

Narrator: Jody Buttman (JB)

Company Affiliations: Port Arthur Shipyards (Port Arthur Shipbuilding Company), Canada Car

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Summary: Retired welder for Port Arthur Shipyards Jody Buttman describes his brief career as a welder working on grain lake vessels. He discusses his seasonal work doing ship repairs at the drydock, like patching damaged hulls, replacing piping in engine rooms, and other welding work. He describes how ship work was assessed by inspectors, the different skilled trades that operated in the shipyard, the different levels of welders, and the dangerous work conditions. Buttman discusses the work culture at the Shipyards, including the proliferation of alcohol and drug use, the unionized atmosphere, and the separation of labourers and management. He recounts his involvement in a different aspect of the shipyard's work, the building of the *John B. Aird* bulk carrier. Buttman recounts the progression of his career after leaving Port Ship, moving to Canada Car to build hopper cars on an assembly line, then to construction, then to truck driving. Other topics discussed include the lack of health and safety awareness during his career at Port Ship, his enjoyment in learning welding in college and on the job, workplace accidents associated with welding, the qualities of a good welder, work disassembling ships for scrap, and the old-fashioned atmosphere of Port Ship.

Keywords: Port Arthur Shipyards (Port Arthur Shipbuilding Company); Ship repairs; Welding; Skilled trades; Grain transportation—ships; Lakers; Canallers; Bulk carriers; Drydock; Ship inspection; Health and safety; Workplace accidents; Workplace fatalities; Ship building; *John B. Aird*; Alcohol and drug abuse; Hopper cars; Canada Car; Canada Steamship Lines; Paterson Steamships Ltd.

Time, Speaker, Narrative
EP: Well it is a pleasure to be here with you today, Jody, to do this interview. To get ourselves started, I will ask you to give your name.
JB: My name is Jody Lawrence Buttman.

EP: The place and date of birth?

JB: I was born December 31, 1960, in Fort William, Ontario, McKellar Hospital.

EP: Good, and then we would like to get a sense of how you began involved in the grain trade. Now you didn't work in elevators ever, I guess, but you did work that did relate to moving grain?

JB: Yes, I did not work in any of the elevators, actually, but I worked on a lot of the boats that carried the different grains. I worked at the shipyard they called the PASCO [Port Arthur Shipbuilding Company] and then actually worked for Mr. Paul Shaffer's dad at Western Scrap Metal as it was called. I was disassembling the boats after they were finished with the use of transporting the grain.

EP: You had repaired grain carriers and you have taken grain carriers apart?

JB: Yes, both.

EP: It sounds very interesting!

JB: In manufacturing and disassembling.

EP: You did this as a certified welder?

JB: Yes, I was. I got my ticket at Confederation College. It was a two-year course. I was 18 or 19 years old when I acquired my ticket. It was a something that happened because I didn't finish my diploma from high school, and I was wondering where I was going to go. Some of my friends had started the course, so I thought I would do something, and I got into it and discovered that I liked it. I finished at the top of my class and from there it just took off. The first place I did work as a welder was at the shipyards.

EP: You went from Confederation straight off to Port Arthur Shipyards to begin welding there?

JB: I worked there two winters and three summers. It was a type of job that was sporadic due to the seasonal work at the grain elevators because of the grain movement.

EP: You might say something about the seasonality of it because you were involved in repairing ships there. When would this take place?

JB: Most of the time it took place in the wintertime. They would get the ship in, whatever ship it was, whether it was Paterson Lines or CSL [Canada Steamship Lines] Line. There were a couple of other ones that I can't remember what we called them.

EP: Was it Misener?

JB: Yes, Misener was there too. They would pull one into the dry dock and assess the damage and then start to repair the damage as it went along. Sometimes summer work for sure. At first it was seasonal work. As a welder it was the extremes of the hot and cold weather which played on you because of the apparel that you had to wear at time to protect yourself.

EP: I'll say. You would be working inside ships as a rule?

JB: Inside underneath the drydock. They would settle the boat on, similar as you would jack your car up, and put timbers underneath. They had the schematic of the underside of the boat, and they would place the blocks in certain positions then float the boat in and settle it in the center of it and pump the water under it, and it would settle onto the blocks. So you had about four feet underneath the boat that you could walk from one end to the other underneath the boat.

EP: You could duck underneath?

JB: You could crawl right underneath. They would assess the damage and then cut the bottom damage out. Usually what would happen is that the boats would run aground on sand bars wherever they were coming from, and it would rip the hull open and stop them from taking on the ballast water so they wouldn't list one way or the other when they had the grain in them.

EP: Were these ships double hulled? Was there an inner lining holding the grain?

JB: Yes.

EP: The area between?

JB: Yes, that was the ballast tanks.

EP: It was the ballast tanks.

JB: It was the ballast tanks to keep it from listing one way from another. If you have so much grain in one hold, you had to have so much water in another side of the boat to keep it from falling. They all had it figured out that way. So, if one bail was ripped open because of the sand bar, they would have to repair that.

EP: The ships you would be repairing would be what length?

JB: They would 730 feet long.

EP: I guess that is the canal length?

JB: Yes. Most were 730 feet long. There were not too many that were longer than that. The drydock would not take much bigger than that.

EP: No. They were built for the old canal and trade, I guess?

JB: Yes, and the ones that were bigger than that, they would pull them up along the side and do more top damage and side damage and side panels and whatever else, engine room work that they did. Because they did a lot of different things at PASCO. We did manufacturing, they did machining, and the motors and everything.

EP: Well, they had a terrific wood-working shop, which I have visited back in the 1980s.

JB: I never had a chance to go into that. But I was in the foundry where they forged a lot of the different things on the brass and stuff. Later in the years I know that a lot of the stuff coming over from overseas from Sweden and places like that, they would ship in the propellers and the shafts or the motors.

EP: Which is what was manufactured there I suppose?

JB: Yes, at one time it was. They just didn't have the facilities left anymore. They would make certain stuff, but not the bigger things.

EP: I image there just wasn't enough of it to keep the crews and the equipment up.

JB: Absolutely. I guess like everything else it has to get shipped and farm it out to somewhere right. One shaft of the propeller would be probably over 10 feet long. It was one piece of the prop and the nuts to hold them on. They are all made of a material called chromium, and the one nut was almost 18 inches around. One nut to put onto the bolt. They would tighten it up with the crane. They would use a chain fall and to get it really tight. The overhead crane would come along and pull up on the chain and keep turning the wrench to tighten the bolt up. It was amazing to watch. I never got involved in that, but I got to watch.

EP: It was interesting things to watch. How many ballast tanks would a 730--?

JB: Offhand I wouldn't know how many. I believe the ballast tanks that we worked in were probably 20 feet long and they were about 4 feet wide. You could hop from one to another and then there were the bulkheads. So they were usually joined in two pieces probably 40 feet long by--.

EP: I guess it's 80 into 730

JB: As they got to the front they narrowed and changed the dimensions.

EP: Was this repairing of the bottom of the ship the ballast tanks that had been torn open, was that the main welding repair that you did?

JB: That and side damage. On the side, they take the whole panel out which is probably about a 20-foot-by-20-foot piece of steel out that had been damaged. It hit something. I don't know what would hit the side, but it would run into something. The steel was an inch thick, and they would take that out. The welder and the fitter would dog it into place with the dogs and wedges. Then we would weld it, tack it in the day shift. Then the night shift would then totally weld it up. The fitter was always on the day shift because the welding flashes. The night shift crew would come in and the fitters would not be around, so they could weld steady.

EP: You have used a bit of technical language there for our lay listeners. Can you explain what a "dog" is?

JB: A "dog" is a wedge. They weld the one piece onto the plate that they are putting into place. Actually, they weld one piece onto the hull of the boat and put the piece of steel in there. Then they put a wedge into between the pieces of steel that is going in and the dog, so wedges are in place. They would tack it all around at different spots every foot. Then the night shift will come in and zip it up.

EP: Would the pieces of steel that was being put in be cut at Port Ship?

JB: Yes. Down at the bottom. Sometimes they would have to weld two pieces together and they would use a machine called a submersed arc which was a welding machine that was on a track. They would put two 20-foot pieces of steel together and bevel both sides and set the track up along that joint. The submersed arc would be underneath flux. This submersed-arc machine would travel along the track at a certain speed which you could regulate by dials on the machine.

EP: Computerized?

JB: Yes, it was computerized. You could weld a perfect weld and then it would pass over top. So it would become stronger than the metal itself all the time.

EP: So submerged words meaning the undersides?

JB: You could not see the arc. It would be infused underneath in the flux so it would be totally clean. There were no impurities in the weld at all. Once you get an impurity in the weld that is a weak spot. And you don't need that in the middle of the water.

EP: No. So would it just be welded on the one side or would it be welded on the other side?

JB: No, they would flip it on the other side too.

EP: To do the other side?

JB: Yes.

EP: So the intention was to take two pieces of steel and make them as strong as if they had been one steel.

JB: Make them stronger and make them bigger, yes. They could do one big patch at the same time instead of two smaller ones.

