

Simon Sahied Hosein

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Interviewer Donna Coombs-Montrose, camera Don Bouzek

SH: I was born in Trinidad and Tobago and in 1969 I got into pipefitting and welding. That was in Hodges School of Welding. Then I also, after a couple of years there, ended up going to work at Texaco. This was a refinery in Trinidad. I continued my apprenticeship there. That was in 1972, and I came up to Canada in 1975.

Q: What brought you to Canada?

SH: I came to Canada on a holiday in 1974 to visit my sister here; I had a sister living here. I came in the summertime of course; it was beautiful, warm, hot days. I liked it, and there was a lot of work around in my field of pipefitting and welding. I just kind of browsed around and checked out a few places, and everywhere I went they wanted to hire me. They needed my type of skill set. So my sister applied for me and I came up a year later. I resigned my job down at Texaco and I came up to Canada in the fall of 1975, and I've been here since.

Q: What kind of employers were around at the time?

SH: When I came to Canada, they were just starting to build the Syncrude plant up at Fort McMurray. So there was a lot of construction work around for that, building bridges and. . .

Q: Were these regular transportation bridges?

SH: No, these are special bridges for the plants so they could move the bitumen and stuff that they were going to be digging up. I started on that, and then I proceeded on to pressure vessels with the boilermakers.

Q: What are pressure vessels?

SH: Pressure vessels are these big vessels they use in the plants to collect the oil and do the different type of breaking down the products and what not to get to the stage where they get the gas out of the oil. It's a kind of breaking down process. They use different types of vessels for different things. They use a lot of heat and stuff to melt the bitumen to get the sand out and get the oil. Then they put it into different vessels and systems to break it down and extract all the different types of gases and sulphurs and many different things.

Q: So those are the pressure vessels that you were working on?

SH: Yeah, we were building those pressure vessels.

Q: So you were instrumental in the building of the Syncrude plant?

SH: Yes, I was, yeah.

Q: And this continued from 1975 until when?

SH: They kept building. I think they first started when I first went up there. I think it must've been '76, and I ended up working at the powerhouse. That was the first building they built there. It contained all the electrical power they would need to run all the different types of plants they were going to have in there. They built different plants to do different things; so they needed to power up. The powerhouse is basically the first building that went up there. Then they started building around it. I worked there for the electricians and then I moved over to the pipefitters, more in the pressure welding of piping systems and stuff like that.

Q: Were you commuting from Edmonton at that point?

SH: Yes I was, yeah. We were driving back and forth to Edmonton.

Q: What was your rotation like?

SH: It was four tens and an eight; that was the first shift. So we worked four tens and then eight on Friday, and then we'd come home for the weekend.

Q: You had a family here?

SH: Yes I started a family back in '76.

Q: Was it difficult for you with the long days and separation from your family?

SH: The separation was one of the tough things. You're away from the family. At the beginning it was fine, but then after a while you start having children and stuff and you're away from home.

Q: But you continued working?

SH: Oh yeah, I continued working. I did manage to find some work around Edmonton. So I wasn't always up at Fort McMurray. I was there in the early years but then they were doing some construction around Fort Saskatchewan and close to Edmonton at Shell Scotford and a couple of days at the plants out there, Dow Chemical. So that was better because you were home every day.

Q: So you no longer went to Fort Mac?

SH: I started there in the early years when they were just building it. Then I moved down to Edmonton and did some work at Dow Chemical and Shell Scotford. I went out of town for a little bit there when we did a power plant out at Forestburg. In those days I was with the union 488. Then in 1980 I started a welding company, and I've been doing that ever since.

Q: What do you call it?

SH: The company was Hosein Welding Limited.

Q: Describe that process.

SH: I registered a company and I continued to do the same thing but at this time I had my own equipment and my own truck. So I was self-employed, working for myself. The odd time we'd hire extra people but most of the companies would do the hiring and we'd just come in as a subcontractor.

Q: Did you have a partner?

SH: A couple times during my career I had a partnership. In the early '80s I had a partnership with a friend. We started a company called Professionals Portaweld. We were doing quite a bit of work for. . .

Q: Did that company do welding?

SH: Yeah, we were doing fabrication welding, piping systems and [11:27].

Q: Is this difficult work?

SH: It's physically demanding and of course there's a skill set. But it's physical, lifting heavy objects. We had mechanical equipment and stuff like that, but sometimes you'd lift some heavy stuff. Maybe somebody would team up with you to move a piece of material, because we didn't always have the mechanical capabilities around to move it. But if we couldn't handle something, we wouldn't do it. Everybody's got to know their limits.

Q: Did you ever have any injuries?

SH: I've seen guys get injured, but I myself have never been injured. Maybe I've pounded a finger or stuff like that, but no major injuries breaking any bones or anything like that.

Q: So, from 1980 you had your own company?

SH: Yeah, along with another welder. We became partners and formed a company other than our own companies. We had our own companies but we just formed this one together.

Q: What is a welding unit?

SH: Well, it's a mobile truck with a welding machine in it, which is actually a welding plant that has AC/DC power in it. You need DC power to weld with and you use it for the power tools and grinders and stuff like that. DC power is used for welding. Welding cables, you've got a ground on a stinger and you put your ground on the material you're going to weld on and it forms an arc. Then you can use an electrode and just start welding. Of course you've got to set your heat and all that, because different sizes burn at different temperature and stuff like that.

Q: So, with a mobile unit, you can go anywhere.

SH: Yeah, that's why we went mobile. You have a welding machine in it and then you'll have your tools and equipment; so you could pretty much go out on a job and be self-contained. You have all the equipment you need to perform a welding job, weld a pipe or weld a plate.

Q: Does that allow you more flexibility than working for a company as a welder?

SH: Being self-employed is financially a little better. You've got your own company and you control everything. If you work for a company, they control everything and you're just a worker there. You're hired on as a fitter or welder and you just follow their program. But when you're doing your own thing, you've got more flexibility and you could bid on jobs and stuff like that. You get contracts and can hire people to do the work and stuff like that. You can hire more welders with their equipment or you can supply the equipment for them.

