

Narrator: Joe Ripku (JR)

Company Affiliations: Manitoba Pool Elevators/Alberta Wheat Pool

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Summary: Former grain handler for the Manitoba-Pool-Elevators-run Alberta Pool 9 Joe Ripku discusses his short but eventful work in the grain industry. He describes starting off at Pool 9 as a summer student shovelling boxcars. He recalls the challenges of shovelling different grains and the injury that led him to work on the elevator dock. Ripku then shares his account of the Pool 4B elevator explosion, which he witnessed from the Pool 9 dock. He describes the explosion, the rescue of trapped workers, the resulting injuries to friends and neighbours, and his resignation that very same day. He shares other stories from his life, which he wrote in a history for his children, about growing up in Port Arthur, his hockey career, and his work in carpentry and real estate. He also mentions his views on the downturn in grain traffic through Thunder Bay.

Keywords: Grain elevator explosions; SWP Pool 4B explosion; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Manitoba Pool Elevators; Alberta Wheat Pool; AWP Pool 9; Grain handling; Boxcar shovelling; Grain varieties; Workplace accidents and injuries; Healthy & safety; Labour unions; Carpentry

Time, Speaker, Narrative
OM: Go ahead.
EE: Well, it's been a pleasure to be in your home this afternoon, Mr. Ripku. We can start then by my asking you to put your name on the recording and your place and date of birth—which is repeating what I've already jotted down—and then we'll get into things.
JR: Yes, yes. Okay. I was born in June of--.
EE: Your name is?

JR: Oh, my name is Joe Ripku, and I was born on June the 9th, 1930, in the old city of Port Arthur in Current River. I was born in the house in the bed because the doctors come there because they had a small hospital here then. So, I was there. Then after that I went to the school, Claude Garton school, for a few years there.

EE: In Current River?

JR: Current River, yeah. Then I moved downtown to Lincoln Street where the post office is now. Then later on it was bought up by the post office, and then we moved from there to 354 Ambrose Street, up sort of in the hill. Right next to us was--.

EE: The higher level.

JR: Yeah, the higher, the medium. There was a children's shelter there years ago, and now it's got apartments in it now. Yeah, so we used to live there.

EE: Okay, on Ambrose.

JR: On Ambrose Street, yeah.

EE: And you went to Central School, then, at first?

JR: Central School, yeah. Went for Grade 7 and 8. John Lowcock was the principal there, and then Chuck Hodgson, he was our teacher there. He's the last one. Chuck Hodgson finally died about a year or so. So, he was almost 100 years old, yeah.

EE: So, the gentleman you first named there would be known by many people as Jack Lowcock, I suppose.

JR: Or Jack, yeah. I thought it was John.

EE: I knew him in his later years.

JR: Okay. He was a good man, too.

EE: Wilda Lowcock was his wife, active with the coalition for Waverley Park in the '90s.

JR: Oh, yeah?

EE: Got to know Wilda pretty well. I got to know her at St. Paul's and Trinity United Church even earlier. So, her husband was a teacher. He was the principal there, was he?

JR: Yeah, principal there, yeah.

EE: And then you went off to high school?

JR: Then I went to high school, Hillcrest High School, after that. Just got my Grade 12, then I went to work in the paper mill. In the meantime, my brother was working there, and my dad was working there. So, in 1953, my brother got killed there in the paper mill.

EE: Which mill in the provincial--?

JR: Abitibi at the top end there. At the far end.

EE: Abitibi. What, the Thunder Bay--?

JR: Thunder Bay, yeah. Abitibi, yeah, yeah.

EE: Thunder Bay Mill, yes.

JR: So, he got killed in the machine there in the finishing room.

EE: Good grief.

JR: He got caught. He had a hose. Okay. They didn't show him about the hose. They cleaned the paper and that, the finishing paper. Well, they usually use it in this hand, but he I think he had it on this side and the hose was behind him! So, when he did that, the hose got caught and pulled him right in. Killed him instantly.

EE: Would, of course, with those huge machines.

JR: So, that was my brother. I had no sister. He was the only one I had.

EE: So, you were left as the only child?

JR: Yes, yes. I was the only child.

EE: So, this was in the '50s?

JR: The '50s.

EE: I understand that your involvement with the grain trade was earlier than that.

JR: Yes, yeah, just a student. I was a student.

EE: So, you were in what grade the preceding year?

JR: I guess I was in Grade 11. Yeah. 1945, I'd be 15.