EP: It is sort of tacked into place during the day time?

JB: Yes.

EP: What was the reason for the final weld for the complete job to be done during the night?

JB: At nighttime it was mainly because of the fitters would not have to deal with the welding flashes. If you are person welding a vertical joint that is 20 feet long, he is continuously welding on that for hours. The welding flashes are there all the time.

EP: The light flashes from the arc?

JB: Yes, the arc itself. The worst flash is from the side. You think it would be straight on, but it is from the side. Your peripheral vision will give you a flash, which is very uncomfortable.

EP: This is where one puts on the wrap around goggles.

JB: Yes, but if the day shift were doing that, the fitters would not be provided with that stuff. They were just fitters. So at nighttime they would do a 4:00 to 12:00 shift and then a 12:00 to 8:00 shift all night. They would be running all night sometimes. And cold.

EP: One of the stories I remember from my father's telling me was that he taught himself how to weld in the '50s on the farm, and eventually he ran a welding shop in Carman, Manitoba, for a time. But he told us this story about some kid who was curious to watch the welding with his naked eyes and watched it for a time, and in the evening he was standing outside facing the wind trying to cool his eyes because he had done some damage.

JB: It's similar to having sand in your eyes. I have had many a flashes when I was welding. Yes, many flashes. It is just like having sand in your eyes. There is nothing you can do. They put Neosporin in your eyes at the hospital. It is quite uncomfortable, but it does go away after a day and a half or so.

EP: But too much of this would do damage to the eyes.

JB: I would imagine so. It would be similar to looking into the sun for a long time. That is what the equivalent is.

EP: Yes, of course.

JB: Equivalent to looking to the sun for a period of time. The ultraviolet rays.

EP: How long would it take to weld in a piece that is what 20 feet wide?

JB: 20 foot by probably 20 foot by 20 foot square piece most of the time. How long would it take to do that?

EP: To weld it all, all night?

JB: Oh, longer than that. A couple of days to weld a piece like that. You would have more than one welder on it. You would have a couple of welders on it doing the horizontal and a couple of guys doing the vertical. Most of the time the foreman would know who was better at doing one position than the other because one is harder than the other. The vertical is a harder position to weld. They want the better welders on that one.

EP: The tricky thing is that both are vertical surfaces are they not? It is not like having something lying on the table where you are welding.

JB: No. A flat weld is the easiest weld. You can't really mess that one up. It's the vertical or the overhead weld that is the hard one.

EP: Yes, laying down and laying bead and maintaining that bead.

JB: The damage in the side tanks where the ballasts were was the dirtiest and the hardest stuff to weld. On the outside they would have two pretty good pieces of metal to weld so there were no impurities. They would clean it up really well. The fitter would clean it up. But on the side tanks, it was welding new metal and patching it into old rusty steel. You know you would have to clean it up as best as you can. And sometimes there would be water running down because when you put heat to things in the middle of winter, things start to melt. So water starts to trickle down, and when you are doing overheads over your head and water is trickling down. I can remember getting a good poke from the electricity because the water is trickling down on you. I really learned how to weld there, more than at the college. I learned techniques but I learned how to weld there. Poured a lot of rod. In a night shift, you would burn a whole box of rod would be about that big and that long. A good 50 pounds of rod in one night.

EP: The rods tend to run about a foot long?

JB: Yes, close to a foot long or a little longer. A little longer than a foot long.

EP: And they vary in thickness.

JB: They vary in thickness for their tensile strengths and their different properties that they run. Their flux is on the outside and different positions that you can run them in and different techniques that you can do with the rod.

EP: So in this case you were welding good steel?

JB: Most of the time, yes.

EP: Although the joins must sometimes, as you are saying, when you have got rusted corroded that means that the thickness has been affected. It's not that the whole thickness any longer?

JB: Absolutely. In those instances, there was not much that they could do really. You can't replace the whole thing. They would just patch it until I guess the lifelong of the boat would have reached the point where there is no repair. Like an old car, you can't do much more to it.

EP: Opening in the hole was involved and cutting with the welder's--.

JB: Yes. They would weld with a torch. They would come along and cut the piece out that they needed. First of all, we would cut an access hole for the inspectors to go in, welding inspectors. He would go in and mark with a special marker pen and would mark what needs to be cut out and replaced and the guys would go in and cut it all out and make the bigger access hole and bring in the new steel and tack in place.

EP: The inspector was an employee of the shipyards?

JB: Yes. The white hats would come in. The foremen would come in. I am not sure if there was an employee of, like CSL, with them or not.

EP: I was wondering. You don't know whether there were government employees conceivably?

JB: Yes. Or insurance.

EP: Or insurance?

JB: Probably some kind of insurance. There would be adjusters in there.

EP: I would think the first order deciding, well it could be insurance adjusters come in and say how much has to be cut out here to make the repair.

JB: I remember the big insurance company was Lloyds of London.

EP: Sure, of course.

JB: They were huge.

EP: They have been at it for a long time.

JB: They were one of the biggest ones that would take on that sort of insurance.

EP: How long would a repair of that sort take from the time that the hole was cut and the inspector comes in?

JB: Well, most boats would come in and, if it was in for the winter, it was in for the winter. It was in for the whole winter. It would stay there, and it would be done up right. There would be a lot of damage to a job like that. The ones that were lesser damaged, they would do them in the summertime so that they could get them in and out. Because once she is in in the wintertime, it freezes outside, and you can't get it out again.

EP: The plant managing at drydock really involves deciding which ship is going to have the drydock for the winter?

JB: Absolutely, yes. You would get ones that needed more damage and a lot of engine work. There were times when I worked in the engine room, and I often wonder about those times where we would be---. In the engine room there is a lot of asbestos covering the pipes, and I often wondered about those times that it did. Back then there was no big talk of it. The asbestos scare that there is now.

EP: They still didn't have you with facemasks?

JB: No, they had nothing.

EP: And the asbestos was floating in the air?

EP: Oh, floating. It was everywhere. It was everywhere. We would cut it off. Cut it off and ripped it off with our hands. There was no talk of safety at all back then. Not that kind of safety. No, and so we ripped it off and take the torch and cut the piece of pipe out of the hangers out and take it out. Then we would put new pipe back in.

EP: That's distressing. This is only 30 or so years ago and problems with asbestos were known in the 1970s were they not? I think that Johns Manville went into bankruptcy protection. I think it was in the 1970s because of lawsuits.

JB: That whole asbestos scare and the whole asbestos-mining thing. It is really scary stuff. But it is a necessary mineral. They still use it today in certain things.

EP: I am not sure to what extent, but certainly it has been used a lot.

JB: Yes.

EP: In context in which as in brake drum--.

JB: Yes, exactly.

EP: The shoes are on the old drum brakes were certainly asbestos. When you think of some asbestos must slowly flaked off from that. But the question is dust, isn't it? If it is asbestos fibre in water, there was a concern down near the taconite plants in Minnesota some years ago in water. The problem is the lungs. The stuff gets into the lungs.

JB: What do they call that? Mesothelioma?

EP: It is something like that.

JB: I often wonder that sometimes. I am not a smoker, but I have sometimes a cough and everything. There were a lot of guys who did that work.

EP: It is a time bomb really. I wish you well with that. In your lungs, if it is there. In the engine room it would be a matter of replacing pipes?

JB: Yes, steam pipes, replacing whatever needed to be replaced. If turbines motors needed to be replaced, we would usually just cut the brackets off that held them in place and would be welding them into place. Just along the steam maker or the fitter or whoever it was. Or the electrician. They all had their own. It was very unionized place. You could not touch someone else's job. If you needed an electrician to change the light bulb, you would not change the light bulbs there. The electrician had to come along and change the light bulbs. The carpenter, you didn't touch the nail and the hammer there. It just wasn't done. It was very unionized. You were cutting another man's throat by doing it.

EP: Yes. There is language for this sort of collective agreement.

JB: Yes.

EP: I don't remember it.

JB: I am not sure.

EP: It is derogatory language of course as well with company's management wanting freedom to move workers around. It was just to have one person do everything rather than, as you say, protecting the jobs of your fellow members.

JB: Yes.

EP: Was it United Steelworkers Union 40?

JB: I am not sure what it is. Nowadays you have millwrights. So millwrights can do pretty much most things. They do all those things.

EP: From your memory, what were the different job classifications? You have named three if I understand right. The electrician, the carpenter, and obviously the welder.

JB: There was the fitter.

EP: The fitters, that is four.

JB: And there were the labourers.

EP: What would the labourers do in these circumstances? A labourer would not change a light bulb?

JB: He would move scaffolding. They would move scaffolding, pulling cable for the welding machines and cleaning up garbage. There was fire watch. You always had to do fire watch. Wherever there was welding, you had to have fire watch. There had to be a person with an extinguisher there all the time. And saying that, I wasn't working at the shipyards at the time this happened. I was working somewhere else.

EP: At another workplace?

JB: I was working at Can Car. I was welding at Can Car after the shipyards.

EP: Yes.

JB: And a friend of mine passed away there. They were in one of the side tanks and it exploded. As a result of an oxyacetylene.