Q: Did you also supervise some apprentices?

SH: We apprenticed probably about a dozen and a half guys over the years, fitters and welders. I'd apprentice them, sign them up for an apprenticeship through the government program, and they'd have to go to school once a year for a couple of months. But we'll do the training for them and show them how everything is done; then, after three or four years, they become a journeyman.

Q: So you worked all over Alberta. Were you at Syncrude still?

SH: No, Syncrude was just a starting point for me; I didn't stay there. I went back there from time to time on different projects.

Q: You bid on different jobs?

SH: No, I bid work with the smaller companies, because we were a small company. So it was tough to bid on big jobs because of course we didn't have the manpower and the capability to do it. So we did smaller projects. But I went to work for different companies and back at Syncrude just as a small contractor. They'd hire contractors like myself with their own equipment, and we'd just subcontract ourselves out and just go out and do the job. They'd supply all the material and everything; so we didn't have to worry about that. It was easier for them to hire us, hire a mobile unit to come in and do the job, because some were in remote areas. They didn't have to worry about that part. They just have the material and equipment and the consumables, which would be welding rods and gases and all the stuff you need. They'd probably have a supervisor there with a crew and inspector, but whatever company we're working for, the client would have their own representative there, whether it be Nova or Trans Mountain or whoever. They'd have their own representative there to make sure the work specifications and all that are complied with.

Q: Is this a popular trend in the industry?

SH: It is-especially now, there's a lot. Back in those days in the late '70s and '80s, there were just a handful of us welding rigs. Most everybody would go work for a company as a worker. In

this area now welding rigs are quite popular. Companies like it because everybody comes in and brings their own equipment and just goes to do the job. I worked for Worley Parson quite a bit and they hire guys like me with their own equipment and truck. They supply the fitters and the supervision, and we just start to put stuff together, build stuff – build a piping system or work off joints and stuff, blueprints.

Q: Is it a requirement in the profession that you're able to read blueprints?

SH: It's not a requirement as a welder but it is an asset, because I'm dual ticketed. I'm also a pipefitter and a welder. So it makes my tasks a lot easier. It's another trade, pipefitter-steamfitter. It's a totally different trade but kind of works in the same field. A pipefitter fits the pipe up and the welder welds it. In our case as a contractor you could fit and weld, and sometimes I've even done both with a helper, and you end up doing your own pipe fabricating and welding.

Q: Is this a competitive environment that you're in?

SH: Yes it is. Everybody likes production. You want to get a job done because a lot of times there's a time frame to get a project done. Sometimes it takes a month or two or a year, depends on how big the project is. Time is always of the essence, getting things done as quickly and safely as possible. Sometimes you get delays for different things and what not. So you have to go out there and try to have a productive day. But sometimes things get in the way. Sometimes you're waiting on a permit, especially if you're working inside a plant. You've got to get a work permit from the company there, from the operators. Things have to be checked out and everything's got to be safe.

Q: They have to check your tickets?

SH: No, not my tickets. Say we go inside a plant to change a line or put in a new line or change a valve. Everything's got to be safe; everything's got to be bled down, de-pressured. All that's got to be in place. Sometimes they've got to purge some of these lines or they might still contain

gas, H2S and stuff like that. It's quite a process; so sometimes you might be waiting for days to get a permit to do that.

Q: So the permit is issued after that?

SH: After everything's okayed and cleared out and the operator is confident that it's safe and purged out and everything is good, then you can proceed. So then they'll issue a permit. They all have to be in agreement. Sometimes there's a lockbox, and anybody working on that particular system has to put a lock on that box and sign some documents, sign the permit, so they know who's on that. Then they know when it started and when it's done.

Q: Is this mandatory?

SH: Oh yeah, for hot work. For cold work you don't need that. If you're doing construction, like building something outside the plant, working off a blueprint isometric, you're building a couple lines and stuff, you don't need a permit for that. But once you get in the plant, the live plant, to do the tie-ins and stuff like that, all this has to come into play.

Q: What is the lockbox?

SH: It's a physical box with a bunch of slots, and everybody has a lock and keeps their key. Then, at the end of the day, when you've finished your task, you've got to go in and lock your box and sign off.

Q: Does this allow you more control over the operation?

SH: No, it pretty much controls all who's involved in the job. There might be different trades involved in the job. So they want everybody to be on the same page from when it's started up until everybody's lock is off and the operators are confident that everything is good and everybody signed off, everybody's lock is off; then they could fire up that particular system.

Q: This is the normal procedure?

SH: That's a normal procedure.

Q: Do any accidents happen?

SH: I've seen certain things, but I wouldn't want to talk about it. But I've seen accidents happen. Things do happen. We don't live in a perfect world; we're human beings and people make mistakes. It's a system and you've got to go through the system. Always there are lots of people involved, and if there's an incident then there are tons of people.

Q: Other agencies get involved?

SH: Right, Alberta Health and Safety and all that. I've been in incidents where an alarm goes off, evacuation. You've just got to leave your truck and everything, shut the equipment down and just evacuate and leave there. I've been in situations where I've left my job for days, because you can't get back if they had a fire or something. It's all got to be investigated now. OH&S comes in and does their thing.

Q: People on the outside don't realize everything that's involved.

SH: Working in a live plant is totally different from working, say running a pipeline. But there are other dangers involved on a pipeline, because now you've got ditches and excavation, and everything's got to be safe and stuff like that to make sure it's safe so a human being can go down there and perform a task. A lot of time in pipe plants we do the pipelines above ground and then they lower it into these trenches they dig. Then there's going to be tying involved where you're tying stuff together, tying all the lengths together. Then they might have to go underneath a road. So there's a lot involved. You've got to drag sections through there and then make the tie-ins on both sides of the road. So we physically have to go down there and tie these pipes in together. Safety is a big thing there, because you have to make sure everything is shut off. It depends on the type of ground you've got. You may even have to put some safety boxes in

there to make sure everything doesn't cave in on you. They have special safety boxes they build, dig a big hole and drop the box in so things can't come into you. Of course you try to execute that work quickly because you don't want to be there for any extra time. You go in and do it and get out. So, safety is a big part of this process in everything we do. That's why we do these FLHAs and fieldwork assessments. We put on the paper what we're doing and then we assess what we're doing and we assess the hazards that could be involved. Then there's another section where we put all the stuff we can do to eliminate the hazards. Sometimes you can't eliminate all of it. So you might have to wear some PPE, some protective equipment.

