Narrator: Jean Killens (JK)

Company Affiliations: Ogilvie Flour Mills Ltd., Riverside Grain Products

Interview Date: N/D

Interviewer: Ernie Epp (EE)

Recorder: Owen Marks (OM)

Transcriber: Sarah Lorenowich

Summary: In this two-part interview, former process technician for Ogilive Flour Mills and later Riverside Grain Products Jean Killens discusses the period of her career related to Thunder Bay's grain industry. In the first part, Killens discusses her work as a laboratory technician in Ogilvie's Thunder Bay mill. She explains the mill's main process of separating starch and gluten from flour, the uses for starch and gluten in edible and industrial products, and her responsibility for sampling, testing, and assuring the consistent quality of the product. She describes the number of staff in the lab, safety equipment and procedures, and the major change to staffing when ownership changed to Riverside. In part two, she discusses her chemistry experiences before and after her work in the flour lab, and she expands on the ownership change from Ogilvie and ADM to Riverside. She shares vivid memories of processing incidents, training staff on safety, and staff social events. She recalls some of her other responsibilities in the lab, like her involvement on the safety committee, training staff on WHMIS protocols, and operating the effluent treatment plant. She recalls major changes in the lab, like the streamlining of the process, and safety and sanitation improvements. Other topics discusses include the destructive fire at the plant in the early 2000s, her pride in the quality of the operation, the laboratory office in the historic McLaurin Store, and interactions with the sister lab in Candiac, Quebec.

Keywords: Ogilvie Flour Mills Ltd.; Riverside Grain Products; Grain science; Industrial chemistry; Grain processing; Wheat flour; Starch; Gluten; Industrial starch; Lab equipment; Protein testing; Health & safety; Workplace sanitation; WHMIS; Downsizing; Safety training; Quality assurance; Archer Daniels Midland; Ogilvie Elevator—Thunder Bay

Audio Part One

Time, Speaker, Narrative
OM: We'll start.

EE: Well, it's great to be here this afternoon to do this interview. Let's start by giving your name, place and date of birth—again, of course, since you've done it for the record, put this is on the tape. Perhaps I can ask you for that first.

JK: I'm Verna Jean Killens. I commonly go by Jean. I was born December 20, 1947.

EE: Thank you very much. Since we're interested in the grain trade, I'll ask you if you could describe how you got involved in whatever part of the grain trade you were in.

JK: In 1989, I began to work for Ogilvie Mills Ltd. in Fort William. I was hired as a process technician.

EE: We'll get into what kind of work that involved. How long did you work for them?

JK: I worked for Ogilvie Mills Ltd. for seven and a half years. Two years after it closed, I went back to the same plant to work as the quality assurance manager. The name of the same plant was Riverside Grain Products.

EE: And how long did you work for them?

JK: A year. One year.

EE: Just a year. And was that the conclusion of your work in the grain trade?

JK: Yes, it was.

EE: Right. So, it's one plant, two owners. Well, we'll get into the particulars.

JK: So, it was 1989 to 1996, as Ogilvie Mills—or ADM Ogilvie.

EE: Right, the American company.

JK: When it reopened two years later, Riverside Grain Products really only ran for about another year and a half. I left before it closed.

EE: Was Riverside a local reopening?

JK: No, it wasn't. An American company named Southern Ventures bought the plant from ADM, Archer-Daniels-Midland.

EE: I see.

JK: They were from the southern US.

EE: So, it was actually the southern US that really deserved the name then of Southern Ventures. All right. What kind of work did you--. Did you do the same kind of work throughout those seven years? We'll leave the other for later.

JK: I progressed. I started as the process tech and then went onto be, I believe, the position was called shift technician. While I was in that position, I assumed other responsibilities—purchasing, looking after health and safety for the plant. While I was employed there, new government regulations required WHMIS training for all employees, and I became the trainer. I did inventories of all the chemicals.

EE: We might say workplace health--?

JK: Workplace health and safety became very important.

EE: And WHMIS was Workplace Health Materials System? Material's Information System? Hazardous Materials Information System is what WHMIS—we'll get that on the record just in case WHIMIS has been forgotten when someone is listening to this. Well, that's and interesting array of work. How large an operation was it? How many people worked there?

JK: When I first started there were 115 approximately. And when it closed, I believe there were only--. When Ogilvie Mills was shut down there were about 80 employees.

EE: Now most of those would have been involved in the actual handling. Grain moved through the facility, did it? Like other elevators? Or was it quite different from that?

JK: It was an industrial grain producer. We bought flour from a mill in Medicine Hat, I believe, and we treated it to extract the gluten—or to separate it into gluten and starch basically, although bran was also separated out.

EE: So, when people purchase gluten-free products, those would be based or would incorporate the kind of material that would come out of this sort of mill? In terms of the gluten having been removed from the flour, is that right?

JK: Well, gluten is a very important component to the flour. When it's removed, what you have left is bran and starch.

[0:05:12]

EE: I see. And starch of course has its own market.

JK: There's not very much that you can bake with starch alone. When people talk about gluten-free products, they're talking about rice and other materials that don't have the gluten, the wheatgerm.

EE: Not wheat at all. So, this was wheat flour, then, being processed in this way, was it?

JK: Yeah, it was.

EE: Okay. Question, Owen?

OM: What's gluten used for once it's processed like that?

JK: Oh, it's used for all kinds of foods. Shaw's Bakery was one of our customers. They bought gluten from us for their hot dogs, for the buns. Gluten it's a protein, and it's what gives breads its elasticity.

EE: Its bounce. So, when those hamburger buns are sort of plump and almost bouncy, that's because there's extra gluten in there?

JK: Yeah. But it's also used for crackers, cereals, all kinds of food products. At one time, we were looking into selling some to Asia to be used as a vegetarian sausage. [Laughs]

EE: Yeah, what else would go in there? Glutens. Spice it up.

JK: Well, there would be a number of other ingredients, of course, but the gluten would give it it's shape.

EE: Well, that's a very good question. There's no waste product that is left after it's been removed from the flour. Did the bran have a market as well?

JK: Yes, and we made basically two different streams of starch. There was an A starch and a B starch. The A starch was the desirable starch, and some of it was used to make food products, again. It's a component of icing sugar.

EE: Oh, is it? And one can buy starch, I think.

JK: We were making starches to make the glaze on cruellers. You know those donuts with the sugary glaze? Pop Tarts.

EE: All kinds of good stuff here.

JK: When I worked for Riverside Grain Products, one of my biggest projects was to devise tests for and help develop a starch that would be used for an M&M candy.

EE: Really? I see.

JK: You know the sugary coating? To keep the chocolate from melting.

EE: Starch was a significant component of that coating?

JK: Yeah. And then, on the other side of starch production, we were treating starches to be used for various industrial purposes. For coatings in paper, for instance. That was the biggest one. And for adhesives.

EE: So, when anyone has a coated paper, starch is commonly or generally the significant component of that?

JK: Generally. Yeah.

EE: Did that go to mills right here? Or were we coating paper--. Or Dryden?

JK: Here in Thunder Bay, in the region, and in the States.

EE: I see. So, you were working in a laboratory setting, I suppose then, monitoring the process. Can you describe what the process actually involved? The equipment involved and so on. Where all the guys worked, I suppose. Was it mostly a male workforce out there?

JK: Yes. Well, are you familiar with the site? There was a fire in about 1999.

EE: I'm vaguely aware of that, but I don't really know the site. Well, I know where it is.

JK: Well, it's on the banks of the Kaministiquia River near the Jackknife bridges. The plant and the warehouse burned down, but still standing are four silos. So, we receive this flour by railcar, and it was transferred to the silos.

EE: It came in in bulk?

JK: Yeah, by railcar.

EE: Flour, powdery stuff, in the whole car? It wasn't in bags or anything, just came in in bulk?

JK: Yeah. Came in bulk. My memory is really vague about the actual production now because I didn't spend as much time involved with that. But anyways, the flour was sifted to remove debris and there was a huge piece of equipment that--. It had a name, something to the effect of a dough-maker. The flour would go into this vessel, and it would be blended. There were paddles inside that would turn the flour around and around. Water and salt would be added to it. You'd get something like a dough, and it would spend a certain amount of time in there. Then the product would go through various processes where the starch would be washed away from the--.

[0:11:14]

EE: It can be done sort of mechanically, if you will?

JK: Yeah, in various vessels and pieces of equipment. The starch would be extracted and purified. One of the machines used to purify the starch was called a centrifuge.

EE: Spin it around. So, the higher grade would be, further out would be heavier stuff, and that would be the more industrial kind of starch? Am I guessing right, or am I on the wrong track?

JK: I don't think it's as simple as that. [Laughing] But there were different screens and ways in which the various grades of starch were separated out. We'd have A Starch which would be used for industrial purposes and for food, and then the B Starch had a lot more protein or gluten and bran in it. It would be dried and sold for things like briquettes—less quality.