EE: Had you had summer jobs before?

JR: Oh, yeah. I had the one job in the paper mill sometimes too. I'd be working on that labour gang, you know, 86 cents an hour.
[Laughing]

EE: Never get rich on that!

JR: Yeah. [Laughs]

EE: So, why did you go to the grain trade that summer or '45?

JR: Well, it was pretty good money, eh.

EE: Better than the paper mill?

JR: Yeah, yeah. So, I went there.

EE: Which elevator?

JR: It was Pool 9 at that time. It was Pool 9. That's Pool 9 here, and there's a slip here where the boat--. This is the elevator that blew up here, Pool 5.

EE: Okay. And Richardson's is on the other side of Pool 9?

JR: It's further down, yeah. Further away like, yeah.

EE: So, it's the group just short of the Port Arthur Shipyard as well.

JR: I think it's gone.

EE: The shipyard was a little further north there.

JR: Yeah, well it's further away. Yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

EE: So, you're working in Pool 9.

JR: Pool 9, yeah.

EE: Maybe we should talk about what it was like to work there first, what your impressions were. We'll hold the drama. Let the drama build here!

JR: Oh, I'll tell you. Right. Okay. When I started working, they gave me the job of shovelling the boxcars. You had a 4x4 shovel and had a chain on it. They would open up the boxcars for the grain, so we'd have to run up there, catch the grain, and go like this and take it all out. Every time you have to run back, and you've got to make sure you hold onto that shovel, the flat shovel, until it's empty in there. Then the worst part was when you work with flax. You know flax is slippery? That was horrible to work with!

[0:05:20]

EE: I was thinking running in grain isn't--. You're clamouring on top of the grain?

JR: That's right! That's right, and your feet are slipping, you know?

EE: At what point would you start? How much grain would there still be in the car?

JR: I guess about this much.

EE: So, sort of three or four feet, a metre or more of--.

JR: Well, it was sort of run out and then we would have to go. Maybe it was four feet high or something like that!

EE: And you're climbing over as best you can?

JR: You're climbing over and almost hitting the ceiling in the boxcar there, you know.

EE: It was still that full sometimes?

JR: Yeah. We had a mask on. Just a thin mask, paper thin mask. That's all we had.

EE: All it did was to catch some of the dust on the outside, I suppose.

JR: Yeah, that didn't catch nothing. [Laughing]

EE: I see. You were mentioning flax is probably the most treacherous one to work with.

JR: Oh, yeah it was. So slippery.

EE: What about the other grains? What are they like?

JR: They had rye and they had flax and they had--.

EE: Wheat?

JR: Wheat, oh yeah. Wheat. Mostly wheat.

EE: What would be a good deal easier to--.

JR: No, it's slippery too. It's runny. It's like running on marbles on that.

EE: Were the guys who did this work fairly young as a rule? You were in your teens, of course.

JR: They were young, yeah. There was some students there too and older guys working there. That was their job, eh. I thought, "Oh, boy! What a job!" A hard job, you know, for 86 cents an hour. Yeah, and then what happened about, let's see, in July I stepped on a nail from the boards as you pull off. It was under the wheat or something that I stepped on it, so they said, "Okay, Joe. You'll have to go work on the dock. Got to clean up and that because we don't want to give you compensation." If they have an injury, their compensation will go up higher, eh? So, they just kept me there.

EE: How bad was the injury? Had it gone through your shoe?

JR: Well, a nail in my foot. About a two-inch nail in my foot.

EE: Broken the skin, I suppose.

JR: Oh, yeah. It went right up almost through my top of my skin there. That hurt! Oh!

EE: Did they send you off to see the doctor then?

JR: Oh, yeah. I went to see the doctor, yeah. But then, like I said, I went back to work.

EE: They pulled the nail out, they got the boot off, your sock and so on. Blood all over the place?

JR: Yeah, yeah. Blood all over! Oh! And it hurt. For about a week it would just go throb like boom, boom, boom, because it was trying to heal inside, trying to coagulate.

EE: Did you get any kind of time off at all?

JR: No, no. They kept me on the job. They said, “Joe, you go on the dock here,” the slip with the boats, “and you go clean up around there.” That was my job.

EE: They weren’t watching you to be sure you were on your feet working all the time?

JR: Oh, no, no.

EE: Just as long as you did something useful?