Q: Can you describe a normal working day?

SH: If you stay in a camp, like I was working up at CNRL in a camp, you get up and go for breakfast and then you go to work. First thing there's a safety meeting right at 7 o'clock, a general safety meeting where we discuss stuff that's going to be going on in the day and the hazards that might be involved. They'll probably give us a retrace of the day before, the week before. They might even say, well in the last month we had so many incidents, some minor and some critical and what not. Then after that meeting we usually break out into little groups, like we have our own little crew of about four men, fitters and welders. We have our own little group, and we break out into that group and discuss our tasks for the day, what we're going to be doing and how we're going to be doing it, and what we're going to do to eliminate any hazards or whatever. People ask questions and what not. Then your own little group you're working with will fill out these FLHAs and discuss everything that's going on. Sometimes we discuss in a little group, the guys you're actually physically working with. In some cases I might have two fitters working with me and we'd have safety watch, somebody who's going to, inside the live plant and equipment, to monitor the equipment while it's running and stuff like that. They'll have radios and what not to control any situation. If there's a problem somewhere, they've got to call on the radio; an alarm goes off. They call us and say, hey, we gotta evacuate the area and what not, shut equipment down and things like that. That's kind of a normal day if you're working in a live area.

Q: So, the smaller group you describe, who is left out of the bigger group?

SH: We have the general meeting and then we break into our own little group. If you've got 200 or 300 people working on this job, that's the general meeting. You're going to have scaffolders involved, you're going to have ironworkers, you're going to have welders and fitters in a different group; you're going to have electricians. So everybody breaks out into their own little group. We're all part of the same project, but we're doing different things. Sometimes you've got electricians working in the area. So they'll kind of cross sign our FLHAs to know what we're doing, and we get to know what they're doing. Then we just go out there and get our permits, and once we get our permits, we go to the designated area to work.

Q: Each area gets its own permit?

SH: Yeah, it's not a general permit. Everybody's task is different and the areas are different in the plant; so there'll be different permits issued. Some people might get the permit right then. The general permit is given to the guys who are not doing hot work. We do hot work as well as the hot permits, because we're doing hot work. We're playing with fire. They're going to be cutting, they're going to be welding, grinding, all that stuff. So that's all got to be under hot work. Then the area is going to have to be horded off and everything's going to have to be in place. Sometimes we work up in the roof somewhere, and the carpenters will have to build a box there and they'll have to wrap it up and horde it up with fire blankets and stuff. Sparks can't even fall on the ground; so the floor will have to be covered over. That's how critical it is in some of these live plants. Everybody uses the same type of format to do their work. It's just some are designated hot work and some are designated cold work. If we're fabricating out in the field there somewhere, that would be a cold work permit. Even if you're doing hot work, if it's in an open field or something, it's not where it could catch a fire or nothing. Then everybody just proceeds with their work. You stop for lunch breaks and coffee breaks, and when you get back to work everybody signs on. The foreman comes and signs the FLHA again and makes sure everything is good to go, and we just proceed and continue with the work. Sometimes you can finish the same day; sometimes it might take a few days. It all depends what it is.

Q: Is it different than the work you did for Texaco?

SH: No, I basically was doing the same thing in Texaco, because it was a big refinery. If I'm working in live plants, like Syncrude and CNRL, it's typically the same type of work. It's a live plant; so you've got to have permits and everything. That's basically what I was doing in Texaco before I came to Canada. So it wasn't hard to transition into that. It's basically the same thing, except for pipeline, which is a different situation. You're always across country, up mountains and down hills and stuff like that. A little different scenario, but you didn't have to get permits for that type of stuff. The contractor will have to get a permit to do the work there, but we were doing hot work but you never needed a hot work permit unless you got into a live situation. Then you'd have X-ray come and X-ray the welds. So, a lot of times they'd be roping off the area. Or sometimes they'd come after hours and do the X-raying and stuff like that.

Q: In the night?

SH: Yeah, they'd come after work and do the X-raying. Say if you ran a couple kilometers of pipeline during that day, they'd come at night or they'd come behind you.

Q: Who would come?

SH: The X-ray, the radiographers. They come to X-ray the welds.

Q: What is the purpose of X-raying?

SH: To make sure there's no defects, no faults. You're running a pipeline; you don't want any leakage and stuff like that. Plus a lot of these pipelines, after you make the weld and they X-ray and everything is good, then they have to coat it and wrap it and stuff like that, because it's going to get buried. So it's got to be protected from the elements, the environment. So things don't corrode and stuff like that.

Q: Would the pipes freeze during winter?

SH: Well yeah, we use torches and stuff to preheat the pipe before we weld it. These guys who've got to wrap these sections, usually a pipeline comes insulated; the full length is already insulated, sometimes internally and externally.

Q: So somebody else did that before?

SH: Yeah, the pipe comes from a factory and it's insulated on the outside. Sometimes if you've got to cut a pipe to a certain length, we might have to peel some of that insulation off, scrape the tar off it, because they insulate it with tar and then they put a plastic coating over it.

Q: Is that mandatory?

SH: Yeah, anything that's going to be buried has to be coated, especially now with the rules. That's why they X-ray pipeline to make sure there's no weld defects. Once it's X-rayed and it's good, then they do their thing – they wrap it, heat it, put the coating on, and then wrap it and seal it off to make sure no water gets in there to corrode it. Once it's buried, then it's hard to monitor anything. Even though they have equipment now that flies over the pipeline and they can detect any leaks and stuff like that, these are procedures you've got to use as you're building it in the construction stages.