EE: For fuel?

JK: Yes. Charcoal briquettes. Yeah.

EE: Yeah, to be pressed in with coal.

JK: Or as an additive for various animal feeds. And then there was a way of getting the bran off, and that would be collected and--.

[*…audio skips*]

EE: Those were ones you were monitoring in operation, I suppose, then. Were you?

JK: Yeah. Through various kinds of physical and chemical tests. We were also responsible for ensuring sanitation.

EE: Keeping the little rats out?

JK: The rats, the insects, bacteria, mould.

EE: Owen?

OM: The doughy mass, then that was used for--. Was that just broken down into these constituents then?

JK: Yeah.

OM: Okay. I thought maybe you were making a pizza crust or something like that, but not so. [Laughs]

JK: No, no. [Laughs] There were a number of different ways in which the gluten and the different kinds of starches were dried.

EE: So, I suppose the water would be required. What purpose did the salt play in the process as far as making this doughy thing?

JK: Just facilitating in breaking down the--.

[*…audio skips*]

EE: The water. Because without that, flour is incredibly light stuff, isn't it? It would blow all over and the water would be needed to slow it down somewhat, I imagine.

JK: Well, it was just the start of the process of flushing out the starch.

EE: Did you have any knowledge of how the process to do all this developed? The industrial history of this kind of mill, or did you get into that at all?

JK: No, not really.

EE: I should ask you much more particularly. What exactly--. You were beginning to describe what you did in terms of monitoring for--.

JK: Yeah. Ogilvie's built the industrial grain plants around 1947, 1946. There's one in Thunder Bay and there's one in Montreal, Candiac. And, I suppose, they were first just interested in finding a way to extract the starch.

EE: Yes. **[*…audio skips*]** The market, those are not questions you're going to be able to answer.

JK: Well, a lot of it just evolved with time.

EE: Ogilvie's is one of the pioneer flour millers in the country. In the late nineteenth century—I don't remember when they started—but certainly they were a major producer of flour by the beginning of the 20th century. One of their--. I remember the family named Shirley—a man, Shirley Ogilvie—was actually involved in the establishment of Abitibi Power and Paper at the Iroquois Fall's mill, and this was circa 1910 or '12. I did industrial corporate history in the early part of the century and came across Shirley Ogilvie, but the company was a major operator with mills on the Prairies, including one in Winnipeg that they knocked down not very long ago. They exploded the flour mill they had there.

[0:15:52]

JK: Yeah, it burned.

EE: And so, the product that you were saying, the stuff came in from a mill in Medicine Hat, then, was your impression?

JK: I believe so, yeah.

EE: Right. So, maybe with this kind of context and background, we might ask you what a typical--.

[*…audio skips*]

JK: Typical days. [Laughs]

EE: Or were they all atypical?

JK: There was never a dull moment there. As a process tech, I was working 12-hour shifts. You go in in the morning and collect samples from different places. We'd collect flour samples, process samples, samples taken from production at various stages of the production, then finished products. There'd be composite samples taken of the gluten that had been produced over the past 24 hours.

EE: Because it was process industry. It ran around the clock. There was someone else covering the other 12 hours?

JK: Yeah, oh yeah. Well, as Ogilvie Mills, we just had a day shift, but they were 12-hour days. Many of the operators did their own tests during the night.

EE: I see, during the night.

JK: Yeah, product is tested at various stages 24 hours a day, but a lot of what the process tech did was to calibrate the machinery. So, you'd have these process samples, and you'd test them, and then you'd check them against the instruments that the operators, for instance, could use.

EE: You had an array of instruments in the lab, I suppose. Would you go out to the equipment actually and make the adjustments, or you'd tell the operators what they needed to do?

JK: Oh, we'd tell the operators if there was anything wrong that needed to be adjusted. One of the most important tests that we did was measure the gluten or the protein in starch because, of course, we needed to keep it as low as possible. So, we would do a test to determine the protein content, and we'd report it. If it was high, we'd certainly let them know right away, and they would adjust their process.

EE: I guess, what happens if it got out of sync, if you will—if that's a good phrase for it—and its proportions are wrong and then it's adjusted.

JK: Much of our product, the dry products, were packed in 25- or 40-kilogram bags.

EE: They went into bags immediately?

JK: Or supersacks, and that was about 1000 kilograms.

EE: I see. Were the bags dated?

JK: Oh, yeah, dated and numbered. Everything was very carefully--. We would be able to track a problem.

EE: So, you could go back two or three bags to see whether there was any manifest in there? If it were to be found in the product, would the stuff go back? Just tossed back in and sent through it again?

JK: Oh. [Laughs] That's where the challenges came in, deciding whether or not we would feed it in gradually, if we could. How much, how fast.

EE: Because you might find yourself checking, as I was inferring, a succession of bags to see.

JK: That was quite the problem with some of our specialty starches, the modified starches. We'd definitely have to determine where the problem began and ended and how bad it was.

EE: Because the purchasers were expecting a certain quality without a doubt.

JK: Yeah, we had specifications for all of our products.

EE: How many of you would be in the lab during this 12-hour shift?

JK: There were about eight of us.

EE: Eight of you. All women?

JK: No, no. It did vary over the years.

EE: And you were one of the--. What was the structure in it? Were you all sort of equivalent as technicians? There would be someone in charge, I suppose.

[0:20:06]

JK: There was a quality assurance manager, and another person who was called a specialist, and then two process technicians, and two shift technicians. We had a microbiologist, and I was his backup.

EE: With what kind of--. With a bachelor's degree in biology? Or was he even better than that?

JK: He almost had his bachelor's degree. He was in his fourth year in a correspondence program with the University of Waterloo, and there was a strike at Ogilvie's. This was before I came onboard.

EE: A heaven-sent opportunity.

JK: He'd left--. No, it was a disaster for him. He had brought his books to work, and when the strike started, the strikers wouldn't let him go back in to get his materials so that he could study and prepare for his exams.

EE: Oh, good grief.

JK: And so, he didn't finish his year.

EE: Which makes me ask then, there was a union there, but I take it you may not have been part of the union then?

JK: No, we weren't part of the union.

EE: You have your own union or were you part of the management stretch?

JK: Well, sort of.

EE: Sort of. Part of ADM Ogilvie's with a manager, office staff?

JK: There was a plant manager, a production manager, a warehouse manager, the quality assurance manager, and shift supervisors. There were four shifts, and there was a supervisor of each shift. They were responsible for six to eight men.

EE: And so, those workers had six-hour shifts then? I'm doing the arithmetic--.

JK: Twelve.

EE: Oh, but there were four shifts?

JK: Yeah.

EE: I guess, one has to offer weekends and things. Yes, of course.

JK: Oh yeah. Seven days a week.

EE: Process industries are a real challenge that way. Well, that's very sad, indeed. I thought he had more time to work, but in those circumstances, poor fellow. And the union couldn't be persuaded because you were part of management as they would see it.

JK: I wasn't there then, and he didn't tell anyone. I think he gave up.

EE: I would think that if he had gone to the strike captain, or whatever, and explained that he needed to get that stuff out, they surely would have got it out for him by whatever means, if not letting him go in himself. Anyway, that's before your time, you were saying.

JK: I know he was very bitter. He was bitter forever after.

EE: Yeah. Could he get no work there then?

JK: Yeah, he did.

EE: So, he was there when you were there?

JK: Yeah. He worked in a little lab all by himself.

EE: It was not a happy place, his little lab?

JK: I didn't mind being the microbiologist for a few weeks every year to give him a break, but I wouldn't have wanted his position. It's just too lonely and isolated.

EE: Because of the fact that he--. Did he have to be off by himself?

JK: He was over in the office building.

EE: All the more reason to see him as part of management.

JK: Yeah, and he kept the door shut, so. [Laughs]

EE: You kept it open when you were working there?

JK: It depended on what I was doing. If I was working with a lot of acids, I would shut the door so that everybody else didn't have to breathe it as well.

EE: What kind of background did you bring to the position in terms of the chemicals that you're alluding to now?

JK: You mean my qualifications?

EE: I suppose.

JK: Bachelor of Science, chemistry major.

EE: Was that an important qualification to get the job initially? Did the other people--? Well, he didn't have a bachelor's degree, so you were obviously better qualified.

JK: By the time I started, that was a requirement, yeah.

EE: I see.

OM: What sort of protective gear did you have when you were working with these various solvents and acids?

JK: We had fume hoods, and goggles, face shields, gloves, aprons, the whole bit. Big arm things, arm coverings, for when we worked with sulphuric acid.

EE: You never felt that you were not properly provided for. You didn't feel unsafe doing that work given what they provided?

JK: No, I didn't. If there was something that concerned me, I could always bring it up, and we'd work to solve the problem. I became involved in the safety committee and various endeavours regarding safety in the plant, right from the beginning.

