indigenous people working in Fort Mac?

DF: Very few, very few.

Q: Any in the union at all?

DF: Very few. We have Indigenous people that were here in Edmonton that were basically members of the union, but the ratio was really, really, really low. It was as low as I would say that of coloured people in the union. And they were out here before us. When I joined the union there were maybe about four or five Black guys in 488.

Q: Who?

DF: Oh you have John Brown, Amos Henry, Frank Santiago, Morris Lane and Pippy Roberts. Robert Lewis. And there's one named Vic Henry. I can't remember the name of this other gentleman: he went to Jamaica. Hee and Vic were good friends. That was it. They give me such a hard time to get in the local.

Q: Who gave you a hard time?

DF: The recruiters or I mean the people that were looking on the examining committee.

Q: Why?

DF: They didn't know my educational standing. We have all documents to get in the local. We live up here now. Every time they would have a committee meeting to select the guys that were on the committee, after I get on the committee I know that what they were doing is taking our application, because you have to give them a picture and everything;, they're taking our application and putting it on the bottom. They were taking them and putting; every time they'll take it and put it. So how I get in now is I was at Syncrude for about six months and there were some guys just come from Newfoundland and they were working and talking with me. I said to them, oh you guys just get your? They say, yeah, man. How long? It's a week. So I said, are you a member? He said, we gonna get our membership next week; we already got a letter. I said, you only work a week and you already gonna get in? So I said, that's fine. So I said, what's your name? Give me your name. They give me six of their named, and I wrote them down. I come down to the hall and I said, I leave work early. I leave work on a Thursday. So I want to go Friday.

So I came down and I went down early Friday morning. This lady's name was Margaret, and the other person that was looking after on the committee was Bill Rankin. So I came in and Margaret said to me, oh well the committee didn't approve. I said, how much time does it need for us to be a member? He said, three months. I said, we've been here six months going seven months, and I have these names of people coming in a week and they already are a member. I said, I'm gonna go down to the Labour Board and tell them that you guys are discriminating against the three of us. He said, oh no, no, you can't do that. I said, watch me. He said, oh just one second. He come back and said, okay how about we make this arrangement next month, which is about two weeks time, and you guys will be initiated. That's how I got into the union. From that moment I've been there, anything I need from that local, everything I get. Any time I go down there and they see me coming it's like, oh. I say, well then I make it my duty to try to get on the examining board at that time, and I've been on the examining board. I got to find out it wasn't really Bill Rankin, it was two other guys on the committee was doing that, three of them. They were living out in Spruce Grove and they were doing that;, then Bill went with them.

Q: So there's discrimination in the union?

FD: Oh yes, oh yes, big time. But they don't mess around with me, as I tell you. I know the channel to go through. I know the by-laws at the hall, I know the union agreement for the hall, the standard and everything. So I read them so I know what's happening. I'm not waiting to come and ask you what I have to do. I come and I say, well then this is in the by-law, how do I go about it? A lot of people do not know that for you to get anywhere or do anything you have to read, because knowledge is power. I always know when to do it even when I got an accident. I was coming home from work and a guy T-boned me. I wasn't on the job long enough so I could get unemployment. I basically wasn't hurting really for money, but it's there. So I went to the hall and told them, look, I fill out my unemployment and they say I'm not eligible for unemployment. So I said, because I read it, I know the union is supposed to take care of you like to pay your dues and to give you some money. I don't know how much it is, but I know that you are supposed to get money, because I've been working and my hours are up to date. So they told me, oh yeah, you can get yours. It's just the amount of money that unemployment was giving. But they said to me that I will get more than what I'd get from unemployment. So I took



that for about a year. So they gave me money for a year. Plus they paid my dues. All I have to do is go to the doctor every month and get my thing and bring it to them. I get physiotherapy and all those things paid for by the union, and I still get my dues paid and money.

Q: I'll probably ask you later if you've got any pictures.

DF: I've got lots of pictures from different places. Even the last job that I was on, I have a picture of it. I have it on my phone--when we were moving the vessels. I got lots of pictures when we're at convention and stuff like that, pictures of all those too.

[ END ]