Q: Is that more expensive, having drones that fly over?

SH: Well, the big oil companies use that after the job is done, after the ground is reclaimed and everything. The equipment they use, they use that on a continual basis, like Trans Mountain and these guys, because they monitor the pipeline. This thing can show any leakage or anything.

Q: Is the oil shipped south?

SH: Yeah, a lot of the oil products are shipped to places like Edmonton refinery, Petro-Can, and then they break it down into all the different products and by-products.

Q: So that's a different refinery operation?

SH: Yeah, that's why they've got pipelines to run it to some of these places.

Q: Are those pipelines deep underground? Do they pass through cities?

SH: Yeah, they pass through cities; they go through cities. Sometimes they run them along highways and stuff like that. They try to eliminate going through residential areas and stuff. But there are residential areas that are built around pipelines now, because they were there before. But now they try to eliminate that and try to keep it away from residential areas and stuff. But sometimes they can't help it; that's the way it goes.

Q: If you're shipping from Fort McMurray to Calgary, it must pass through some kind of residential areas.

SH: They do.

Q: How deeply are the pipes buried?

SH: These pipes would be buried around six feet. I don't know all the specs, but from what I've seen some would be down six feet underneath. Then they backfill it and reclaim all the area so you won't even know a pipeline is there.

Q: Unless there's some rupture for some reason.

SH: Exactly. But that rarely happens, especially with the technology now and the type of material they use that's way better than they used back 40 or 50 years ago.

Q: In some sectors of the public there's a lot of demand to move away from oil industries.

SH: I believe the world is trying to move away from the oil, but that's not going to happen any time soon. It's going to progress as time goes on. They're going to have to phase one thing out and bring in another. If you have automated power, they might have to start building more nuclear plants because they're going to need more power. If you bring electric cars and everything's running on electric, our system can't handle that right now. So many things consist of oil products. They make plastics, rubber, all these types of things they use oil products to make that because they use sulphur and different by-products of oil. We use the fuel to fuel planes and the oil to run vehicles and stuff like that. Those are just some of the products that come out of oil. We use oil to heat, natural gas to heat houses and stuff like that. I know the world wants to go that way, but it's going to take time. They don't have the infrastructure and the capability to run electric vehicles. If this was to become a city where you only have electric vehicles, they won't have enough energy and power to do it. They'll have to build more generating stations and stuff like that. That's kind of out of my league, but that's my two cents.

Q: What changes have you seen in Fort McMurray from the time you came?

SH: To now it's been quite a change. When I first came to Alberta, the Great Canadian Oil Sands was the first plant up there. That was the only existing plant. Then they built Syncrude and Canadian Natural. There's so many plants there now.

Q: When did Suncor come in?

SH: Suncor? Well they were there with Great Canadian Oil Sands. They came in around the same time. They all started to build around that time in the '70s.

Q: Did Great Canadian Oil Sands change its name to Suncor?

SH: I'm not sure, but I know some of these companies buy these plants out. But GCOS was considered the Great Canadian Oil Sands, which was one of the first plants there at that time in the early '70s. That was before Syncrude. Syncrude started in '75 or '76. Fort Mac was just a little small town back then. The population might've been 1,500 or 2,000 or 3,000. There

weren't even roads. The roads going up to Syncrude and Great Canadian Oil Sands were just gravel roads. The general part of Fort MacMurray was just right downtown. There was nothing built outside. But as more plants started coming in, they started to move out to some of these other areas. The places had to evolve with everything else.

Q: Do you know what they're doing now in terms of production?

SH: Bigger companies are buying up the smaller companies. CNRL own a lot of the big plants up there now. All these mega companies are buying out the smaller ones. But these plants are also doing a lot more for the environment too. They're building carbon capture plants and they're reclaiming all these big holes and they get refilled back.

Q: What are carbon capture plants?

SH: They eliminate all these pollutions coming out of these plants. They eliminate most of them so less stuff is going into the environment and the air. They're also reclaiming all these big holes that have been dug and these big pits that have been dug for the tar sands. All that gets refilled back and forests are being replanted. Syncrude and all these companies are doing that. All the big oil companies are doing what they can to restore the environment. That's what I've seen anyways. If you go up to Fort Mac and you go to Syncrude, you can see areas where they have dates where this was replanted on such and such date. You'll see new forests coming in and wildlife is coming back and all these types of things. Sometimes what you hear on the TV or you see somebody fly over the plant and all they show you is the big holes in the ground, that's the beginning but it's not the end product. I've seen Syncrude and all those places rebuild and restore the place to somewhat normalcy. You see animals coming back and forests regrowing and stuff like that.

Q: Do these big oil companies still own vast amounts of land?

SH: Oh yeah for sure. I believe the indigenous people still have some control over some of it. So at least they talk to these plants or whatever agreement they came up with. Some of the bands up there do get subsidized by some of these plants or compensated for using their land.

Q: Could you tell me about DRU?

SH: That's a project. I don't know too much about engineering, but I've worked on a project called a DRU. I'm not sure exactly what it does but I know it's a couple of big plants that they put together and then they put it in place and it does some type of extracting and breaking down the oil and what not to bring all these other products out.

Q: Who owns it?

SH: I worked on a project out at CNRL, but like I said, I don't know what it does exactly. It's just another plant in the plant that does some type of, I'm not sure what it does. It just does different things; there are different types of plants in there that do different things. Some might remove the sulphur; some might remove different things. Some of these plants remove the oil from the tar, use a lot of steam and stuff to heat up the oil to remove the oil from the sand. I don't know what the terminology means exactly.

Q: So the current trend in Fort Mac is to continue to boost production and keep expanding?

SH: Everybody's building; it's construction town. Most of these plants are expanding to accommodate the needs for oil and gas until some other type of energy takes its place. There's always going to be a need for that.