[0:25:29]

EE: The WHMIS system came in soon after—was applied in the plant—soon after you started there or was it already in existence a bit earlier?

JK: Well, I think it was two or three years after I--. **[*…audio skips*]** Inventory of all our chemicals and make sure that we had MSDS for everything.

EE: Meaning?

JK: Material Safety Data Sheets, so that everybody would know what they were handling and what the hazards were, what precautions they should take. We developed a lot of safety procedures through this whole program.

EE: I wonder if that was staggered through industry? Because I was MP, of course, ’84, ’88, and my memory now is that I ran across WHMIS arrangements at forest industry operations by the summer of ’88. Now, I could be wrong on that, of course. So, if this would be three or four years later, it’s possible then that it didn’t apply to all industry immediately at the same time.

JK: It wasn’t something that could be instituted immediately. It was very expensive, very time consuming, when you think of all the training that had to be done.

EE: Did you feel that it made a significant improvement in the operations of the plant? To have the WHMIS system brought in and imposed on the company, in effect?

JK: I think it did because of issues with workmen’s comp, for instance. I’m sure it cut back considerably on some of the accidents that might have happened.

EE: Were you aware of accidents in the plant?

JK: Yeah. There was really nothing major—eye splashes. Chemically related, no.

EE: So, what you’re--. I guess I’m wanting to ask then is, the process itself, or the operation of the machinery, could involve its dangers for workers. That’s what you’re alluding too, I suppose, in terms of things that happened.

JK: Yeah.

EE: There were no splashes with sulphuric acid, but there were things that happened in the process that could be unhealthy, shall we say?

JK: Yeah. There were a lot of skin issues. Flour is very drying. Many people had problems with contact dermatitis and that sort of thing.

EE: How much of a sense of the workforce in the process part in the mill itself would you have? Was there any amount of turnover? People discovered that they really weren’t able to do this kind of work in these circumstances successfully?

JK: Ogilvie's was one of the really good places to work. People didn't generally quit their jobs there. It was a wonderful place to work.

EE: Well, that's always good to hear. In the union there would be--.

JK: When it burned down, I'm sure that half of the people who'd ever worked there before were standing on the road watching it burn. Many of us had tears running down our faces because we'd all hoped that it would reopen.

EE: And the fire pretty well took care of that?

JK: Yeah.

EE: Was the cause of the fire discovered?

JK: Arson.

EE: It was arson?

JK: Yeah, a couple of little boys.

EE: Not meaning to burn it down, I suppose.

JK: Well, they were playing in there and it was abandoned at the time. They were playing in there, and someone lit a little fire, and it got out of hand. They ran for the nearest fire extinguishers, but they were all discharged because they had also been playing with them. They're lucky they got out with their lives.

EE: Their identity was actually known?

JK: And it was fortunate that--. There were ways of breaking in there, and my first thought was, "I hope nobody's sleeping somewhere in that building."

EE: It hadn't been adequately fenced off then, I guess.

[0:30:00]

JK: It was fenced off, but you could get in there. I had to break out of it once. When it was Riverside Grain Products, we weren't running a seven-day operation. On Friday afternoon, I was working in the office trying to catch up on some paperwork, and everybody else left. I went back to the plant to get my purse and my car keys, and the plant was locked. I was also locked out of the office.

EE: No cell phone, I don't suppose.

JK: No, there wasn't a phone for some reason. I was locked out of the office, locked out of the plant.

EE: And who would you call, I guess?

JK: So, the place was enclosed with fence, and I found a place in the fence where I could crawl underneath. I went over to the bingo hall that was nearby and used their phone to call someone to come and open the plant for me so I can get my keys. [Laughs]

EE: That's how one discovers how the little guys got in probably. [Laughs] Crawling in under. The little guys of course will reconnoitre a place like this with great care.

JK: Yeah. You couldn't drive in, but you could definitely break in easily.

EE: Did the shift from ADM Ogilvie to Riverside involve many changes? You mentioned the change from the seven-day week operation.

JK: Huge changes. They tried to operate with a staff of 30.

EE: As against, not 180--.

JK: 80 when it closed.

EE: 80 when it closed.

JK: So, whereas with ADM Ogilvie, men would be trained to do a position—say they were the ring dryer operator—and they would stay in that position for a year or more, then perhaps move into another position for a period of time. Most people were trained just to do a few jobs. But with Riverside, cross-training became imperative. There were a number of new employees, and they were trained on everything. If they weren't very busy at the P&S operator, they would move over into warehouse and do some bagging for the afternoon, packaging product.

EE: And I suppose the plant manager or subordinates would be watching to see how well they could get everything done with just those 30 people.

JK: Yeah, and I think they were realizing it was impossible. They thought that they could get by with just me at first.

EE: In the lab?

JK: Yeah. Then I hired another technician, and even that wasn't enough, so we hired two more.

EE: The person managing the--.

JK: We were running the lab 24 hours, five days a week with--.

EE: Four people?

JK: At first it was just Stella and myself. I was working about 80 or 90 hours a week.

EE: They paid you accordingly?

JK: No.

EE: No? [Laughs]

JK: No, it was salaried. [Laughs]

EE: Ah, the joy of salary.

JK: I reached a point where I just couldn't do it anymore.

EE: The management for Riverside were some of the same people--. Were they the same people as there had been earlier? Or was it a manager came in?

JK: No, they weren't. One of the presidents of Riverside was Denis Saunders, and he at one time had been a salesman for Ogilvie Mills. He didn't stay in Thunder Bay. He wasn't there on a day-to-day basis. A plant manager from Decatur I believe, Rick Nutter, he came as the manager. Then they hired Stephen Hessian to be the production manager.

EE: From Domtar?

JK: His son. I don't know if you know him.

EE: I know Steve Sr. I see. What was he like?

JK: I--.

End of Part One.

Audio Part Two

Time, Speaker, Narrative
EE: Okay. Resuming the interview here. The question of what your education was—you referred to having a bachelor's degree, a Bachelor of Science in chemistry. We're interested in how that came to be. JK: I loved chemistry in high school. My Grade 13 teacher was John Francie. His classes were so much fun. I enjoyed the topic and did well in it. EE: And so that prepared you to--. You went to Lakehead? JK: Waterloo.

EE: Oh, Waterloo, I see. Well, you're going to the science centre of the province, I suppose, at Waterloo.

JK: Yeah, I enrolled in the cooperative program there. I didn't remain in that program past second year, but it was good.

EE: Did that have you working in industry then, the cooperative program, as well?

JK: Yeah. As a co-op student I worked for Sherwin-Williams in Montreal.

EE: Paints? Wow. What did you do for them? Anything that prepared you for Ogilvie's?

JK: Basically, I was a technician in their various labs. They had a research and development centre there. For the first semester I helped the analytical chemist, and then the next few semesters they gave me projects to carry out for the length of the work terms. They were interesting and really useful.

EE: And they were benefitting from your being there, I suppose, giving you these assignments. Owen?

OM: You said you liked chemistry, what did you like about chemistry?

EE: Blowing things up! [Laughing] That's the male caricature of chemistry.

JK: I'm going to say it was just learning the characteristic of the different elements and how they could be combined in different ways, for different purposes.

EE: Do you have a preference amongst the branches of chemistry?

JK: Organic and biochemistry.

EE: So, this is the chemistry of carbon in the broad. It's about that deep knowledge of--.

JK: I wasn't as strong in the mathematics areas, so physics and physical chemistry they were tougher for me, and I didn't find them as interesting.

EE: But what you can do with carbon. Organic chemistry has been such an incredible area, part of the discipline as I understand it, all the various compounds that have been developed. All the stuff nature never made.

JK: The stuff of life.

EE: The stuff of life, of course. Hydrocarbons and so on. Were you involved in concocting stuff to put out into the world as well?

JK: Not on a molecular level. But probably at Ogilvie I was mainly involved in developing procedures and working with new equipment and establishing how we would use it.

EE: Would you have been the best equipped employee in the lab at Ogilvie's?

JK: No. One of the technicians who was there was Andrew Parks. I don't know if you know--. He works for Canada Malting. His first area of expertise was as a brew master. I'm trying to remember the name of that little brewing company that started up in Thunder Bay in the early 1990s. Renegade?

OM: Okay.

EE: You're closer to the beers, I expect, than I am.

OM: [Laughs]

JK: He was the brewer. [Laughs]

EE: He made the mix, all right. Well, that's interesting to know.

OM: As an interesting anecdote, I have a friend who was a chemist. He worked for Procter & Gamble. They were concerned somebody had invented Cool Whip, so he told him to invent an equivalent for their particular company. And he invented Dream Whip, of all the things he's ever--. **[*…audio skips*]** And in my stomach. [Laughs]

EE: And I suppose Dream Whip isn't very different from Cool Whip?