EP: Yes, it was quite an infamous event. There were two or three guys.

JB: Yes. One was a friend of mine. His name was Gary McDonald.

EP: Was there a fellow named Osadic?

JB: I am not sure of the other two guys. I remember the one guy. I would have known them probably, but I knew one guy well.

EP: Do you think it could have been avoided, that particular accident?

JB: Well, I will say this on this tape, and if you want to edit this part, that is fine by me. Could it have been avoided? I would think so. At the shipyards back in those days, and I am not sure if it goes on anymore, alcohol and drugs were prolific. On a night shift at any given time, it was all around. Was that young man that I knew high? Probably. Could it have been avoided? Probably. If he had been more coherent and attuned to his job. So I am assuming that that was the case, and I knew him well.

EP: So there was a culture of alcoholism or of alcohol consumption during the shift?

JB: Absolutely. We would go to the Jolly Roger at lunchtime. They give you a pass-out. The company itself at the gate would give you a pass to go out for the lunch and come back and nothing was said. And lots of things went on during the day.

EP: Even during the day?

JB: In the yard. At a night shift of 12:00 to 8:00, people would bring in brandy to keep warm.

EP: Or so the argument was?

JB: So the argument was.

EP: I guess liquor doesn't actually warm you. It just gives you a sensation of warmth.

JB: No not at 40 below it doesn't. It sucks the heat right out of you. But I mean, you know. And I was part of that for sure.

EP: Were you employed there after this accident, or had you finished there?

JB: I had finished there. I don't think I ever went back after that. No, I went on.

EP: And you had friends working there afterwards?

JB: Always.

EP: Did they say things had changed after the accident?

JB: No, I don't know. I never talked to them about that. But I don't think so, you know. I don't think so.

EP: You know Tom Chauvin?

JB: Yes.

EP: We had interviewed Tom once, and so we need to listen to that tape again because he is now retired. And Tom was happy to talk further.

JB: Tommy was not a welder. Tommy was a foreman at the end of fitting. Was he a fitter?

EP: He became president of the local for a long time.

JB: Right. Yes, he was a steward.

EP: He could have been the union steward?

JB: Yes, he was the union steward when I was there. That is right. But I can't remember his classification. You still had a classification back then when you worked.

EP: You did when you worked?

JB: Yes sure. You would have had to have a job.

EP: I must ask Tommy about that.

JB: Oh, I am sure he probably turned his eye. Turned his head too.

EP: My memory from the last interview was that he suggested that he had become more concerned about these things. I think they had stopped turning their heads, averting their eyes to what was going on, because it is so dangerous to not have full control of your senses.

JB: And it is not only dangerous it affects so many people's lives. It affected every person. It affected mine by listening to what happened to that young man. He was a friend and he had family and yet all kinds of people--. It could have been avoided. Absolutely could have been avoided. Absolutely. You are dealing with heavy machinery. You have 240 volts of electricity running through your hand, and if you have alcohol or drugs in you, it is not a good thing.

EP: No.

JB: It's not. He was a firewatcher. He was supposed to be watching that job. There were two other men that were doing their job.

EP: Can I ask you when you came into Port Ship and was this an atmosphere in which substance abuse grew for you, or had you been familiar?

JB: No, I had already been introduced to it.

EP: So there wasn't any change that took place then?

JB: No.

EP: Alcohol is the most common drug around the globe, I think still.

JB: Yes, it is very socially accepted, isn't it?

EP: Yes.

JB: But people turn a blind eye to it because it is socially accepted.

EP: But it is gradually changed at workplaces.

JB: Slowly.

EP: It has surfaced in other interviews we have done that I think in the last 20 years or so--.

JB: Yes, it has changed in my workplace. I would like to see it change in other places. I would love to see it change in our city employees.

EP: We are getting a little bit more delicate here, so we should go back to Port Ship. [Laughs]

JB: All right, let's go back.

EP: Or have you worked for the city?

JB: No, I haven't. [Laughs]

EP: How many welders would there have been at the time you were working?

JB: Welders on a shift? Well, there would be on one shift probably 50 at one shift. You had three shifts. And then it all depended on the type of boat. There weren't only damaged boats coming in. We actually got a chance to work on a new boat. We actually got a chance to build a new boat. Build one-half of a boat.

EP: So it was the *Aird*?

JB: *John B. Aird*, yeah.

EP: It was that late, was it? It was around 1980 or the early '80s when the *Aird* was put together.

JB: Yes. What they did was--. It is just memories. It is hard to go back.

EP: You put a false bulkhead on the front half?

JB: The front half, that is right. We put a false bulkhead on it. And they floated it down to Collingwood and they joined the two together.

EP: Collingwood built the back half. The engine and all the rest.

JB: Yes, because we didn't have the facilities to founder the engine and all that. So I wonder if the *John Aird's* in service still there.

EP: I don't know off hand. I visited Collingwood about 1986 or 1987 so just a few years when I was MP, just a few years later. And of course, that construction was one they were proud of as well since they built the back half, and then the two halves were mated.

JB: Our half had no accommodations on it. They built the part with the accommodations. Our part was just strictly grain holds and bulkheads.

EP: And the *Aird* was bigger than a canaller, am I right?

JB: That is right it was. That is why we could only do the one half, I guess. That and the engine work, but I mean it was a bigger boat. I am not sure exactly. I believe it was 1000-footer. I think it was 1000-footer, yes.

EP: So you build about 500 feet of it?

JB: Yes.

EP: Were you involved yourself in that building?

JB: Oh yes.

EP: It must have been exciting to build a ship?

JB: It was exciting to see the technology that went into it. For it to go across the lake with the rough weather and stuff. The thickness of the plate steel varied from the centre to the end of the ship at both ends. Because of the roll of the wave and the boat had to give a certain amount or else she would split in half. So the centre of the ship was almost three inches thick, the top plate.

EP: The deck plate?

JB: The deck plate down to each end.

EP: It had a bit of a natural slope to it?

JB: It didn't have the slope. Well, I guess you are right. It varied to the water to roll off. But the idea was so that it would give certain amounts and would roll.

EP: Certain flux to it?

JB: Yes, some flux to it. The technology in that, I don't know.

EP: Which parts of the *Aird* did you weld on yourself? Clearly you know the deck.

JB: Yes. All different parts. We were put in different parts every day. Every day was different. Depending on what your welding capabilities were and that.

EP: Yes, that is another part of this. The 50 welders. There were rankings amongst the welders?

JB: Yes, there was.

EP: Ones that the company maintained?

JB: Yes. It was all company maintained. And you had to have so many hours and they would give you a promotion. I think it was A B welders. That is what it was. And they had a test that they give you when you first start to see where you fit in.

EP: You had to weld, I suppose?

JB: Yes. Exactly. They are not going to hire you if you don't know how to weld. So they give you a test. You did your own CWB test at the college so that told you that you could weld. It really didn't give you much.

EP: CWB would be?

JB: Canadian Welding Board, I think that is what that stands for.

EP: That makes sense that there would be a certifying body.

JB: Yeah, and each company that you work for.

EP: And there were just the two ranks then that you are suggesting?

JB: Yes.

EP: So you were sort of an apprentice and journeyman welder and then I guess a master welder?

JB: Yes.

EP: And it wasn't so much time related or was there something in terms of the length of time that you welded?

JB: They would leave the A welders alone by themselves to weld the stuff that they wanted more intricate work. The tacking of the plate steel was more of a B welder's job.

EP: Yes.

JB: Unless you were on day shift and they needed somebody or whatever.

EP: But the final welding would be done by A welders?

JB: Yes.

EP: Of course, the thing has to be waterproof.

JB: Yes.

EP: How was the weld tested at all?

JB: They would X-ray the tests.

EP: They X-rayed them?

JB: Yes. They would X-ray tests certain pieces of welds. Not all welds because that would be impossible to X-ray all of the welds. So they would X-ray to the standards of the insurance company I would imagine.

EP: How do you X-ray a weld?

JB: I never saw them do it. I know that they do it.

EP: Presumably a plate on one side or the other. I suppose perhaps on the inside of it?

JB: Yes. What they look for is porosity. They look for holes, bubbles that are not pure. So right there they will know that there is a bunch of porosity that is where it is going to break.

EP: Sure.

JB: The weld is supposed to be stronger than the steel itself.

EP: Yes.

JB: Lower tensile strength.

EP: The weld would not have tensile strength, would it?

JB: The rod that you are putting into it has a certain tensile strength.

EP: A certain strength that allows for flexing, is it?

JB: Now you got me. You have to go a way back to my schooling for that one, but I know that each rod had a certain tensile strength. Most of them 40,000 pounds per square inch and some were 70,000 pounds per square inch depending on the rod itself.

EP: I am concluding a bystander here would just kind of guess at these things aside from the fact that I watched my dad weld and tended to tell a story or two but not on the tape about all of that.

JB: Yes. You know once you start to weld you put all those things in the background. They are all in the back of my head, and I just know that I could stick two pieces of metal together pretty well!

EP: If you have the right kind of material?

JB: The right kind of material and cleanliness, and they have to be clean for sure.