Q: So they're expanding further east and west?

SH: Most of this stuff is going on just outside the plants, these big mines. It's just outside the plant.

Q: Have you worked on a dragline?

SH: That's some of the stuff I was talking about earlier, when I worked on some of the bridges and stuff. Those were all for the draglines.

Q: What is a dragline?

SH: I don't know much about it. I just worked on some of the physical stuff that's used. They have big belts and stuff that goes on these bridges to transport the bitumen, conveyor belts, to take to the plant.

Q: Is there anything that you'd like to add about your career working in Alberta?

SH: Yeah. When I came to Canada it was totally a different place than it is now. Times have changed; the place has grown. There are more people here now. Before there were different people coming from different parts of the country and the world to work here, and I think sometimes they still do when they've got a big project. They're still bringing foreign workers and stuff.

Q: Do you still see people coming from your part of the world?

SH: Once in a while I see people coming from the Caribbean. A lot of people come from the Philippines.

Q: To work in the oil sector?

SH: Yeah. I've seen people come from Ireland and those places, different type of tradespeople.

Q: They come as tradespeople?

SH: Yeah, most of the people come as tradespeople, skilled workers, maybe engineers and stuff like that. There's always a need for that, especially if you get a couple big projects going. There's always a need for more skilled and professional type people.

Q: So you feel that in the future the industry will still be absorbing skilled labour?

SH: Well, as long as they keep building they're going to have to keep bringing in more people. People like myself are starting to age, and they need young blood to come in. One of the things I've noticed here is they need more mentorship, more people training people and mentoring people. A lot of the people I see in the trades, it used to be five years and now it's three years. People aren't getting enough information. Even though they become a journeyman, they still come out and still don't know a lot of stuff. Nobody's teaching anybody now. When I was learning the trade, everybody was teaching me. Now nobody is teaching you. You might work in one part of the trade, and then you do your whole apprenticeship in that part of the trade. So you're not learning all of the other stuff. Let's say for instance you're working on a hydro test crew; so all they're doing is hydro testing all these pipes. You become very knowledgeable and specialized in that, but the rest of the trade you haven't even touched it. I think trades need to get more diversified so people can move around different areas of the trade and learn the different parts so when it all comes together they have a wide knowledge. When I apprenticed in Texaco, the first couple of years you went to all the different departments: the machine shop, the welding shop, the electrical shop, the fire department. Now you're learning all these different parts of the process that are going to all come together when you do specialize in something, whether it be electrician or pipefitter or welder. So you have a vast knowledge and you could change a tire, you could use an extinguisher, all these different things. That's what I see is lacking here. I meet a lot of journeymen out there who don't know how to run a grinder, don't know how to use a piece of equipment because they say they haven't done it before. So that shouldn't be. All the trades should be incorporated in all the different aspects of it, so when somebody does become certified they need to be... If we get a journeyman to go on a job, he should be able to do the job. If I'm a B pressure welder and they've got a pipe there for me to weld, I should be able to go out and do that, because that's what I was trained and qualified to do. I think we need more mentorship. People need to get more mentored into any trade, not

only the welding trade or the fitting trade. In every trade, I think people need to be taught more by a lot of the older people. I see a lot of the young people today; they just get a journeyman ticket and they want to become a supervisor. They might be book smart but then you have to creep before you walk, a long time you have to work your way up. With the technology now and the stuff that the youth have today, they can learn faster. They know all the technical stuff but the physical stuff and all the going-ons around it, they don't know that. I think we need more mentorship in all the trade programs now, people teaching people. That's going to make the place a better place, because people have a lot more confidence when they go out there to do their job.

Q: Do you know anyone else in the community that we could interview?

SH: I'm sure there are. A lot of us came from the Caribbean and different parts of the world to build all these things. So yeah, there's definitely a few more people out there you could interview and get their input. We all came here to help build this country. Back in the '60s they were bringing up teachers because there was a shortage of teachers here. In the '70s a lot of tradespeople were coming up, '60s and '70s a lot of tradespeople were coming up because there was a demand for skilled workers and tradespeople. Down in Trinidad, because of the refinery and oil-related work, there were lots of skilled people coming from there.

Q: Do you think we contributed to building the province?

SH: Of course we have. I'm living proof. I've contributed. I've been in this country longer than I've been in my own country. I came here in '75 and we're in 2023 now. What's that, 48 years I've been working in this country and still am working. It's been a great country. I have no complaints about it. There have been lots of ups and downs in the oilfield. There'll always be a boom and a bust. It'll boom for five or ten years and then there'll be a great slowdown. I've seen lots of people lose everything when these downturns come. I think that might be it, unless there's anything else you need my input for.

Q: I have some things I'd like to know more about. Just keep talking to Donna. When you came from Trinidad, was it straight to Alberta?

SH: Yeah, my sister was living in Alberta and my brother-in-law was a chemical engineer. He was working in a boilermaker shop as a chemical engineer. When I came here, that's actually one of the first shops I started to work at when I came back to Canada. I was here on a holiday the previous year, and a year later I came back as a landed immigrant. I started to work where he was working because it was easy for me. I would be transported to work back and forth. A new person in the country, it takes a little while to get into things. I didn't have a vehicle and didn't have a Canadian driver's license. So I was commuting back and forth to work with him until I started to get on my own. I actually lived at their residence and contributed and paid a little rent. They didn't really want anything, but just to help. I stayed there for about six months and then I ended up renting a little apartment with a friend. A couple of young guys, we got a place together and started to live and work. He was in the same field. So we kind of helped each other out. Then I started to go from there. I met my wife and one thing led to the next. I married and had kids and stuff like that, and your whole life changed now.

Q: In the early days at Syncrude, how many people were working there building that place when you were up there?