OM: Well, it's probably now extinct, but I'm old enough to remember it. Sorry.

JK: While I was there, a number of new pieces of equipment were brought on board. I was lucky enough to be the one to work with the suppliers of this equipment and learn how to operate the machines and develop procedures to be used in our plant.

[0:05:11]

EE: That would be very interesting work. Why did the mill, the plant, finally close the first time?

JK: The cost of flour just became very prohibitive. It was an old plant. When ADM was looking to streamline things to make themselves more profitable, they looked at the oldest plant.

EE: And this was from Ogilvie's. I don't know, was Ogilvie's still in the flour business at--?

JK: Yeah.

EE: They were? But they were prepared to let this go to someone else because, I guess, they may have faced similar cost pressures. You know much about the market for your products? Were others setting the prices in such a way that they couldn't cover the cost? By increasing the price of starch, for example?

JK: I think it was very competitive. Australia was producing a lot of grain, wheat at that time. Europe had started to produce quite heavily too, and they were subsidized, I think.

EE: Yes, the Europeans certainly were. And I guess if the raw material is cheaper--. So, the starch would be imported from Australia and Europe as well. The Canadian plants--.

JK: And the gluten.

EE: Of course, I don't know whether the free-trade agreement, NAFTA—that's of course North American only—but duties were coming down generally, so I suppose if the Canadian industry had been using that in the 1990s. It closed in '96 did you say?

JK: ADM Ogilvie's closed in '96.

EE: And then the other plant, was that--.

JK: Made an attempt.

EE: Rather like the rebirth of Shaw Bakery in the past decade that was not possible either—turned out unsuccessful. Well, let's--. We've been using the typical day question to explore your activities over the years, and I expect the questions in the brackets—what did you do, who did you interact with, what tools and equipment did you use—I suppose we could specify further, but we've done a pretty good job, I think, in your answers covering those things. What would you like people to know about the work you did and the place you worked? You've said some things that I think fit into that, but if you face the question full more.

JK: Hm, it's a very general question. Food safety at our plant. I helped ensure that we were making a very good product, and I was proud of the product we were making. I knew that it was a really good product because at one point we did a study with gluten samples from all over the world—from Australia, from Europe, from the United States. We submitted all of these samples to tests along with our own, and it was quite obvious that ours was the superior product. So, we were proud of what we were making. It was good food.

EE: And that's known through the plant, I suppose, and everyone shares in that pride.

JK: Yeah, it's nice when you can take pride in what you're doing, what you're making. We were creating wealth for ourselves.

[*…audio skips*]

EE: In comes the people derived from operation there. You're suggesting that over the seven years of your employment there, the employment dropped by over half, I guess, if it went down from 180 down to about 80, did you say?

JK: No, it was about 115 when I started there and down to 80.

EE: Oh, 1-1-5. Oh, so that's a 35.

JK: Yeah.

EE: Well, that's not that many. Although how did they do that?

JK: They eliminated some middle management and just tried to streamline things a bit.

EE: Because there'd be little you could do with the reduction operation, I suppose. It was probably fairly tautly run, in terms of the people running the machines, and in the lab, and so on and so forth. Well, that's certainly something that's probably question eight, what are you most proud of in the work you did over the years? I think you just indicated that. Although you might want--. Would you want to expand on anything at all? This is more general.

[0:10:10]

JK: I think you asked what I liked about working at Ogilvie, and I guess one of the big things was the staff, the camaraderie amongst us. I was working with people who really enjoyed what they were doing as well, and you could tell. You could tell that people cared about what they were doing. They cared about each other. When one of my colleagues had cancer and went through a lengthy period of treatment, we put together a benefit for her to help her make her mortgage payments. And everybody from the plant attended this event.

EE: All the production workers as well and so on?

JK: Yeah. Oh yeah.

EE: Could one speak of it almost as a family in a way? Everyone working together there?

JK: Yes, I would say so.

EE: And the management was in keeping with that?

JK: **[*…audio skips*]** For the people at the top, and at the other end.

EE: Was there one manager throughout that seven years?

JK: When I started, the plant manager was Norm Holman. He was a man who worked his way up from being a sweeper in the warehouse, I believe, to become plant manager. He was very intelligent, very good with people.

EE: Loved the place?

JK: He loved the place. Yeah. When he retired, Linda Luszczak became the plant manager, and she was the person who had originally hired me in the lab.

EE: What was her position before she became manager? In charge of personnel or--?

JK: Quality assurance manager. And she started as a technician.

EE: When you were describing the half a dozen or so managers, she was one of those. Did she--. It's interesting to have a woman managing. Was this a bit of a surprise to have her move up to the plant manager position?

JK: It was very egalitarian. He called Linda "The Iron Lady".

EE: Was that justified?

JK: Yes.

EE: She was tough, eh?

JK: She was tough. Very strong.

EE: But fair, much like--.

JK: Oh yeah. I have nothing but respect for her.

EE: Are they still with us?

JK: Norm passed away a few years ago. Linda is just recently retired.

EE: Someone else we might get in touch with, in terms of--.

JK: She could tell you a lot more about the history of Ogilvie, and a lot more about the production side of things.

EE: Yes. She wasn't involved with Riverside, I don't suppose?

JK: No. She was to have been. I really don't know what happened and why she didn't come on board as the plant manager again.

EE: Someone else's story. **[*…audio skips*]** Most about the work that you did.

JK: Just perhaps the variety of things that I did while I worked there. I was never bored. There were always new things happening. A crisis every day, you know? There was problem solving involved in the position, finding ways to make use of everything that we made even if it was off-spec.

EE: Could you describe a crisis or two for the interest of the listeners? The most spectacular surprise I ever had--.

[*…audio skips*]

JK: Just customer complaints for instance. I remember once one of customers found pieces of a pen in a load of gluten.

EE: How did that happen? Is the question he's asking.

JK: People used to wear those little techy pockets where they'd carry pens and pencils in their breast pocket, and I think someone just bent over and it fell in. [Laughs] Was crushed along the way.

EE: And after that those were rule contraband?

JK: Yeah, we just had to decide--.

EE: My fancy pen or a customer.

[0:15:10]

JK: You couldn't walk around with those things anymore. Try another--. Well not a crisis, but a challenge was trying to get people to wear hairnets because we are a food manufacturer after all.

EE: Nothing glamorous about those. I guess guys would have long hair too, at times. Well, no matter what the length of hair I guess--. **[*…audio skips*]** Beards too, yes. And some people have hairy beards.

JK: There were, you know. And try and get some people to wear those things. I was involved in a sanitation committee and things like that came up. It was the committee's responsibility to try and figure out how we were to get the message across. We actually made a couple of videos. [Laughs]

EE: Of what could happen?

JK: Well, no. The first one was just a day in the life of an operator. It started with him waking up in the morning to his alarm clock, and having a shower, and going off to work in nice clean clothes, and putting his nice clean uniform on. Right down to washing his hands after he used the washroom. [Laughs]

EE: Conveying the idea that all of these things should be happening.

JK: Yeah, conveying, yeah.

OM: Sort of ahead of its time. It's like reality television. [Laughing]

JK: It was fun making it.

OM: What time would you have to start work every day?

JK: My shifts were from 7:00 to 7:00.

OM: Did you live on that side of town then?

JK: No, I was on this side.

EE: Right here?

JK: Yeah. But then the scheduling changed over the years. For a while, we tried 10-hour shifts. For quite a bit of time I was working weekdays 7:00 to 4:00, or whatever.

EE: Was the production it involved 12-hour shifts as well, I guess, with four different shifts?

JK: Yeah. I think we only closed down for Christmas Day.

EE: Of course, what I wasn't calculating before is when you have 12-hour shifts, you're up to 48 hours in four days. If the workweek were less than, it would be less than 48 hours I suppose?

JK: Well, for me, you'd work two days, have two days off, work three days, have three days off. Sort of staggered like that.

EE: Just days, fortunately. The brutality comes when people have to shift from day to night.

JK: We didn't have a nightshift until Riverside happened.

EE: And then they tried that too, did they?

JK: Yeah. It was quite difficult with just two of us to begin with. Well, just me at first, and then Stella came on board. We took turns working day and nights.

OM: Heavier production levels as well?

EE: Were you producing as much?

JK: Riverside never was able to achieve the same production levels because they were just operating five days a week. They lost a lot of time because start up is--. You can't just start up. It's a gradual thing. It takes at least eight hours to get up to steam.

EE: Did the plant operate 365 days a year then as well? Through Christmas day and so on?

JK: Ogilvie's shut down for Christmas day.

EE: For a day?

JK: For a day. Maybe it was closer to two days.

EE: For the Boxing Day as well, or whatever.