EP: The thickness is a factor, isn't it?

JB: Absolutely.

EP: The thinner steel is the worst.

JB: The harder and the tougher yes.

EP: And of course, you have other kinds of metals that are very, very difficult to weld.

JB: Yes. Some of them are different. Some positions are difficult.

EP: Cast iron pieces in particular, but I won't go into that.

JB: Yes.

EP: So you worked at Port Ship then for the two winters you said?

JB: Two winters and three summers yes.

EP: Three summers. How did you enjoy working at Port Ship?

JB: I liked it. I really liked it. The money was good. The money was really good for a young fellow. The money was good.

EP: I guess the money is the same no matter--? Is it age determined or experienced determined? Once you are an A welder?

JB: Yes, once you are an A welder.

EP: That the wage for the 40 years or whatever time you are there?

JB: Yes, as you graduate up the scale through the union contract or whatever it was.

EP: Then there were older guys in the place?

JB: Lots of older and younger guys. There were a lot of guys my age coming out of school. They wanted the young guys too to bring them up into the company. There were some older guys that had been there for a long time.

EP: In the early '80s, Port Ship was still operating at a good or high economic level?

JB: They were a good employer. I would guess there were 400 people employed there, which was probably a pretty good thing. I would think that there would be that many.

EP: Yes. And all of this of course is before the grain trade through Thunder Bay took a bit of it. You finished in 1982 or '83 or so?

JB: Yes, somewhere around there. I am not too sure exactly the dates. It's a little sketchy on me.

EP: I would have met you plant gating that Port Ship, but you probably were over at Can Car by that time?

JB: Probably yes, and I didn't work there too long either.

EP: By the time I was running in 1984.

JB: I didn't work at Can Car for too long.

EP: The winter work was brutal, I guess?

JB: Oh yes. Beyond brutal! It was cold. You had to wear steel toed boots, so that is a good thing for the cold, and you couldn't get enough clothes on you really. Sometimes in the side tanks, which were probably against company policy for sure, we would let the acetylene tank run in the corner while we would wire it up and turn it on and we would let it go. Just to heat it up.

EP: To generate some heat.

JB: Just to generate some heat. They would not give us any heat other than the light bulbs that were running through the side tanks. And you would sit, and you would weld.

EP: Yes.

JB: And you made sure that you were dressed really warm.

EP: Was there any recognition of the difficulty of doing the jobs in those kinds of conditions?

JB: No. You got paid. [Laughing]

EP: The company didn't--?

JB: No, not really. I think that the recognition that some welders got was if the welding supervisors saw that you were a go-getter, you know, and didn't take breaks and all those things, yes, you would get the better jobs. [Laughs] That is recognition I guess.

EP: Well, I wasn't thinking of recognition in terms of what you got, but in terms of whether the company realized, I guess, is what I mean, what the circumstances were and could do anything? Of course, I guess you couldn't heat a ballast tanks in the wintertime. You were out of the wind?

JB: Yes, you were out of the wind, but down in the bulk heads underneath the boat, the bowels of the ship, the wind would howl down the drydock as you come down and it would come in.

EP: Yes.

JB: You were out of the wind a bit. You are beside the lake, right at the lake in the cold. There wasn't a much colder place than that! And you are in steel!

EP: Right. Steel transmits all the heat out.

JB: Not very forgiving, no.

EP: And shifts were eight hours?

JB: Yes. Eight-hour shifts.

EP: And coffee breaks?

JB: Yes, you had coffee breaks. We had a good lunchroom. A nice big warm lunchroom, and we would play crib during our breaks and talk.

EP: So you got to walk into the lunchroom from the ship and going back out?

JB: Yes, and then on your way to the ship, you would go to your spot where you are welding, and you go and get rods from the rod oven, and they would be warm for a while and sticking your rods and go [inaudible] because once they get cold they don't weld too well, they don't burn too well.

EP: Oh really?

JB: Yes. [Inaudible] of a rod oven in that it keeps them to a certain temperature. [Inaudible] or else the flux breaks off when you get them to the boat.

EP: And you would have this stimulant in the side pocket I suppose as far as cooling or warming the throat and so on? [Laughs]

JB: Yes.

EP: I suppose in those circumstances a certain amount of alcohol gets oxidized very quickly, I suppose, but probably not enough of it?

JB: Was it the right thing? No, it wasn't the right thing, but it was just something that happened.

EP: Would there have been an alternative? Could you have had electric suits that would have warmed you? There would have been an expense involved in that kind of equipment.

JB: Oh yes. We wore leather. We wore leather chaps. We wore leather pants and leather jackets. It was all leather. You were covered in leather from the top and whatever else you wore.

EP: The leather won't allow sparks.

JB: Yes. Lots of burns. And you would be welding an overhead, and it would go down sometimes, go down your neck, and it would go all the way down! So you had so many layers of clothes on and it would go down and you couldn't do anything about it. Because the time you got to it would cool. By the time you have your stuff off to get it, it's burned into your skin anyways. So you would have lots of burns. The worst ones would be the ones that go down into your boot. They would go into your boot and just stay in there and put up and rattle your leg around and look at it after, you know. Take care of it after, because you are in the cold, and you couldn't really take your boots off.

EP: With electric welding, the sparks are always spraying away and any opening is likely.

JB: And then the water comes and spurts off and throws the arc off and slags falling everywhere. It's in your hair and burning your hair. Yes, we always had a hard hat, but I don't know why they would still get in there.

EP: Well, if you are welding upwards at all up or at all it is going to be open isn't it to some extent and so on.

JB: Did I like it? Yes, I liked it. I do like to weld. I do still like to weld.

EP: But Can Car was an improvement in terms of conditions?

JB: Yes. Warmth for sure.

EP: And you were inside and all the welding's in the building?

JB: Yes, breaks. I didn't like it there though. I had to get out of there. I didn't like the indoor part of it.

EP: Oh really?

JB: Yes.

EP: Because of--?

JB: The smoke.

EP: The smoke. So the air. So they didn't have adequate ventilation for the employees?

JB: I think the smoke, and for me, not the freedom, too many supervisors around. Too many people watching over your shoulder with everything that you did and scrutinizing everything.

EP: Was it necessary?

JB: Was it necessary micromanagement? I don't think so. No. There was no trust in a person's job.

EP: How long did you work there?

JB: There I just worked almost one year there. This is interesting because what we were building there was the Sask Pool hopper cars.

EP: Oh really?

JB: Yes.

EP: So Bombardier built hopper cars as well?

JB: Yes, and they built the Sask Pool hopper cars. The ones that you see with the big wheat thing on them.

EP: Of course.

JB: Yes, we built those. I was right at the beginning of the line. The frame would come in with the wheels on it.

EP: It was called the undercarriage.

JB: Yes, and it was called the wrap up, and the sheets of steel would come in and be fitted into the bottom of the frame, and then this machine would roll them up and we would weld the bulkhead there.

EP: The end?

JB: Yes, the end.

EP: That was your job?

JB: Yes.

EP: And of course, it was an assembly line, and the cars moved, and so your job was always one more bulkhead?

JB: Yes, and it would continue on down the line. We would do a 15-foot vertical weld all continuous nonstop because you couldn't have it stopped. They didn't want it stopped because of the porosity, and they wanted it all continuous.

EP: Right.

JB: I still see those cars today.

EP: Sure. You built them well!

JB: I guess the company did well. Yes.

EP: Well, we won't pursue the matter of wasting money on superfluous management, which you suggested. Well, that is another aspect of the grain trade quite clearly. Do you know how long they built those cars or how many they built?

JB: I believe they made it into one year. I am assuming though. I believe it was for only one year they did those, and they moved onto something else.

EP: This is a new feature. We have interviewed various people, and I don't think that building these hopper cars in Thunder Bay was mentioned by anyone else. In fact, we now have reasons to talk to people at Can Car, too, I guess that worked in the early '80s. I was aware that hopper cars had been built by Nova Scotia or whatever it was called the successors to Doscoe many years ago I think built some. Sydney Steel I guess would be the company that did it. I think they had contracts in the '70s to do that. I think others were built probably in Hamilton if I remember correctly.

JB: I am not sure. How about Trenton?

EP: Yes, Trenton would be another car works that would have been used. So they got a contract?

JB: Yes. I remember Trenton did the entire undercarriage, all the wheels and forging all that and that would all come down here, and we would do the wrap up here.

EP: Oh, I see. You were doing the superstructure if you will. The grain holding part of it?

JB: If you look at the cars there is not much to the cars really other than the under carriage.

EP: No.

JB: They fill them in and fill them up to the top and empty them on the bottom with the shoot.

EP: In fact, the undercarriage would have the emptying equipment and on the chutes and so on and so on?

JB: Right.

EP: That was already all there. You were getting a chassis, in effect, in putting the car body on the top to use the cars?

JB: Yes. Then they would go down the line, and they paint in there too.

EP: Sure. Including the Sask Pool?

JB: Including the Sask Pool with the nice green on there, yes.

EP: Well, another aspect.

JB: Right.

EP: Was there a social life to things at Port Ship, I suppose?