SH: When I went there, there must have been about 4,000 or 5,000 people. There were massive camps with these buildings, and then there'd be the big kitchen. There'd be people from everywhere. There'd be people from Quebec and Montreal and different parts of the world. There were even guys from Jamaica and different people they'd bring up to do tank farms and different things. It was just a booming place. Not so much in Fort Mac; we were all staying in camps. Some people stayed on there after these plants were built, and bought a house there. That's when Fort Mac started to grow. But when I was there, there were just massive camps. We'd be lining up for supper, there'd be lines of people lining up for supper and breakfast and everything else. We had our own little rooms, and a lot of the rooms back then were shared rooms; you'd probably share a room with somebody. The washrooms were down the hall. Now when you go up there you usually get your own room. Some of the places still

have what we call gang showers. There'd be rooms for the shower and stuff; so you'd go take a shower there. But most places now you have your own bathroom and stuff in your room, which is great. It gives you some sense of privacy when you have your own little quarters. You go and eat in the common kitchen but you'd go back to your room and have your own little washroom and shower and stuff, which makes it a lot more bearable now. Back in those days it was tough because you'd share a room with somebody, and when you've got to use the washroom at night you've got to go down the hall. Especially up at Wabasca and stuff, where I went when I first started my company. It was tough there. You'd come out in the hall to go down to the washroom, and it would be cold; the hall wasn't heated. You'd come out to the camp and I don't know if you remember those big Bosh handle fridge doors; that's how your room was. It had a big door like that.

Q: As a contractor, did you have housing in camp too?

SH: Yeah, we had our own little company but we were still working for the company. So they had to supply accommodation and meals. They were in remote areas; so you had no choice. You couldn't commute too far because it was just too far to commute to a little town or something. So that's why they had these camps. Some were better than others. As time went on they got better, but in the early days it was tough, cold. You'd go into the kitchen and take your shoes off and leave them in the hallway, come back and your boots would be frozen. They were in some remote areas like Wabasca and those places where they were doing pipeline and stuff. It was cold times. Fingers and toes, you always were on top of that. You always gotta change socks. That's why I liked the idea of running my own company, because I had my truck and I could always have something warming up in there, liners for your boots so you could switch it out every now and again.

Q: Were there many Black workers at that time? How did it work socially? Did people from the same place hang out together?

SH: Now you still find some of that, but back in them days it was more predominant. People who could converse together would always hang together. Some of these guys from Montreal,

they just speak French. You'd have to get them on crews with people who could speak the language to communicate the message to them and the orders and stuff. But they're all good workers. Just they speak their own language. Even now you find you get a bunch of Filipinos together, they speak their language. You get a bunch of Chinese together, they speak their language. Or Russians or Ukrainians or whatever we got; everybody's kind of got their own little niche going. You get people from the Caribbean: sometimes we speak in slang languages. So we kind of understand each other a little bit better. But still we all got along and still worked together.

Q: Were the crews a mix of different people?

SH: Yeah, it'd be a mix of different peoples. There weren't so many Black people up there back in them days; there weren't very many. I remember when I came up here you'd very rarely see any coloured people. I remember one time I was downtown Edmonton walking down the street and if you'd see a coloured folk across the street you'd be running over to say hi to him. There weren't so many of us. If you go to a little function or something you'd end up meeting more. The ethnic population wasn't as much back in the '70s as it is now of course, more people coming now. Then everybody kind of intermarried into the different cultures and stuff. So it's becoming a melting pot. Where I come from in Trinidad, that's how it was. It was like a melting pot, the different races marrying each other. Then you get the offspring, and everybody gotta get along now because your grandkid might be half of something else. So God has a sense of humour anyway. If you didn't get along then, you know you gotta get along for the grandkids' sake. You gotta throw the old foolishness away.

Q: That's a good thing.

SH: Yes it is. We all bleed the same blood. We come from different cultures but we're all basically the same.

Q: You mentioned that you switched from being an electrician to working in the pipe trades.

SH: No, I wasn't an electrician. When I was in Trinidad apprenticing, they sent us to the different departments for like a couple months. That's where you learn to put a plug in and a little bit of electrician. You learn how to work a fire extinguisher and how to maintain it and that type of stuff. Texaco was a big place; there were 9,000 people working there when I was there. You had the garage where all the company vehicles go to get fixed. So you learn to change a tire and all the other stuff. So all the different departments you go to, you get a little bit of knowledge. So when your apprenticeship fully comes together you know how to use an extinguisher, you learn how to change a tire, you know how the machinery works, just enough so you can get by. There were always older folks teaching you. Everybody who was in charge was an older person. If you wanted that job, you had to work there for a while to get there. There weren't as many accidents, because all those older guys knew their stuff and they'd mentor you. That eliminates a lot of the accidents we have today, because you're being taught. Some people don't know, and they're experimenting as they go along.

Q: Can you talk about the importance of welding? If a weld fails, what can happen?

SH: If you weld on a pipeline you've got to put your root in; you've gotta put your hard pass weld and a cap. Your root is you've got a V groove, butt weld, and now you gotta put the first pass in. Then you've gotta clean that up and put a second pass in or a third pass, as many as you did to get it flushed out. Then you put a cap on it. So they X-ray these welds to make sure you've got full penetration, your weld is clean, and there's no stuff in it like what we call porosity or slag trapped in the internal part of the weld. They X-ray these and once the X-ray is good then they can continue to wrap it and finish it up or whatever. Even in the plants, they don't wrap it. They must insulate it after, put some insulation in it. Depends what product is going through the pipe. But everybody who says they're welders is not a welder; not because you can burn a rod you're a welder. Some of these types of welding need a higher skill. If you're doing argon welding-which is tig--I've got a little video on my phone I'm gonna give to you and you can incorporate it in this. It shows you what I'm doing, the process. So that's why you've gotta get extra training for different type of welding. If you're doing chrome and stainless, you need extra training to be able to do that type of welding. It's not basic type welding. There's extra training you need.

Q: What is B pressure welding?

SH: B pressure: when you get your B pressure first you learn how to do structural welding.

Q: Is that A pressure?