JK: Yeah, at one time Ogilvie's was owned by Labatt's. It was owned by Labatt's when I started there. There was a tradition on Christmas Eve of stopping at noon—closing the plant down at noon—and then we'd have a big lunch and Labatt's beer. That happened for several years until one year somebody hit a train leaving work. [Laughing] We had to cross railroad tracks to get out to Syndicate.

EE: These are marvellous traditions and then someone spoils it. [Laughs]

JK: Yeah, somebody spoiled it.

EE: Were there other social activities among the Ogilvie family, shall I say?

JK: The Christmas party, different tournaments. We had a curling bonspiel once a year, there were fishing--.

EE: Amongst the workers, the employees?

JK: Yeah.

EE: And fishing? I see. Was there a committee responsible for the social round of the year?

[0:20:08]

JK: I don't know. I think just whoever was interested would help out.

EE: Sure. Well, these things will happen.

JK: We had a charity committee. Employees could designate whether or not they wanted a certain amount of money taken off their paycheque to go to charities. So, the committee would decide which charities that money would go to.

EE: United Way, I suppose, is one?

JK: Eventually it all went to United Way. That was a contentious issue.

EE: Because there would be people who would have favourite charities they'd want to support, and this is now being imposed on the entire workforce.

JK: Yeah.

EE: I can imagine.

JK: I'm trying to think of other things. It seems to me--. Well, within the lab and administration there were a lot of other social events happening.

EE: So, each of the managers, I suppose, would have a secretary or an assistant, or was there a secretarial pool?

JK: There were three administrative staff helping the plant manager at one time.

EE: At the best time.

JK: Yeah, when there were more employees. [Laughs]

EE: So, you'd have--. The union representing was the Grain Handlers Lodge 650 would you say?

JK: Herb Daniher was in it, yeah.

EE: Yeah. That's Lodge 650 of the Grain Handlers. Right. One of the other questions is "Did you think that the work you did contributed to Canada's success as an international grain trader?" Now, that doesn't immediately apply. You were in a business that competed with international traders as well. Although did some of the product leave the country, do you know?

JK: Oh, they did.

EE: So, you were involved in a global business or market?

JK: I know at one time we sent some [inaudible] material to Thailand to be fed to shrimp. [Laughs]

EE: Right. Well, shrimp need to eat too, don't they? Along with pigs and other critters who would enjoy the product. Is there--?

JK: Most of our products remain within North America.

EE: Did you have a sense that ADM's purchase of it expanded markets in the United States? Were you in competition—again would you know—with operations ADM had in the US?

JK: ADM had their own operations.

EE: How long did they operate this particular plant?

JK: It might have been three years.

EE: It was as much as three years? Because sometimes, of course, these acquisitions are really part and parcel at reducing competition. They operate them for a little while and then shut them down.

JK: I think trade secrets were another factor.

EE: You had some here that they were acquiring, which were then transferred to other operations?

JK: Yeah.

EE: Could you describe any of that? It's not so secret that you can't say, I suppose, what sorts of things that involved? Or was it?

JK: I think it would just be the production model and perhaps one of the factors used in making gluten.

EE: Part of the process then. I see. Do you have any knowledge of how old that plant was as an industrial--?

JK: It was built in '46.

EE: Oh, that's right! You were saying just after the war. I wonder whether it was a new development in industry at the time that it was discovered how one could make additional uses.

JK: Yeah, I think it was a few years after that that another industrial grain plant was built in Candiac, Quebec, near Montreal.

EE: And you were saying that Ogilvie's came to control that?

JK: These two plants were called Industrial Grain Products. They were a part of Ogilvie's.

EE: IGP are initials I've—I was thinking, I was mouthing—a name I've seen before. Describe any connections you see between your work and the work of farmers growing the grain handled in the grain trade. Now, the dear ladies in Winnipeg who drew up these questions, that's what a lovely--.

JK: Could you repeat that? [Laughing]

EE: I hesitate to do so because I want to answer it myself, really. Describe any connections you see between your work and the work of farmers growing the grain handled in the grain trade.

[0:25:08]

JK: Well, we were providing another use for the grain that is grown on the Prairies.

EE: Yes. And I was thinking--.

JK: Value added. It was a value-added product, especially some of the industrial starches—the ones used for the paper industry or for adhesives—very, very much value-added.

EE: I was thinking about the fact that if it's soon after the war, and a war monopoly, I suppose, that Canadian wheat probably had in Britain and other suppliers as Europe begins to recover, the Canadian farmers faced difficulties in getting a good return on their wheat as I vaguely remember. The international wheat agreements at the time were quite contentious. So, for Ogilvie's to come up with another way of using flour, processing it into industrial products, would certainly make sense. In '47 it's nicely timed with that after the war ended in the fall of 1945.

OM: What sort of grade would be used in your flour for it to be most efficient as the by-products you're producing at the end? Was it high grade flour or was it an industrial-use flour? I'm not sure, I don't know.

JK: It was a lower grade flour, yeah.

EE: Which then could take us back to a flour that was made from--. Did you have a sense of what would happen in Medicine Hat? Would they be separating out the higher quality? Would it be based on the kind of--?

JK: They do. They have different streams in the milling process. I knew all of this at one time, but I've forgotten.

EE: But your sense is that, say, they would have different qualities of wheat and would be milling lower grade wheat as well as the highest grade wheat?

JK: Yeah.

EE: And the lower grade wheat, then, would produce the raw material for your operation?

JK: Yeah, there were variations in the milling process to get certain desired effects.

EE: Right. We haven't really talked very much, or had people to interview, in regard to flour production because there wasn't anyone producing flour here in the city. I don't know that the team in Winnipeg--.

JK: There is now.

OM: There is now, yes.

EE: Yeah, there is a modest operation, is there not? No one retired from that yet, we may have to get a little closer to people still working. [Laughs]

OM: I have a question again there, Ernie. I'm sorry I seem to be interrupting as this is a different area.

EE: Please, by all means.

OM: When you left, did you retire? Or did you move onto other areas where your expertise was of help?

JK: I moved to a company called Neste Resins. It's--.

EE: Plastics?

JK: No. It was a plant across the street from Bombardier, and they were a chemical producer. They bought--. They manufacture formaldehyde and formaldehyde resins.

EE: And formaldehyde would be--. It's a preservative?

JK: Yeah.

EE: Yeah. What's it used for these days?

JK: Oh, it's used for all kinds of things. We were making resins for the board industry. It's like glues, urea formaldehyde resins, and phenol formaldehyde resins used in plywood, chipboard.

EE: In fact, it was used in insulation at one unhappy time 40 years ago, wasn't it?

JK: Yeah. There's different--. You know those little green scrubbies?

OM: Oh, yes.

EE: Swiffer? Oh! The same--. Rather than steel wool, but the plastic equivalent of steel wool.

JK: That kind of resin is used to make--. Yeah. They used that kind of resin for those products and also for different kinds of filters. Your furnace filters, perhaps, some of them might have that kind of thing in them. Formaldehyde--. They're used in fake wood dashboards in cars, in furniture making, flooring, curtains, wallboard. All kinds of things.

[0:30:02]

EE: How long did you work there?

JK: 15 years.

EE: Oh, right. Until the final retirement then?

JK: Well, that plant closed down too. I've been really unlucky. [Laughs] I worked for Terra Scientific for a while, and they also shut down.

EE: Terra Scientific?

JK: Yeah. It was a little analytical lab. Well anyways, it shut down and at that point I just had a few years to go until I could retire. So, I went to China and taught oral English for three semesters.

EE: That's not shutting down. [Laughs] With millions of Chinese to learn English.

JK: Yeah. And, apparently, I could have stayed there forever if I wanted. [Laughs]

EE: Our son brought the parents of a Chinese girl he'd come to know in Winnipeg to the city just a couple of weeks ago from the Beijing area. They have a lot of English to learn, both of them. The father has a bit. There are questions about changes, challenges, and so on. Let's dig our way through those. What major changes did you see in your job in the trade over the years? That envisaged people working in the elevators or what have you over a lifetime, but you've seen changes. You've seen the closure of two operations, but there may be other changes as well. Major changes did you see? The processes themselves, I suppose--.

[*…audio skips*]

JK: Very little change as far as the process was concerned.

EE: Well-established processes that kept on going.

JK: The plant as a whole tried to streamline itself to--. As I said, middle management was laid off to a certain extent.

EE: Did you feel a loss to the quality of the operation with the loss of the middle managers?

JK: Not to the operation, per se, but there was a loss in morale. When you work somewhere that goes through several downsizes, people become very worried about their own position. They suffer from survivor guilt. "My job was saved, but his was lost." People just weren't as comfortable there because they felt insecure.

EE: That will impact morale without a doubt. I guess what I'm wondering--. **[*…audio skips*]** Misguided, perhaps, whether these middle managers brought something to the operation that was now a serious loss, or whether it might have been a mistake to create those positions initially. Do you have any opinion on that?