JB: Yes. A huge social life. Everybody got along pretty good, all the welders would stick together. Social life comes involved, and we would do the bar together all the time. We would party together, and some of us lived together for a long time. Then after

shipyards, we went on to construction careers too most of us, and we would see each other from time to time in construction at different places and different towns like Dryden and wherever.

EP: Right. As far as unions were concerned, there you were members of the Steelworkers Union, and everyone in the plant was a steelworker, I guess, whether they were labourers--?

JB: Yes.

EP: Everyone. So that was one of the ways of maintaining job classifications, I suppose?

JB: Yes. It was a tight unit. It was strong. It was a pretty strong union.

EP: Yes. Do you remember union meetings?

JB: Oh yes, at the Labour Centre. Absolutely.

EP: Any contract negotiations during the time you were there?

JB: I don't recall that at all. You know I was young. Did I care about that stuff? No, not really care about that stuff. No, not really.

EP: You were grateful other people were, I suppose?

JB: Was I then? No, I really didn't think of that. I knew I got paid and did a job. I got paid right. Did I get involved in the union stuff? Not really.

EP: Did you ever have a grievance to pursue?

JB: That is interesting.

EP: Had you touched with the steward for example, I suppose?

JB: Have I ever talked to Mr. Chauvin? I know Tom. I remember him. He probably would not remember me. I don't recall having anything to grieve about.

EP: Everything went well with management?

JB: I tried to do my job the best I could and stayed out of the way the best I could.

EP: Are you suggesting that Port Ship had an appropriate level of supervision in terms of the men watching the welds and so on and so forth?

JB: At Port Ship I would probably say no to that. Not enough yes. There were not enough of them. And the ones that they had, were they qualified to do the job? I don't know. It is similar to hockey players. You are either a hockey player or you are a coach. You don't make good hockey players as coaches. You make good welders, foremen. Do you? No. You keep them as welders.

EP: Yes. I dare say.

JB: If you can't weld very well you put them in a position of a supervisor. [Laughs]

EP: A supervisor? [Laughs]

JB: That happens. I've seen that happen quite often.

EP: The Peter Principle, promoted to your level of incompetence. [Laughing] But the highest level it was incompetence system. Once you are not able to do the job, you can't get promoted any higher than that.

JB: Yes. I guess so. Why would you take a really good welder off a job that you are getting production off of?

EP: Was there an understanding amongst you of some really cracker jack welders in your crew?

JB: Yes. You always knew the ones that were better welders than other ones. And you always knew the ones who were, well, I don't know what technical words we could use for it, but brown nosers. That is not a very good word, but it is a common one.

EP: It is a common one.

JB: So we always had those. Were those cast out by the rest? Yes.

EP: So ostracized?

JB: Yes. We would not want to associate with that.

EP: No.

JB: Because you could not trust people like that in a union mentality you could not trust that no way.

EP: So were there guys who were sort of pushed out of the workplace altogether?

JB: I am not sure about that. But there was a definite line between the union and the company there. A definite line. It was drawn in the sand. Once you crossed that line to the other side, it didn't matter what you were. Didn't matter who you were.

EP: Did the management at Port Ship include men who had been on the line or been worked as welders before?

JB: Did they promote them do you mean? Yes, they promoted them and once they crossed that line--.

EP: Yes of course. Well, they are management after that.

JB: Yes. And that's union mentality.

EP: The union-management relationship, what was your sense of that while you were there?

JB: I never saw a contract come apart. I don't think there were any problems there. There was no strike or anything there that I can recall. There were not too many disputes of anything. It was a job that, because of the lack of supervision, assistant foremen not being around, and the yard is so vast that a person was set by themselves to do the job totally 100 percent of the time. No. So in saying that was there reason to complain about your job? Probably not. I mean if some of the foremen were on your butt, well, you just didn't do the job to what they wanted you to do, then it was left to them the company would come down on them. And how is one guy going to watch over 50 welders? It was a tough job.

EP: Sure. But I am sensing, inferring from what you are saying, that there had to be a fair amount of trust in the employees to do a good job?

JB: Absolutely.

EP: And that the workers responded accordingly. They did a good job generally speaking.

JB: Did or did not. Either, either. It depended on, I guess, work ethics and if the foreman was a good person or not or the assistant foreman was not than the jobs that you got.

EP: You did not have a foreman breathing down your neck when you were busy welding especially at night I suppose?

JB: You are freezing, and a person is yelling and screaming at you because you are not doing your job fast enough or efficiently enough, well what would you do? I mean human beings are human beings right. They only take so much from a person like that. I mean the work conditions were brutal, they were brutal.

EP: Sure.

JB: That would never happen in this day and era. I can't believe that it would.

EP: Is it even as recently as 30 years, or to turn it around, you are saying literally that you don't think that they could function?

JB: No, I don't think they could function that way with the way that health and safety is nowadays.

EP: Yes.

JB: The field that I work in now with health and safety they can almost shut a company down because they are not following certain standards. The standards that the shipyards had 30 years ago, no, they were not humane standards. Not at all.

EP: What large places did you work after Bombardier?

JB: After Bombardier?

EP: Which was still Can Car at the time?

JB: Yes, it was Can Car.

EP: Can Car.

JB: After that I worked construction.

EP: Yes.

JB: There is Link Steel, Dominion Steel, and Coastal Steel. I was working as an iron worker.

EP: Right.

JB: A welder.

EP: Did they have a different union?

JB: Yes, a different union.

EP: Do iron workers include welders?

JB: Yes. So I did a lot of buildings around town. Some bridges and then out of town and different places. Shutdowns, mills and lot of mills, [inaudible] jobs.

EP: Paper mill and sawmills?

JB: Yes. I went to work at a few shutdowns here and in Terrace Bay and Dryden.

EP: Another subject could work for this tape, I suppose?

JB: Yes. That was interesting work.

EP: The work could be seasonally brutal as well, I guess. You did work winters and in the wintertime, I guess, at some of them?

JB: In the shipyards? In the middle of the winter. I was up in—and I am sure you are aware of it—in Minaki.

EP: In Quebec?

JB: No, in Minaki.

EP: Oh yes, beyond Kenora? Maniwaki was the name

JB: You have probably been to that establishment in Minaki?

EP: I don't think I ever have been. Most of it has burned down I gather?

JB: Is it now?

EP: Unfortunately, the launch is gone.

JB: We were up there, and I was with Coastal Steel that had the contract, and they were putting up condo units. They were putting up units for the workers for the service staff, waitress staff and all that. It was like a small hotel for them to work erecting the steel up there. And we would stay in one of the lodges there. It was quite the place. It was beautiful. They had a theater in there and a golf course. It was right on the Winnipeg River. But that was in the middle of winter and was it cold. It was cold there and we were erecting steel there and up on the steel in freezing cold weather. We were going inside, and I remember me and this one older fellow and I don't know why but we stuck it out for a while. I remember pouring methyl hydrate down an air hose trying to keep the air hose going so the air gun would go because it would freeze up if you couldn't tighten the bolts up on the steel without the air. So the air would freeze up and you would pour methyl hydrate down the lines. We stuck it out though. [Laughs]

EP: There was a time a hundred years ago and more, I don't know how much less, when work largely stopped in the wintertime because of the brutality of it. The Montreal shipyard or port for example would largely shut down. The big warehouses in Winnipeg I think were built in part in order to get stuff to the Prairies and all of course the trains would still be running I guess aside from blizzards stopping them.

JB: Well, you know, it is interesting you say that because I think there are two factors there that I can see. One is the human factor that things in your hands, those things don't work well in those extreme temperatures. But the other thing is it cost effective for a company to be continually replacing things that break in the cold? Because some things are not supposed to be run in those cold temperatures. So when things keep breaking because of the cold, it doesn't pay off, I don't think.

EP: No.

JB: Especially air lines and all kinds of things bust.

EP: I wonder if the establishment of Unemployment Insurance about 1940 might have been a factor involved because before that I guess layoffs were layoffs. But once the system is established, and of course it was built up during full employment war years, then in a sense the state has a stake. Certainly, the Unemployment Insurance Commission taken in premiums has a stake in people working year-round if possible. I wonder if that impacted work patterns so that winter work became more common.

JB: Well, I am not sure that it was not. But I can tell you this is that I am very grateful for that.

EP: Unemployment Insurance?

JB: Oh, absolutely. With Unemployment Insurance in those days, I don't know what would have happened.

EP: It took you going through to the summertime.

JB: Well sure. It paid my rent wherever I was living you needed some income.

EP: Sure.

JB: And back then they didn't really bother you to look for a job or nothing. You worked so many weeks and you got your unemployment. You know it's seasonal work. You were grateful for that. Oh, yes, absolutely.

EP: In the '60s, winter works projects began to be developed to maintain employment in cities. So that would certainly be another factor and that is the federal government without doubt, those winter work projects.

JB: That is how I went through college, through the unemployment insurance program. The winter work project was one of them. They sent you to school and paid you while you were going to school.

EP: I see. How long were you at Confederation College?

JB: Two years.

EP: Two years learning welding?