SH: No. There is an A pressure course. B.C. has an A pressure. They call it an A pressure ticket; we call it the B pressure here. B pressure here, once you qualify with a B pressure ticket you can weld a pipe according to the ABSA, which is the boiler branch. That qualifies you to weld on their piping. You've got to be able to put a bead in, a root – bead, root, same thing. Root, hard pass, fill and a cap – you've gotta make a complete weld. Then that's the type of stuff they would X-ray. Once that is good, then you proceed to the next one or whatever. So that's the B pressure. But if you want to do stainless and stuff, that's also covered under B pressure but it's a different process. With stainless you gotta have an internal purge inside the pipe and an external purge on your torch. Stainless is an alloy and you cannot fuse it together unless you have some kind of internal purge. Unless you're using a stick type rod, then you don't need a purge. But then you can't get the quality of root with the stick compared to if you use tig. So it's a different process. So that's why you've gotta get extra training and learn that. Everybody cannot do this, because it's demanding. You've gotta have patience when you're doing this type of welding. Some people don't have patience for that. It's a slow process and it takes more skill and more knowledge. Somebody's gotta teach it to you. Then, if you have the knack, you can catch on and learn to do it. It's a whole different setup, all the different alloys.

Q: Especially if you have to lie on your back and weld upwards.

SH: Well that's the thing. We've gotta lie on our back; we gotta stand; we gotta go on our side. Sometimes you're welding and if you don't cover your ears properly you get a spark down your neck. You're playing with fire, right. I'll show you some pictures where you're welding underneath there on some of the bigger pipelines, two guys working it. You've got one on this side, one on this side; so we're both going up on the pipe. We've gotta be careful of course

when a guy's grinding. You've gotta give your partner a heads up because you don't wanna shoot sparks his way. He's gotta grind too. So, sometimes one starts at the bottom and one starts halfway up the side. You're doing a 36 inch pipe; it's a big pipe. If my partner starts at the bottom I might start on the side here and goes up and he's coming up. By the time he gets up to the side then I can go down to the bottom. So we're kind of out of each other's way. You work that out with your partner. Most of the big stuff is partnered up, two guys. I'm just talking of what I've encountered over the years.

Q: Talk a bit about protective equipment.

SH: Basic PPE is your steel-toed boots, your gloves, your hardhat, your safety glasses. Those are the basic PPE everybody wears. But if I'm going into a situation where I'm going to be encountering fumes or dust or something, then I might wear a mask. If I'm going into a situation where there's H₂S, I've gotta be trained for that now. That's an all-day course you take, and you've gotta pass the exam with 70 percent. You've gotta have a ticket for that; you've gotta be qualified. You don't just take a regular Joe and send him out there. That's part of the safety program is you know exactly what tickets you have and what you're qualified to do. That's when you go over and above the PPE. If there's silica in the air, if there's acid in the area, then you gotta wear different type of clothes and maybe rubber gloves. In the live plants you always wear fireproof coveralls. It's fireproof, but you can't put a torch on it and hold it there for five minutes. These fireproof clothes are designed just to last a few seconds, like a flash explosion or something. They will disintegrate but they'll be good for a quick flash fire. You can't stay in a fire with it. PPE is your first line of defense; so you've gotta have that. You've gotta have steel-toed boots because if something dropped on your feet or something, it will protect you. It might not save you; it depends on the object, but it will protect you from kicking your toe or stubbing it somewhere. Of course you need to work with gloves because you try to do stuff with your bare hand there'll be contaminants; there might be chemicals. So you've gotta have the right gloves for the job. When I'm welding I use leather gloves, because if I use rubber gloves they're gonna start melting with the heat and stuff. So I use leather gloves for welding and I wear a mask when I'm welding. If I'm doing a real hazardous job, then I might need a welding shield that kind of blows air in a head mask to keep any chemicals from coming in. It kind of forms a pressure in

there and keeps everything out. I might have a little backpack that sucks the air from back there and has a hose coming up and it's got a little fan. In real critical situations you gotta use these things. Or you're working in a dirty environment in a plant or something--then you gotta wear the right PPE.

Q: A lot of that has changed over the years.

SH: It is getting better. They have better equipment now, better safety now. Most companies are pretty big on safety now, especially the one I work with, Worley. They're pretty anal on safety stuff because it saves people, saves lives, saves fingers. It doesn't always save you, but if you have the knowledge it'll help you. Sometimes you might try to take a shortcut. You're under pressure or something; you might try to do something. But that's something you've got to deal with. They always tell us, don't feel rushed; we want to get things done, but don't feel rushed. If you feel too rushed, stop and take a break sometimes – take a drink of water, just do something, take a break. If you're having problems, talk to your supervisor or whatever to see what can be done to make this better or safer or easier.

Q: Are there different sizes of pipes for different products?

SH: In a sense they use different pipe for different things. If it's just oil and bitumen going through there, then they have special grades of pipe for different things. If you're working on a piping system that's running at a high temperature, you will use different piping material for that. You use a lot of chrome stuff because it can withstand operating pressures of 200 or 300 degrees all the time. Some of the welding we do, you have to heat the pipe up before you even weld it. You have big coils in the pipe to preheat the pipe and bring it to a certain temperature before you can even start welding it. That's with some of the alloy piping, chromium and stuff like that. So yeah, there is different material they use for different pipe. The pipeline that Trans Mountain and these guys use, they are a special grade of pipe. These are the big pipes – 36, 48, 20 inch. They're a special grade of pipe, better material, harder pipe, withstands more abrasive. You've got products you're running through the pipe. You've also got an abrasion going through there. If there's sand in there, silicone and stuff, it could wear things out. So they use different

types of material for these types of process; otherwise you can have a pipeline wearing out in no time at all. Especially if they're going around fittings and stuff, they usually go around there with a little more pressure, a little more velocity so they wear more. You see situations in the plant sometimes where we're changing elbows out and stuff on piping because they've been washed out on one side and stuff like that. That's why they monitor all these things and do all kinds of mechanical testing on fittings in live plants and things to see what's happening, how thick it is. Maybe when you put it in it's this thick, and then six months later it's this thick. So that's gotta be replaced or that's gonna cause some problems. A lot of these plants have a system in place where they monitor all these things. They know from experience.