JK: It's hard to say.

EE: Depending on what it is, I suppose. Middle management is a challenging area.

JK: One thing that was happening during the years that I was there was that safety had become much more important. A lot of the pressures came from outside.

EE: And there's bound to be some ambivalence about the WHMIS system.

JK: Yeah. Well, a lot of it was good. There were barrels of unlabelled materials all over the plant. They just sat there for years and years and years, and they weren't being used, they weren't important to the operation. So, it was good that we were forced to--.

[…audio skips]

EE: Did you get a sense of what brought about the WHMIS institution? Because this was an Ontario government regulation—not unique in the world, I'm sure. But did you get any sense of how it came to be?

JK: I think it was because of accidents that happened in various workplaces. People were hurt.

EE: It would have been out of worker's comp, then, to some extent.

JK: And there came the realization that if employees had known what they were working with, they would have been more careful, they would have protected themselves, and the accidents wouldn't have happened.

EE: So, workers can inevitably be a bit blasé about things that are always around them. One of my assistants in Ottawa--.

JK: We're all like that, you know?

EE: She'd worked for a cabinet minister in the Saskatchewan government and PCV concerns suddenly arose. The minister with at least one assistant in tow was down at the plant where they were building transformers. And, of course, PCVs were part of the insulation inside, if you will. **[*…audio skips*]** Pulls it out and the PCV is in the palm, and that may have been quite safe, but it's a nice demonstration of how blasé workers can be about stuff that they're working with everyday.

[0:35:01]

JK: Well, we work with a lot of mercury thermometers, and there was also a mercury monometer in the boiler house. Thermometers would break, the mercury would go down into the trap. There was one fellow who actually collected all that mercury, and brought it home, and kept it in his garage. He'd show it to--. The neighbour had children, to his grandchildren, "Hey! Do you want to play with this?" They're playing with mercury balls in their hands.

EE: Well, if it ever gets into the body, it's a killer.

JK: Well, it does. You inhale it. It's very dangerous. It's a designated substance, and one of my jobs was to write the designated substances protocol for the plant and do training with all the employees.

EE: So, you do the research, write it all up, and then have a classroom of employees in which you were briefing them, was it?

JK: Yeah.

EE: Prepared you for teaching English, then, at a later date. [Laughs]

JK: That and when we were operating at Riverside some horrible things happened with chemicals. [Laughs] We hadn't really been able to get a safety committee going, and we had all of these new, young employees. I'd just walk through and see things and thought, "Whew, he's handling concentrated sulphuric acid without a bit of protection! Probably doesn't know that it could just eat right through his skin."

EE: Well, you weren't there very long. [Laughs] What impact did these changes have on your job and the industry? We hadn't found many. The WHMIS being an example made yours more interesting.

JK: It made mine more interesting, it added a lot of variety to what I did. I was able to gain some skills that I hadn't had before—training employees in safety and in procedures.

EE: Yeah, from the lab into the classroom—speaking as a professor who didn't have a lab, of course.

JK: Yeah. While I was there, sanitation became very important as well. There was a committee struck to look at various issues—rodent control, insect control, sanitation of all our equipment.

EE: The darn little four-leggeds will be in there, I guess. They're almost impossible to keep out, I suppose.

JK: Yeah.

EE: What can one do about mice and rats?

JK: Well, block all the holes, all the entries. Went through the whole plant and the warehouse identifying all the portals of entry and issuing workorders.

EE: So, the carpenters came in and went to work, eh?

JK: Yeah, and instituting inspection of the product at various stages to make sure that there weren't any insects and that there weren't going to be problems with anything else. Bacteria or--.

EE: Almost calls for a sealing of the entire plant, or the process part of it.

JK: And it was a very old plant.

EE: It would be difficult to do.

JK: Yeah.

EE: Was it well air-conditioned? Probably not.

JK: No.

EE: Air conditioning was cross-drafts from the open windows probably.

JK: Yeah.

EE: Was the plant itself built in about ’47 then? It wasn’t installed in an older building, it was actually put up at the time?

JK: It was actually built. Yeah, they attempted to build an elevator prior to that, and it fell into the river shortly after it was built.

EE: That’s the other collapse, the Ogilvie tip-over.

JK: When they built after that there was a lot of reinforcement.

EE: More piledriving?

JK: Yeah.

EE: That’s something, also, one can look into sometime.

OM: What would a new plant be like, if someone were to build it from the ground up? Would major change would you see there? Not knowing what the old plant looked like--.

JK: Well, it would be built to modern codes as far as insulation and ventilation--.

OM: Did you have asbestos in there?

JK: Pardon?

OM: Asbestos, was that an issue at all?

JK: It was. It was. Yeah, we had to go through the plant with a qualified person to identify all the asbestos.

[0:40:03]

EE: Did you just cloak the asbestos or was it removed?

JK: It--. Hm. I think some of it was removed and some of it was coated.

EE: Yeah. A place like St. Paul's United Church, for example, there's--.

JK; It's really--.

[*…audio skips*]

EE: As long as it isn't friable, it's not floating in the air—that's the great concern of asbestos.

JK: You remember my house on College St. built in 1907? With the big old boiler? The asbestos cover on this boiler became friable, so we had to have it removed. I hired a company that came in and built separate rooms—one around it and another one for them to change. It was very expensive.

EE: It's an expensive process.

JK: It took a whole week just to do that one boiler.

OM: I was thinking of—getting back to the new plant—that it could almost totally be automated, I would think.

JK: Yeah, much more automated.

OM: But there's just no profit in building from the bottom up anymore, I would think, in North America for something like that.

EE: Are there plants like this in Canada that you're aware of now?

JK: The Candiac plant is still operating as far as I know.

EE: Was it built later than this one?

JK: Yes, it was, but not that much later.

EE: Probably not that different then.

OM: The business? Or--.

JK: And ADM's plants down in the States.

EE: Yeah, you've really lost it, in a sense, to the national economy when you sell to a foreign operator. Stelco and whatnot.

JK: Yeah, it was a very sad situation because Ogilvie Mills had tried to form a partnership with Maple Leaf Mills. The Canadian government turned it down because of the competition bureau. And then they allowed us to be bought by Archer-Daniels-Midland, who I think later formed a partnership with Maple Leaf Mills.

EE: It would depend on the era. Through the '70s there was probably greater concern about that competition than there was later.

JK: And the Prime Minister at the time became director on the board of Archer-Daniels-Midland.

OM: I was just thinking who were the new senators or board directors?

EE: Which Prime Minister was this?

JK: Brian Mulroney.

EE: Brian Mulroney. Well, investment Canada, of course. The country's open for--. **[*…audio skips*]** I'm very cynical. Well, besides dealing with change, what other challenges did you face on the job? You faced quite a few given where you were.

JK: It was a tough job. I remember when I first started as the process technician, I found it very difficult. It was 12 hours of nonstop activity mainly on my feet. I remember going home after the first few days, and saying, "I'm just going to give this a year, and if it doesn't get better, I can't keep on doing it." But it did get better. I got better. I didn't stay in that position more than a year, I think.

EE: And when you were promoted—or moved to another function—you didn't have to spend as much time on your feet? It simply wasn't as demanding, or--?

JK: Well, it was still really demanding, but it wasn't--. **[*…audio skips*]** More involved in other facets—purchasing, safety, sanitation, relieving the microbiologist, and doing the tests involved in monitoring our waste-water treatment plant.

EE: You were treating--?

JK: We were treating our effluent before it went to the city sewer.

EE: Because there would still be a bit of organic matter in it, I suppose.

JK: Oh, yeah. A lot. When the plant was first operating, the effluent would go straight to the Kaministiquia River.

OM: A lot of stuff went into the Kaministiquia River in the '40s and '50s.

JK: The people didn't realize the damage the biological oxygen demand would cause.

EE: And much later, out of the Great Lakes Paper Mill, that was still happening, wasn't it? I mean, we've had fish killed certainly into the '80s, if not later than that, because of, as you say, BOD. The river dead, I guess.

JK: If you look at the site, you can still see our treatment plant. The biggest tank was an anaerobic digester, and then there was a smaller aerobic one—which was open to the atmosphere—and then finally a clarifier.

[0:45:09]

EE: I see. So, you had a three stage--. Can one relate this to primary, secondary, tertiary? Is it as it would be in a sewage plant? Where the three tanks of the same--. First of all, you'd remove solids, I guess.

JK: Well, I can describe it in terms of reducing the BOD by 99 percent.

EE: Really?

JK: Well, maybe 97. But very good, anyways.

EE: But very good. Most of the organic material was removed.

JK: Yeah. And in the anaerobic digester there was bacteria, and they just broke all the bits of starch and debris from the wheat down, and consumed it, and produced methane gas, which we used to fire the boiler system for the plant.