JB: Well, it was a little bit upgrading and then what happened was that I took a radio and television technician course. I don't like math. [Laughs] Angus Maclean.

EP: The conservative minister?

JB: No, no, a different person altogether. He was a teacher the college.

EP: Oh, I see. This is not a politician.

JB: He came to me, and he said, "This is not working for you." I said, "Okay," and I transferred over to welding and that is where I took off.

EP: So a limited amount of academic study required being a welder?

JB: Right. There was no math and figuring out, some blueprints writing and stuff like that. Most of it was just hands on work.

EP: No schematics in this or not much?

JB: No schematics, no. Blueprint reading but no schematics.

EP: Sure.

JB: Learning about the properties of steels and things like that. But there was no configuring out of math. That wasn't my forte.

EP: How many different kinds of metals did you learn to weld? Or how many kinds of metals can be welded successfully?

JB: All metal, steels for sure. I can braze.

EP: Braze meaning--?

JB: Well, that is a torch. But they are even getting out of that with a brazing rod. Putting fenders and things like that on cars.

EP: Of course, the electric and the acetylene, and you were learning both?

JB: Yes, I can do both, yes. I am a good solderer. I can solder copper well. I have no problem with that. I did some pipe, but I didn't get into the big pipes like chromoly and tungsten, the different alloys, as much.

EP: Yes.

OM: What makes a good welder as opposed to an average welder?

JB: Steady hand and very good eyesight. As I have noticed, my eyesight has gone to worse. I don't seal the puddle. They call it the puddle as well. So that puddle is very important. It is like the paint. I relate it to the same as the paint to the brush. If you were a good painter, you would probably be a really good welder. A steady hand. Your hand from here to the end of the rod, and the rod is here, so it is the tip of that rod is what you are looking at. So if the rod is 16 inches long from your hand to there, that steadiness has to go from there to there. And if it is shaky, it is not a good weld.

EP: If you break the bead?

JB: If you break the bead, you are in trouble. It is going to look like heck and plus it will cause impurities in the weld.

EP: Sure.

JB: Impurities in the weld that is not a good weld.

EP: It is where the porosity come in?

JB: Right.

EP: So I attempted just a little bit on the farm with my father. It is so easy to break the connection. If your hand isn't steady but when you--. What is the term?

JB: Strike the arc.

EP: When you strike the arc and then keep the hands steady so that the rod is melting into the crack.

JB: Right. Back in those days, the welding helmet that you had, they are not like the welding helmets now. So you put your rod at the two pieces of steel that you want to weld together, and then you put your helmet down and strike the arc. Because you couldn't strike the arc before you put your helmet down then you would get a flash. But the helmets they have now, you could put your helmet down as soon as you strike the arc it goes from darkness, and it changes the lens inside. It is an automatic helmet.

Yes, it is night and day. You don't have that problem of starting the arc because it was a little tricky. That is an interesting question though. I would say it was the steady hands. The ability is to manoeuvre in tight positions and things like that. Because they would stick you in some positions--. I remember being in one position where one spots on one of the boats that you couldn't put your helmet in there. You couldn't get your helmet into the spot. You could just barely get your arm in there and the rod in there, and so they had a helmet that was made of all leather with a lens in it. So you could get your head in there but you just couldn't get the helmet in. So you had to stick your head in there and the rod in there and weld them in that box. It was very tricky I remember that.

EP: I hope it wasn't a very large area that you had to weld or a long bead?

JB: It wasn't. It was a vertical in there. I remember welding in there.

EP: You can't weld upside down I guess or overhead?

JB: Overhead yes.

EP: You can?

JB: Oh yes. That is the hardest position.

EP: Well, I would imagine.

JB: That is the hardest position to weld in, and then there are two types of welds overhead. They call it the Philip weld, which is in the angle.

EP: So it is a right angle, and you are coming in at the corner?

JB: Yes, you are coming into the corner angle. And then the other one is the butt weld, right. Two pieces side together, and we weld them there, which this one is the harder one.

EP: Would be the harder one, I think?

JB: Yes, it is the harder one.

EP: If you're actually trying to form a bead overhead to join two pieces of steel, that has got to be very difficult?

JB: The Philip weld is a little easier because you have to usually rest your arm and your body against this wall, right. Where if it is two butts together, there is not much to rest against. You know your arm is like this. So those, in that instance, your arms are exhausted. Your neck is killing you.

EP: Yes. Because you would not be lying on anything either I suppose, or there was no scaffolding, I suppose?

JB: Sometimes you could do that, but you get burnt a little bit.

EP: Yes.

JB: But most of the time it was straight overhead.

EP: Because the sparks were flying in every direction and the only shield is the hand, and you would have a good glove on that hand? You would have to have a glove on that hand.

JB: It's all leather. You are all dressed in all leather.

EP: Leather would sort of shear off the sparks.

JB: It would burn for a little bit. You would buy your leathers from one of the shops in town. I don't remember what shop that was. Maybe Canada Welding. I am not sure of the place, but we would buy them there.

EP: A lot of leathers ended up off animals and onto welders I am sure over the time.

JB: Yes, and then the leather only takes so much after it gets burnt too much and you have to get new ones.

EP: Yes. Were you ever tempted by pipeline work? Or was that even a possibility?

JB: No. But I don't know if it would have been. It might have been, but you know I got out of the construction trade because I wanted to have kids, and I am glad I did.

EP: Yes.

JB: I seen my kids grow up, and my friends that went on with construction, they have oodles of money, but I can imagine what their lives are like.

EP: You went to construction or off construction?

JB: I took off construction. I went off construction.

EP: So what did you did after that then?

JB: I drive a truck for a living now.

EP: I see.

JB: In town, locally.

EP: Sure

JB: For a company in town.

EP: So how long have you been truck driving?

JB: For 26 years now.

EP: Twenty-six.

JB: I am going to retire in three years.

EP: In 1986?

JB: Yes, in 1986.

EE: So you had a welding career of about six or seven years?

JB: Seven years, yes. I did a lot in there.

EP: Yes, obviously.

JB: I am going to retire in 3 years and then I am going to do something else. I build aluminum gates with rod iron.

EP: Oh yes. So that is the kind of construction work again that is in your back yard or whatever.

JB: You see the twist in there in the gate there, the metal gate. I have a machine that twists it. It is called cold twisted.

EP: Oh, I see.

JB: You can twist a square piece of metal stock in half almost.

EP: So you are a consumer of construction, of structural, or what do you call it?

JB: Well, I have a creative mind.

EP: What do you call it? Ornamental steel?

JB: Ornamental steel. With my creative mind I like to do some things like that.

EP: So then the whole arrangement--?

JB: Oh no, that is bought. I made just the gate work. But you could do all that stuff.

EP: You could if you chose to?

JB: Yes.

EP: I suppose in China or wherever it comes in cheaper--.

JB: Yes.

EP: You could build it yourself. Well among the questions that were approved by the committee once upon a time, what would you like people to know about the work that you did primarily, I guess, at Port Ship, those three or so years, I guess, that you were there?

JB: Well, what would you like to know? I would like people to know the importance of that industry and the other industries that are around that the local consumer takes for granted when they go to buy their clothing, when they go to buy their food, and things like that. A lot of people believe that it materialized on the shelves automatically out of thin air.

EP: Yes.

JB: And they don't see the process behind the other stuff. They don't see that those boats are coming across are full of grain to feed the world. They feed the world.

EP: Yes.

JB: Basically, it all goes right back to the farmer doesn't it.

EP: Of course.

JB: Straight to the farmer.

EP: Nature growing the grain and so on.

JB: Yes.

EP: Right.

JB: Nobody thanks the farmer.

EP: No. So you were conscious of your place.

JB: Now I am, but back then, no, I wasn't. No way. [Laughs]

EP: So you would like people to appreciate the fact that a great trade goes on through this port is what you are saying.

JB: Right. This town was built on that. My grandfather helped build some of those elevators. My mom told me that.

EP: I see.

JB: That trestle that used to go right across Memorial Avenue. He helped build that.

EP: The Steep Rock, or iron ore dock and so on.

JB: Yes.

EP: Was he an ironworker?

JB: I don't know what he was classified as, maybe just a labourer.

EP: Maybe it wasn't unionized.

JB: Yes, back then you know a riveter? A riveter was the initial welder wasn't he?

EP: Yes. You didn't deal with any ships that were riveted, I guess?

JB: No, there were always rivets on them, but no. In the disassembling of the boats of Western Metals. There were a lot of rivets there.

EP: We have not talked about taking them apart. Thanks for reminding me. We should do it. What is involved in taking a ship apart?

JB: Gash and slash. They just slash the poop out the boats with big torches. We used to use four-foot torches, and they were run on propane because propane is cheaper than an acetylene. It is not as hot as a fuel, but it did the job well. So you had a four-foot torch and they just cut chunks out of the boats and you just keep whittling it down.

EP: And you didn't worry about taking pieces of steel out of the welds? In fact, I guess you would avoid the torch on the welds because it would be more difficult?

JB: On welds? No, it doesn't matter. It would just go right through.