Q: Can a drone do that?

SH: The drones do that on the pipeline. They detect leaks and stuff.

Q: Can it detect the thickness?

SH: I don't know if the drone could do it, but maybe with technology they might be able to. I know they go and do physical tests on the pipe. They have inspection companies go and do physical tests on the pipe and check for the thickness and all of that. Then they send a machine down the pipe too, the pipeline. They send machines down there that can detect wear and tear and all this type of thing. . . . I picked up all these things from years of experience. A new guy on the scene, they won't teach you that in school. They can't, because it's not part of the. . . That's why I always say you should creep before you walk. You don't take a guy who just got out of school and make him a supervisor. How is he going to lead that crew there? A lot of time you're leading a crew with a bunch of people who are way more experienced and older than him. I'm not taking anything away from the youth; don't get me wrong. It's just that some of these people just need to be mentored a little more before they move them up into these positions of authority. You've got men under you. The way the system is set up now, if you've got a crew working under you you're responsible for them. If you don't have the knowledge to try to keep them safe, you could be in jeopardy.

Q: Now that you have your own company, are you still mainly working within the oil and gas industry?

SH: I mostly do work there, but I go out and do other things too. But I mostly stick to the mechanical part, the building of piping and structural steel. The odd time I might weld a muffler, but I don't do that too much. Or make something, build a barbeque or something.

Q: Welding is a skill that's highly transferrable.

SH: Oh yeah, you go do stuff for the farmers sometimes.

Q: Welding is a skill that could be used in different ways, not only oil and gas.

SH: Welding came from blacksmithing. That's where the first type of welding started – heating material and pounding it together and stuff like that. It's been around for many years; it's just evolved so much. But that's how they started to fuse stuff together, by heating stuff together and pounding it together and then it fuses together. But it's something that you can use for so many different things, not just for the oilfield. You can use it at home doing stuff, building a gate. You put some posts up and want to weld things on it, build a deck. You can do all kinds of things with it. There are many different types of welding, too. It's very versatile. Some people enjoy it as a hobby; some people do it just for hobbies. Welding has been used everywhere in everything. Now they've got robots doing it, robotics and stuff, putting car frames together. It's all robotics now, train tracks and everything being fused together. I don't think it's going to go away soon; it's going to become more robotic, but still the human is going to have to do some of the places where equipment can't get in. . . . Everybody who says they're a welder is not a welder--let's put it that way. You might be able to burn a rod, but to go and put a pipe together that's going to be under pressure running at 2,500 psi, then welding two plates together is going to be different. A lot of the guys in welding specialize. Now we use a lot of welding with equipment that's a big reel of wire and you just keep welding. STT and stuff like that: those are the different types of welding that's coming into play now. Then there's a lot of robotics where sometimes you're just trained to watch equipment weld the pipe now. You've just got to keep

monitoring it and make sure everything is going good. You set all your stuff and heat. That's the age we're in now. So it's definitely evolving all the time more and more.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

SH: I've enjoyed the trade. That's why I still do it. I could do other things too, but I still enjoy going out with the truck and make a weld here and build something. My mindset is building things; so that's what we do with welding. You get a set of blueprints and you go and [create] something. You start here from nothing and then you build something and put something together. Then you go put it in place and it works. Sometimes you've gotta design something to make something work, a bracket or something. It keeps you thinking. It also keeps you physical, because you're always lifting or climbing or crawling through some little hole. It keeps you in shape. ... The physical you've gotta put it together and pass X-ray and make sure everything's good before it goes into operation.

Q: What was it like on those remote snowy roads and remote camps?

SH: A lot of the jobs we do back in the winter. Sometimes you can only access them through winter roads. You do the work in the winter, but then spring comes and something might start falling apart. I've been on jobs where we had to leave our equipment there and fly with a helicopter to do the work, every day come back out, then at the end of the job fly equipment out with the helicopter. Like a welding machine, they bring it by helicopter. You've gotta leave your truck out on the site. Sometimes they rent vehicles, like vans; so, instead of beating up the road, you rent some equipment to get in and out. Then there's less traffic on the road. If you've got a van with ten people in it, then you eliminate five or six vehicles, because they keep mashing up the road. All these scenarios come into play. Sometimes a helicopter takes you out, picks you up here, drops you to work; then you come back out at night with the helicopter. You work on rig mats and stuff; they put rig mats in there. Sometimes they've gotta leave the rig mats there all year and go get them next winter.

Q: What is a rig mat?

SH: A rig mat is a big maybe 50 feet long by 20 feet wide. It's made out of steel and then they put wood in it. So they drag these rig mats in there in the muskeg area where there's mud, and then they make a whole base out of this; they put them together. Then you can bring equipment on it and stuff like that. There's too much mud and muskeg there; you'd sink out of sight. Some of the roads we go to are made with just rig mats on a lot of the pipeline we do. They use rig mats to get out there. You can't drive a truck on these rig mats. Sometimes they build a whole drilling rig station there with rig mats. They might use a thousand rig mats to put together, like Lego. Then it forms a base for everything. Or else you'll have to deal with all the mud, and equipment would be breaking down.

This rig I was building, this was a new rig that was being built in Nisku. You're building a new rig. So we had solid ground there.

Q: In the picture where the truck was stuck, there was no rig mat?

SH: No, there was no rig mat there. That was in the spring and the road started to fall apart, and you end up getting stuck. A piece of equipment gotta pull you out, if you're lucky and there's one in the area. It was an interesting time and a little nuts and stuff over the years working in all these conditions. It wasn't always easy, but somebody had to do it. I was one of the chosen at that time.

Q: You were going to give me some other names.

SH: Yeah, I could get a couple names for you. All of us went through similar experiences and everybody's got their own story. I can give you a couple names.

[END]