EE: Right. That's the sort of thing that should happen. That was in operation when you arrived, I suppose?

JK: Yeah. And when Riverside reopened, they were never able to get it working properly. Or keep it working properly.

EE: You'd buy the bacteria, I suppose? Or grow them yourselves?

JK: I think when Riverside started up, we were able to get a couple of tanker truck loads of bacteria from the Candiac plant. I'm pretty sure that's how we started.

EE: Maybe not enough of it, then, I suppose.

JK: No, we did get it going, but to keep the bacteria healthy--. Bacteria do not like changes—changes in pH, in temperature, and most importantly in the amount of food that they get. So if there's a sudden spike, it can kill them off, as in a spike caused by a spill.

EE: So, the lab was monitoring the treatment plant as well, I suppose?

JK: Yeah. It required--. You have to monitor it and report it to the city and the Ministry of the Environment.

EE: In terms of what was coming out of it at the end? So, the aerobic, simply, the oxygen from the air is allowed to work on what's in there, I suppose.

JK: Yeah. Well, it was bacteria that used oxygen, that require oxygen, to function.

EE: Oh, so there were bacteria in there.

JK: So, it was a different kind of bacteria.

EE: Right. Actually, in terms of the evolution of life on Earth—stuff I've learned from my environmental history—the first tank is really that pre-oxygen atmosphere our planet, presumably, had. Methanogenic bacteria and so on. And then the next tank you're in

the later stage when oxygen appears, and probably kills off an awful lot of the previous form of life on Earth. And then the last tank does what, did you say?

JK: Clarifies it. Settles all the solid matter down to the bottom of the tank.

EE: And that's removed and--?

JK: Yeah. We didn't do this at Riverside—we weren't operating long enough—but at Ogilvie's, it seems to me that once every year or two we'd stop the operation and remove all the settled material.

OM: And where would that go?

JK: To the dump. [Laughing]

EE: A lot of industrial stuff ends up in the dump, I fear, inevitably. That's what a city dump is for. That's why we want to discourage, endeavour as consumers, to use as little as possible.

OM: There are so many things that provide challenges there for you. Were you able to leave the job on the job? Or was it something like a 24/7 for you where you were thinking about things that were going to happen tomorrow, or that had happened? Because that can wear you down.

EE: Stop thinking about when you go--.

JK: Well, sometimes you solve problems in your sleep. You know, thinking about something as you go to bed and then in the morning, "Oh! I know how to do that!"

EE: Got the solution. [Laughs]

OM: Eureka! Well, it sounds like you're stimulated there anyways.

EE: The mind is a wonderful thing.

OM: I think I remember that. [Laughs]

EE: The joys of retirement. What major challenges do you think the grain industry faced over the years? I suppose we can recapitulate--.

JK: The whole grain industry?

EE: Let's just think about this part of it—IGP, what sorts of challenges it faced. You've referred, of course, to competitive pressures and cost of raw material, from which I infer limitations in the market—the inability to increase the price.

JK: Yeah, fluctuations in the price of flour and the costs of meeting environmental expectations, safety expectations.

[0:50:23]

EE: It's interesting those various things that don't relate to what was then worker's compensation operations. In a little while—you left there in '96—and during those two or three years, I would think after the '95 provincial election, the Harris government would, of course, rename the board the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, and try to find ways of reducing the burden on corporations entirely. But you probably didn't see much of that because it was probably happening after you--. Or did some of it begin to appear? I'm not sure whether the impact of that would be felt on the floor.

JK: I know our premiums were very high. We had a number of claims—back injuries and that kind of thing. There was a lot of manual labour required there, heavy lifting.

EE: The consequences for the workers themselves and for the corporations trying to use the worker's comp system wisely, the cost will be high.

JK: Yeah. I know Linda mentioned it several times that it was very, very difficult. Then we were owned by companies who were trying to maximize their profits and weren't inclined to put a lot of money into upgrading the plant.

EE: It's one of those interesting things. We never have this connected with guaranteed annual income or, in the Manitoba demonstration project of the 1970s, with Mincome. But if we did have, well it could take an enormous amount of the weight off of industry generally, if instead of putting people into the worker's comp system—which is just over 100 years old now in Ontario—instead, when we're able to provide the income people need by the wealth of the province generally, rather than loading it on industries would be one of the arguments of income that would be worth pursuing. The only speech of Bob Ray's that I really

remember is a speech of his to a provincial council meeting. It must have been in 1989 because he wasn't the leader—well he was briefly earlier—but it was '89 or '90 that he made this speech to provincial council of the Ontario NDP about a guaranteed annual income. I don't remember whether he called it that, but a program that would basically replace so many income support programs the province had.

OM: And there would be vested interests to keep it the way it is, Ernie.

EE: Well, I think there would be powerful interests create [inaudible] generally to displace the power of those. But a lot of it is short-sightedness. There's enough amount of right-wing economic short-sightedness around, so they don't think in terms of the way it could play itself out.

JK: One thing that I noticed when I worked at--. Well, it was happening at Ogilvie's too, where the responsibility for safe work habits, a lot of the responsibility for that, was laid at the hands of the worker. And I thought that was good that there was a change in attitude there where it wasn't just the employer who was supposed to make sure that everybody was working safely, but the people working there themselves were also responsible.

OM: It's an internal responsibility model basically.

JK: Yeah. And when I worked at [inaudible], I was involved in a program called Behaviour Based Awareness. Awareness Based Behaviour? Anyways, it involved people receiving training in thinking about where they're working, how they're working, what they're working with, who's around them—actually thinking about what they're doing and making decisions after assessing risks.

EE: What has been generalized now as mindfulness, I think, in these last years.

JK: Yeah, and we were able to cut our incident and accidents down considerably during the four years or so that I was involved with it. But employees would be trained to go out into the plant and watch a colleague work, and just look around for any hazards, any risks, and then have a discussion afterwards with that person if they noticed—when they noticed the good habits and the bad habits. It was supposed to be positive as well as critical.

[0:55:30]

EE: So, it was kind of a comradeship then of enhancing safety. Because I always think, myself, that the first requirement is that the plant itself have a very high sort of safety quotient, or whatever phrase one uses. In terms of it's design it should be so laid out, and

this is, of course, where the cleanliness of the operation comes up because I'm tempted to bring forward two or three examples I've read over the years of Japanese engineers coming in to clean up operations, in terms of bringing the Japanese model. Some would say that it may well start with, after the place has been thoroughly cleaned out, is painting of lines and so on and so forth to demarcate work areas and so on and so forth properly. And then, of course, keeping everything else clean in that sense. This can have an, apparently, astonishing impact on cost. Remarkable reductions of cost take place in any kind of plant if you do those sorts of things. And the Japanese have learned to do them.

JK: Yeah, it's just that--. In theory it's great. [Laughs] In actual practice it's sometimes impossible.

EE: Well, it depends. The Porsche plant is the one I think of where, apparently, they had put the parts for the assembly line--. The parts were sort of laying indiscriminately in containers—wooden containers—so the workers had to step over and pull them out of these crates. It almost sounds as if they were in crates at this plant. Of course, when the Japanese engineers came in that was out of the question and they ended up with little carts with the parts hanging on the carts. And I don't know whether the carts moved or the automobile—something. When I say carts, one gets the sense that maybe these things were moving, perhaps moving with the assembly line, and you just had to reach over and pick it up and put it on. They reduced the length of time to make a Porsche by something like 40 percent, I think. It was an incredible increase in productivity by doing those sorts of things.

OM: Following up on the clean up, what is happening on the site—if anything—at this point?

JK: The plant and the warehouse were demolished, and the site is bare now. The only buildings remaining are the four silos, the waste-water treatment plant, and the office building, which is a heritage--. Well, it should be a--.

OM: Is that the old one?

JK: The old Hudson's Bay store. [Note: Actually the McLaurin Store, earliest remaining commercial building in Fort William]

OM: It's one of the earliest--.

JK: That was our office.

OM: Oh, so you actually worked right in there?

JK: Yeah, and that's where the microbiologists worked as well.

OM: I thought that was at one time—and correct me if I'm wrong—that might have been the oldest building in Thunder Bay, still standing?

EE: Extant. Still standing. Yeah, I suppose that's possible.

OM: And you were right in there.

JK: Yeah. [Laughs]

OM: Any old wooden stoves?

JK: No, no.

EE: What are your most vivid memories of the job? Working in the old Hudson's Bay--.

OM: That's a historic one there. It should have a brass plaque on there, really.

EE: We'd probably better press on--.

JK: Someone wrote an article about it, and at the end of the article asked if anyone would be interested in helping to preserve it and to document everything that went on there. I responded to this writer, but she never got back to me.

OM: What was her name?

JK: I can get it for you.

OM: I should let my sister know. She'll take care of that problem for you.

JK: Yeah.

EE: Yeah, Nancy will.