EP: I see.

JB: It just cuts right through. You cut through everything. A lot of lead-based paint. It was all lead-based paint. All of it and so when you are burning that absolutely.

EP: Were you wearing facemasks or protection there?

JB: No, that was all outside work.

EP: Yes, it was.

JB: All outside work.

EP: Not much of a breeze I suppose?

JB: You breathe a lot of that in, yes. And then they would take chunks of it to the compactor and cut it all up and cube it.

EP: Yes.

JB: Mr. Shaffer with his big cigar in his mouth, he'd sell it off there. He was a character. [Laughs]

EP: Was he now?

JB: Oh yes, him was.

EP: What was his first name?

JB: I think it was Paul Senior.

OM: Was it Sam?

JB: I don't know.

EP: That it there--.

JB: That is exactly what it was, yes, Sam. That place has gone through hands a few times. He had a thriving business for sure.

EP: You were primarily involved in removing the structure. When you get down to the engine, what happened to the engine room?

JB: I don't know. He would salvage that. He was a salvager, so he would split everything apart right. You know all your coppers and brasses and he would split it all up.

EP: Sure. For recycling.

JB: Different prices for different metals. I collect copper myself. I mean copper is \$3 a pound right now.

EP: Right. Worth five maybe.

JB: Why not? At least it is money. You take a battery and now it costs maybe \$10 for a battery. That is easy work.

EP: Yes.

JB: It is. So that is what he would do. He knew all the prices of everything. He was a money maker for sure.

EP: How many ships were you involved in taking apart?

JB: Just the one that year, just the one I did. It was an all-winter job.

EP: Do you remember which ship is?

JB: No. Maybe an Algoma. Maybe *Algosteel*. I am not positive which one it was.

EP: Out of Sault Ste. Marie.

JB: We were taking it apart not at the yard. He had it docked over on the side closer to Abitibi, the old Abitibi out that way. Where the new Bowater mill is. Had a dock along side there, and he was taking it apart there, and the crane would pull it apart pieces off onto the ground, and we would cut it up into sections.

EP: Oh, so that is where you were working.

JB: At that time, and then I did also work at the yard.

EP: So not very far from Can Car, am I right?

JB: Yes.

EP: That is where the old yard is.

JB: Yes, I worked there too.

EP: Right.

JB: I worked at both places yes. Cutting steel there.

EP: I think the most famous place for ship disassembling is in India somewhere.

JB: Is that where they do it?

EP: I have seen pictures of the ships that I guess have just been run ashore, and so there it stands out of the water, and they start pulling them apart.

JB: Recycling steel and send it off and melt it down and take all the impurities out.

EP: Yes. It is dangerous work as well. The asbestos inside and so on and so forth.

JB: Yes.

EP: Well, you have mentioned lead-based paint.

JB: It is worse than the manufacturing for sure.

EP: Yes.

JB: I am pretty sure it is. But I mean it was part of the trade.

EP: What might interest or surprise people most about the work that you did as a welder?

JB: I would say the size of the scale of those boats.

EP: Yes.

JB: They don't see that, but when you are up close like that, you see all that. The holding tanks that held the grain if you were to stand up on top of one of those and look down inside one, they are just huge. They are so massive, and that is where all the grain is, and then to see that filled with grain and how much there is in there. I think the size of things like that. To be able to walk underneath one of those and not be crushed was pretty cool.

EP: Under the ship at drydock?

JB: Right under the ship, you could walk from one end to another.

EP: Yes.

JB: Not too many people would be ever to do something like that or done that.

EP: The joy of being a Member of Parliament is that you end up in a lot of places most people aren't, and so I have been on the drydock, and I can't be absolutely certain if there was a ship in there. I certainly well remember all of the timbers and so on and so forth. So the question is whether there was a ship there that is the question. In my mind I'm not certain.

[Person]: There were never fitted for salties. Ocean goers.

EP: Yes.

JB: They weren't flat bottom. The salties have a keel.

EP: Right.

JB: So they were not fitted for that.

EP: I guess the canallers are for flat partly because you want to get the maximum capacity to go through.

JB: Absolutely, absolutely.

EP: With a sill at 23 or 26 feet or whatever it is.

JB: Yes, whatever it is depending on the time.

EP: And the canal--.

JB: Depending on the weather, and it depends on everything, I guess, and how much water they put in and the ballasts.

EP: Sure.

JB: Yes.

EP: And how far down they want to push it.

JB: Yes.

EP: What are you most proud of in the work that you did?

JB: I probably would say it was the construction of the *John B. Aird*. It was a big thing for us back then. I remember that.

EP: We moved to town in 1978, so I got into town just about the time you were going into Confederation College I guess.

JB: Yes, probably, I guess.

EP: On this program and so on.

JB: I would think that they would have a welding career at the shipyards yes. It was probably that for sure.

EP: Yes sure.

JB: Interesting. You know that is funny when you are that age, did I really think of that?

EP: You were doing your job and getting your pay!

JB: I was getting my pay. When I look back now, and I think, yes.

EP: Were you single through all that period, if I may I ask?

JB: Yes.

EP: Family came later?

JB: I didn't get married until I was almost 26 or something like that—a little later in life.

EP: Yes. Well, you know that your work contributed to Canada's success as a grain trader.

JB: Oh, that is nice to know. [Laughs]

EP: Since you referred to that earlier I thought I would put the words out of your mouth.

JB: It is nice to know that I did something.

EP: Changes came to the industry. Did you experience changes at the time?

JB: At the shipyards?

EP: Yes. Or at Can Car?

JB: No, no.

EP: Or were they during the years you were at Can Car?

JB: At Can Car they were always changing. The Can Car was a more progressive company. A bigger company and they were always upgrading things.

EP: Port Ship was very traditional, I would suppose?

JB: Oh, very traditional. You could see the downslide of that company. There was no money going back into it.

EP: One of the things that happened in the '80 was the workplace health, and what was it? The Workplace Health and--.

JB: Works course.

EP: Yeah.

JB: I don't know what it was.

EP: I am just trying to put the words to it. The Workplace Health and--.

JB: Insurance. I think it was Insurance.

EP: Is it Insurance or Safety?

JB: I should know that.

EP: WHMIS. Did you experience that or was that after?

JB: Back then, no, there was nothing then.

EP: It came in the mid '80s, I am quite sure.

JB: It goes back that far?

EP: Yes. I remember certainly by 1990 guys were talking about WHMIS courses and getting designation of hazard materials. Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System. That is what it is. It is not health but the word hazardous materials.

JB: It probably would have crippled that company.

EP: Well, it would be a matter of designating all of the materials.

JB: They would either keep up with that, or they would fold. Whether they had enough money to back it, I don't think they did. A lot of the times there were talks of barely keeping the place open.

EP: Port Ship was certainly struggling, as other shipyards would be in time. One of the great privileges of being a critic for ship building in the NDP Caucus '85 or so through 1988 was that I visited a number of shipyards across the country from Vancouver to Halifax. Actually the stories I would love to tell but not on the tape, interesting things I saw. But I visited Collingwood and Port Weller as well as this one of course. Port Weller is in business and Collingwood is now a resort community or a retirement place and Port Ship is a lot less than it was.

JB: Yes.

EP: So there have been great changes afterwards.

JB: Where are all the lakers being built now?

EP: Well, there are so few.

JB: There are, eh?

EP: So much fewer required given what happened with the Western Grain Transportation Act, which came after your time as well, and other changes which shifted the grain movement to the West Coast very largely and so on, and so there is more rail that is involved than the lake traffic.

JB: Yes.

EP: I suppose it would be interesting to have a list of the lakers registered in 1984 and look at that list to see how many of the ships were still in service and what happened to those that aren't.

JB: Yes. That would be really interesting to see.

EP: Some of them like CSL, Miseners.

JB: Paterson is totally out.

EP: Paterson is gone.

JB: Yes.

EP: One of the people we interviewed was Robert Paterson who was the last president of Paterson Steamships.

JB: He is totally out of that now.

EP: Any other challenges on the job?

JB: At that job? Challenges at that job.

EP: That you have not mentioned?

JB: No, I can't see of any other.

EP: You have mentioned a fair number. Or challenges to the grain industry now that all of that came to you indirectly. Building the hopper cars at Can Car.

JB: That is something, eh? How I went from one to the next. I didn't even think of that then.

EP: Water transport to land transport.

JB: Yes. But did I think of that at the time? No, I didn't think of that at the time, but it is pretty interesting how that came about.

EP: Yes.

JB: That is how important the grain industry was to this town.

EP: Yes. But you were building those hopper cars about 1983.

JB: Yes, so around 1984 or 1983.

EP: In 1984 when in fact the Crow Rate, Crow's Nest Pass Agreement or whatever, that took by the early '80s was under serious consideration. There is a book written by a participant from the federal government about how they worked to end the Crow basically and replace it with Western Grain Transportation Act, and so hoppers cars were still being built in Thunder Bay at a time when that system, on which the federal government was financing construction of cars to make it easier for the railway companies to operate within the Crow Rate regime. So there were changes and challenges taking place sort of at a higher level, and you were working at this level building the hopper cars.

JB: Yes.

EP: I wonder who the Minister of Transportation was at the time. Jean-Luc Pepin was the Quebec-based minister who was in charge of this attempt to change the system. The book is very interesting in his endeavors.

JB: And Bombardier was French owned company, right?

EP: Bombardier certainly is Quebec based.

JB: That is interesting!

EP: Can Car out of Hawker Siddeley is probably Montreal based as well for that matter.

JB: I don't remember if it was called Can Car or it was called Hawker Siddeley when I worked there.

EP: Can Car would be the oldest title with Hawker Siddeley controlling Can Car for a time and eventually they turned it over, sold it to Bombardier. But in between of course is that Urban Transportation Development Corporation. Which government did it come out of? Was it the Davis Government in the early 1980's?

OM: That would be Conservative.

EP: That would not be provincially Conservative. So there were changes and challenges taking place around and about, but you did your job as a good welder. The most vivid memories about the job?

JB: I think for me, the learning part of the job. The different technologies that I got to learn on the job at the shipyards. I enjoyed the welding steel things together, but when I got to being put on different special jobs like submerged arc jobs and different jobs like in the engine room and things like that, I got interested in that stuff, and I liked to watch that. I was telling you about the prop and those things. I enjoyed that part of the job.

EP: Novelty. I suppose it was something new.

JB: Those were fascinating jobs and things like that. The overhead cranes running on two tracks that are 75 feet tall. That is the backbone of the whole shipyard. It's the backbone. It does everything.

EP: The equipment that makes it possible to move things around and so on and so forth.

JB: Absolutely. Those are vivid memories of me watching that guy walk up there, and he had an important job. He ran that whole yard.

EP: You were never involved with an engine replacement or moving or anything of that sort?

JB: No.

EP: Was the engine room under superstructures?

JB: Yes, the engine room was right in the back, underneath all the accommodations, underneath the kitchen and everything was right in the bottom, right in the hull of the boat.

EP: So you are not going to lift that up straight, unless you remove all that stuff.

JB: No.

EP: Once the engine is in there it is really there.

JB: Pretty much, yes. They would have to take it apart piece by piece. But if you are working on the shaft and the prop it was all on the outside.

EP: That is true enough.

JB: And then the bow thrusters at the front they have the bow thrusters to turn the boat whichever way that wanted to turn it. That was interesting too.

EP: Learning about a ship when you first go into Port Ship and on a ship and so on would be very interesting.

JB: For some people I guess they just take those things for granted. They might say, "Oh there is a nice boat out there in the harbour."

EP: Thoughtless, almost thoughtless. Any thoughts about the most important events that happened at the workplace during your career?

JB: An important event for me would be that I wasn't there for that explosion. It could have been me.

EP: Did that happen around 1983 in January? Of course, it was in the news immediately about the accident at Port Ship.

JB: It could have been me or any one of my friends there. I look at it now, and it did not have to happen. It didn't have to. I don't know the circumstances, whatever they did to come to the conclusion.

EP: Your suspicion is that the workers themselves were responsible.

JB: My suspicion would be that. Whether that is reality I don't know.

EP: In a regime in which the company closed an eye to what was going on, I mean, in terms of substance abuse.

JB: It was very possible.

EP: There was not any testing for drugs or anything that took place at the time?

JB: Absolutely not. Most of the places now there is no testing for drugs. In the mining field, they are starting to do that now which they should. Rightly so. We are losing young men unnecessarily. Fathers are losing their sons and mothers are losing their sons because of things like that.

EP: Perhaps the oddest at first blush and not supposing at all when you begin thinking about it, as I understand it was when prohibition came about during the war years, the 1910s, the people that became quite supportive of it were union leaders who found that sober union members were much more clear headed and militant than they had been when they could drown their sorrows.

JB: Them and the suffragettes.

EP: The suffragettes come a little earlier, and there is of course a connection certainly in Canada between the women's temperance union.

JB: They were sick and tired of losing their men to alcohol and to the workplace.

EP: I was in Toronto a couple of weeks ago at the Delta Chelsea again, and the last time I was there, I realized the last time I was there that across the street on Gerard or rather on Yonge Street is the building of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.

JB: Is that right?

EP: It is still there and if you were ever in the Delta Chelsea look up to the east and you will see the name across the front and WCTU on the side of the building. I have not really taken the time to go over and look to see how it is being used but there it is half a block from Yonge on Gerard.

JB: So from that time that that all took place to this time in our day and life now, has it changed that much? I don't think so.

EP: What's the "it" that you are meaning, substance abuse?

JB: Substance abuse in the workplace with unionized and everything. Has it changed that much? Somewhat, but I don't know.

EP: The impression that we have had from some of the interviews that we have done is that there has been a significant reduction in, say, the elevators. Admittedly there are far fewer men in the elevators these days or people working and so on and so forth. Or am I wrong, Owen? You have listened to the interviews.

OM: I can't answer that, but I just know when I was working in the federal government, and it was cleaned up. What drinking there was on the job did not exist in the 1980s. As for the elevators, my father worked in the elevators. He was one of the few folks that didn't drink, and it was always kind of an unspoken reality that when you worked in an elevator or some other dreary spot that they drank to get through the day. But my sense is that the nature of the work population has changed here in Thunder Bay as well. Because as Ernie said there are fewer people in that industry and there is less drinking, just by the nature of the population. [Laughing]

EP: Not necessarily per capita.

OM: But I don't know.

JB: That would be the answer to that one.

OM: The same with the university professors for that matter, too, Ernie in the '60s.

EP: Well, they certainly smoked the way they don't now. Smoking has left a lessen mark.

OM: Yes, that is something I feel more comfortable commenting on. [Laughs]

EP: Do you feel it is important to preserve Thunder Bay's grain trade history?

JB: I think history is important in itself to preserve, not just the grain trade. I love history.

EP: Is this a love that has developed over time, or did you always feel that?

JB: I always felt that. It was one of the only things in high school that I took an interest to. I never finished high school.

EP: We lost ourselves a history professor here.

JB: Absolutely. Do I find it interesting? I would not be sitting here with you if I didn't. I wouldn't have taken me to that display you had there. And my wife was off doing something else. Of course, that's the type of person I am.

EP: Of course, that is where we met. We might have said that earlier. You and I met the summer of 2012 when the Friends of Grain Elevators, our partners with the Lakehead Social History Institute, mounted a display about the grain trade down at the Water Garden Mariners Hall we call that part of the building, and you came in to see, and I was standing by.

JB: That's correct, I found it quite interesting, and I started to look at some of the pictures of the people that were on that board, and I knew some of them.

EP: Others we had interviewed.

JB: I started to read some of their histories, and it was interesting, and you asked me to do that. I thought about it for a little bit, and I thought, "You know, why would I be doing that?" But then you just asked me that question about the history, and I think it is important for people to know about those things. I believe it is important, but whether they believe it or not I don't know.

EP: Let me know when you have a desire to learn and listen to these tapes, but those who want to learn will then have a much richer learning experience because of what you and others have contributed.

JB: Absolutely. I think that is important to know where you come from and how you got here.

EP: Are there any questions that you would have asked, if you could sit here on my side interviewing yourself?

JB: About the work that I did?

EP: In relation to the grain trade and the small and the larger questions that I might have asked?

JB: Not from the past. I wonder sometimes was everything done to protect the industry in Thunder Bay and in this area to preserve that industry, or was it just a sign of the things to come? The way that it has all taken place now. At one time this whole area was grain elevators. They were all over the place. So I don't know that.

EP: We have gone through two terrible declines anyway or some might cite others as well, but one is certainly in terms of the terminal elevators. There are far fewer and far less movement through the port and the other would be the forest industry, the

pulp and paper mills but that is of course quite a really different story, and we won't get into it at all, although I am becoming interested in that story as well these days.

The repeal of the sections of the legislation of the Wheat Board, the ending of the monopoly the Wheat Board has had on movement particularly of wheat off the Prairies is probably the change for 2012 that is of greatest interest. I was listening the other day to someone commenting from the Port Authority, I think, it seemed possible from what he was saying that the voluntarily operation of the Wheat Board now that farmers have had to sign contracts with the Wheat Board if they wanted to have the Wheat Board handle their grain. That they made be moving more grain through Thunder Bay now. That is a very interesting proposition that a voluntarily arrangement could bring more grain back through this port. I don't know whether we are certain of that yet but that would be the current change. The citizenry of course you know they watch things happen they can't affect them and so on. Whether the city of Thunder Bay can have much impact on the grain trade I guess is the kind of question that you are hinting at.

JB: Yes. I think that's my own speculation. I won't go there. That would be about all that I would ask. You asked most of the questions that you need to ask.

EP: I am glad that I did.

JB: You would want those memories out. You are right it does help.

EP: Owen did you have any other thoughts or questions?

OM: No. I enjoyed the interview immensely.

JB: So did I. Thank you for coming and all that. I am glad that I did it.

EP: I am glad you stopped by, and I am glad you said yes, and I am glad that you have done this. Thanks very much.

End of interview.