OM: Her and I may be working on that project.

EE: Friends of the HBC Store, eh?

JK: The manager's office had a fireplace in it and the big windows in the front. His washroom had a big bathtub with the clawed feet. [Laughing]

OM: All right! 24/7.

EE: Well, we probably need to think of the last few questions. What are your most vivid memories about your job?

JK: Very good memories of sitting in this cramped, little office with our torn-up chairs laughing and joking and just talking about what was going on in the plant, in the lab. I have a vivid memory of having my morning coffee standing out on this deck overlooking the Kaministiquia River, and a boat going under the Jackknife bridge.

[1:00:12]

OM: That's a historical area.

EE: Sounds like fun.

JK: The smell. I love the smell of the place. Yeah.

OM: My dad worked at Ogilvie's for a number of years—he was a government grain inspector—and that was his favourite elevator to work out of.

JK: Oh, yeah?

EE: What would the aroma be? Would it be based on the processing of the flour?

JK: The smell of animal feed. It smelled like animal feed. The first time I walked in there it reminded me of a chicken coop. You know the smell of grain?

OM: Fermented.

JK: Yeah. And the smell of chlorine, the smell of Javex. I love the smell of Javex. [Laughing]

EE: So, this isn't necessarily a universal appreciation here, but for you it was quite terrific.

JK: Yeah!

OM: That's what I remember about the elevators I worked at in the summer. I remember very little, but I always do remember the smells, the wind, the sun. I worked outside a lot, but the grain smell. Once you smell that it's etched in your memory forever.

EE: I guess my equivalent might be, then, the aroma of hay—drying grass basically—sweet clovers. I have a soft spot in that. The other day I smelled it around the house in the summertime one day and, "Oh, wow! That is a great aroma." In your mind, what were the most important events that happened in the workplace during your career? This again is not 30 years in an elevator, obviously--.

JK: Most important--. Repeat it again.

EE: What were the most important events that happened in the workplace during your career? One of them would be the WHMIS system, I'm sure, coming in.

JK: I think--. Yeah, you're right. The achievements with safety were very important. The times when we were congratulated on producing something that was very good.

EE: Did you have a lot of contact with Ogilvie headquarters? Of course, ADM came in, but before that. Did people from Montreal come to visit?

JK: Yes.

EE: And less of that with ADM, or did they show up as well?

JK: They were still coming. Occasionally people would come from Montreal for conferences or to help with something, to touch base.

EE: Were you yourself involved with, in touch with, people at Candiac or--?

JK: I was when I worked for Riverside. I had a contact.

EE: Getting advice and support?

JK: Getting advice. When we first started up, we wanted to know if the gluten we were producing had the same protein content as theirs did. So, we exchanged samples quite a bit and both labs ran the same tests on these sample--. **[*…audio skips*]** Also do the same tests. It was interesting to see that our results here in Thunder Bay were midway between those in Montreal and those at the Grain Commission, so of course we had to try and figure out why. What's this discrepancy?

EE: Did you find out?

JK: Yeah, we did. We nailed it down to procedure. The Grain Commission was using a combustion technique to measure the protein. We were using, and Candiac was using, a catalyst. And it turned out that we were using different catalysts, so that was the difference.

EE: Was there a decision on which was the best process? Or did--?

JK: They were just different. But once we realized that that was the factor, it wasn't an issue any longer.

EE: Right. When Riverside was reopened, were they aiming to compete in the Canadian market? Or were they going to go up against ADM in the US? Do you have a sense of--?

[*…audio skips*]

JK: Probably the Canadian market. We wouldn't have wanted to compete directly with ADM because they had been reluctant to sell the plant for that reason. They didn't want a competitor.

EE: You don't think they actually wrote that into the agreement?

JK: I don't know, but that's the sense that I have.

EE: They may have been compelled to sell in Canada.

[1:04:59]

OM: Just going back a bit, Ernie, who was your contact at the Grain Commission? Was there somebody you worked with specifically there?

JK: I can get you the name.

OM: That's okay. Just maybe phone Ernie one night. He only takes calls after midnight.

EE: After midnight I endeavour to get my beauty sleep in. [Laughing]

OM: I just thought if you knew. Might be another contact for us.

EE: Yeah, well that's the very last question. On the way to that I don't know whether to ask you whether you feel it's important to preserve and share Thunder Bay's grain trade history?

JK: I do.

EE: We wouldn't be here. You might be there, but--.

JK: I wouldn't be participating if--. **[*…audio skips*]** Our histories.

EE: And since this is the first interview we've done in the Ogilvie context--.

OM: Probably.

EE: So, you are really establishing the state of the art here for--.

OM: The benchmark.

EE: For this particular operation.

JK: I just wish that I'd done this years earlier when my memory of what went on there was better.

EE: You'll probably be remembering things over the next few days thanks to the roiling of your memory that you've given, that we've imposed on you, this afternoon. Do you have any thoughts about aspects of the history that we should concentrate on preserving? Any thoughts on the physical site?

JK: Yeah, that is one aspect—what the site was before the plant was built there, and a little bit about the Hudson's Bay store.

EE: So, the rest--. Is there any--?

OM: The silos has remained because--?

JK: I don't know.

EE: The cost of taking them down?

JK: I think the city owns the property now.

EE: They learned their lesson with Pool 6 probably.

JK: It's very difficult to demolish an elevator, but those silos aren't built the same way.

EE: They are not, no. No, I'm very sorry Pool 6 was taken down the way it was. Or they could have left it as in the midpoint. Why not have a demonstration of how strong these things are as an example of kind of postmodern art. [Laughs] I'd have been tempted to leave the silos there.

JK: Pieces of concrete were falling off the sides.

EE: At Pool 6?

JK: That's the one next to Ogilvie's, right?

EE: No, this is the one--.

JK: Oh, the one down at the waterfront? Yeah, well there was that demolition attempt made.

EE: The first one, and then the second one. Well, that's something to think about. Are there any questions that you'd like to bounce off us and answer?

JK: Uh, well--.

[*…audio skips*]

EE: Game plan, and I put it that way because having everything in perfect shape is the challenge, but they're being stored in the computer at Lakehead University. The intention is to have them there in perpetuity. And we have agreement from the manager of the computer services for that purpose, so they are--. Access to them is the issue, and I don't know whether--. I'm not up on that, and I don't suppose Owen is either. Nancy has had more contact recently, I think, with Terry.

OM: I'm not sure either, but elements of the previous interviews have been used publicly.

EE: Yes, that's right. Excerpts made. Did you see the exhibit down at the Mariner's Hall in Marina Park?

JK: I did, yeah.

EE: Well, that, of course, was based on previous interviews. So, yes, the intention is certainly to preserve. At some point—I find myself more productive these days than I was in earlier years, believe it or not—so I do want to get into the history of the grain trade in a more lively way than I have in the past.

[*…audio skips*]

OM: That's it's payoff. So, Ernie, maybe I'll have to change my focus.

EE: Next April, you're free to find a new focus. [Laughing] The interviews will be cut off.

OM: I don't even get parole. [Laughing]

EE: You can have the summer off. You don't have any memorabilia, I don't suppose, from your time working there that you'd like to see preserved to commemorate the history of the grain trade and your part in it?

JK: Just some newspaper clippings, and most of them are about reopening Riverside.

EE: Well, if you've got a file on that—because tracking these things down is always labour-intensive—but if you had the file, we can do photocopies of the articles.

JK: Sure.

OM: We've done that sort of stuff in the past with other people.

EE: That would be very nice, and then we'd have that in hand immediately.

JK: Yeah, I don't have any memorabilia. When the plant closed down the first time I took—with permission—I took the mortar and pestle that I'd used.

[1:10:04]

OM: You didn't get the bathtub?

JK: No, no, just a little--. **[*…audio skips*]** And then I couldn't take it with me when I left Riverside because they were still using it. So, I wish I had it.

EE: Do you think it might be in there somewhere?

JK: Oh, it was probably destroyed in the fire. Everything was.

EE: Yeah, I guess it was quite--.

JK: I'm hoping that Stella—my comrade there in the lab—at least salvaged the method books and some of the other things. She did that the first time Ogilvie closed down. She just snuck it out. Nobody knew about it. Then she brought it back when Riverside opened. Now why didn't anybody else think of something like that?

EE: Do you have any thoughts about others we might interview? That's why I'm making a little bit of racket here.

JK: Linda Luszczak.

EE: Linda Luszczak.

OM: L-U-S-A-K?

JK: L-U-S-Z-C-Z-A-K.

OM: Oh.

EE: L-U-S-Z--?

JK: S-Z-C-Z-A-K.

EE: Oh, yeah. All those--. **[*…audio skips*]**

JK: Her phone number.

EE: We could probably put off the recording at this point, I suppose.

JK: Because the phone is under her husband's name.

End of interview.