JR: Just something to do! [Laughs] That’s why they won’t pay compensation! [Laughs]

EE: So they didn’t have to admit to workers comp that you’d suffered an injury.

JR: Yeah, yeah. That’s the way it was, eh.

EE: Did you see a lot of that, people getting injured?

JR: No, not much at all. No. I guess I was the only one that I knew of, like you know.

EE: You were the lucky one to discover how the system was worked.

JR: Yeah, oh yeah. Yeah.

EE: So, gradually it healed?

JR: It healed a little bit. I kept working out there and then I’m working on the dock here. Now, I was right here. The elevator’s here, that Pool 5, and I’m sort of looking at the boat here. Then all of a sudden, I hear *Brrrrrboom!* A big mushroom come up. The whole top of the elevator blew right up, eh, from that spontaneous combustion. I look and there’s wheat and there’s all these concrete—like big as this table—concrete pieces falling all over, falling in the boat here too.

EE: Your table here is—I want to do imperial—but it’s--.

JR: That's about six feet.

EE: Yeah, six feet.

JR: They had three--.

EE: It's more than six feet long, isn't it actually? It must be 5x7.

JR: They had three-metres sized concrete, like it's on that paper that I have, in here.

EE: Right. The history that you've written.

JR: Big, like big! Now, I'm not sure if it sunk the boat or not in the bay there. I'm not sure.

OM: How far across the slip would you have been?

JR: I'd say about 150 feet. Not far at all.

OM: Were you looking up into the sky at that point?

JR: Yeah, I was sort of looking. I was resting. I was looking at the boat here, you know. I liked to watch the boat. The guys were working and that, and then all of a sudden, that explosion. I looked, and then after the explosion I looked up there and there was a couple of guys walking on a beam or something like that, and they dropped into the bin. Well, they were pretty well dead.

EE: It probably did kill them.

JR: They were sort of blew up and everything. So, they just went in the wheat, either suffocated or died from their wounds like, blown right up. There was 17 guys were killed in that elevator explosion and 37 men were wounded.

EE: What else do you remember about what you saw there?

[0:10:02]

JR: Well, like I said, I looked--.

EE: You were one of the few real eyewitnesses!

JR: I think I'm the only one because I was on the dock here. I looked and I looked. A few minutes later, I'd be looking and there was a different elevator there, some guys were coming there from the other elevators to see what happened there. Maybe an hour or so later, I'd hear the firetruck coming and that. But I think they were at the back because I was in the front of the elevator here facing the lake. But they were--.

EE: Where the loading would take place for it as well.

JR: Yeah, yeah, like for the boat.

EE: The boat that was tied up, was it tied up on your side or on their side?

JR: On their side.

EE: Next to the elevator?

JR: Close to this elevator there, yeah. They had these conveyor belts that would take the wheat off into the boats.

EE: And they were, in fact, loading the boat at the--?

JR: Like I say, one month I was there! July, and then I think it was August the 7th that it blew up? After lunch, it was after lunch or something like that. Yeah. I couldn't believe it! About an hour later, my dad and my brother came down to see which elevator blew up because I was in Pool 9. So, they just left their job and come to see me. They came down, but I didn't see them. But I went to the office. I said, "I quit!" [Laughing] So, I quit the next day. I said, "I don't even want to go to work!" So, I quit then and there.

EE: Did other people quit as well?

JR: Oh, I wouldn't know if they quit.

EE: No, you're not aware of anyone else quitting?

JR: No, no, no,

EE: What did they say to you?

JR: “Okay, Joe.” That’s it. What are they going to say, eh? Big explosion, people are killed and that. They didn’t say, “Oh, well you stay.” No. I quit. That’s it. They don’t pay me nothing after that. Then I went home.

EE: They probably envied your ability to leave!

JR: I’m still alive when you think of it and look in there. Oh! It was a nice day too. It was a nice sunny day. I think it was August the 7th.

EE: It coincided almost exactly with the explosion, the dropping of the first atomic bomb.

JR: Oh, ’45! Oh, yeah, yeah.

EE: I was checking federal, provincial gatherings at the time to work on post-war planning, and so I was in the Winnipeg Free Press. The explosion in Port Arthur really rivalled--. Because initially the bomb had been dropped and people didn’t know much about it. Took a few days for the word about the atomic bomb to be put out about what actually happened.

JR: Oh yeah. Might have taken a week to see what was happening in Japan there, you know.

EE: Yes, so the Port Arthur explosion was bigger news than the bomb that hit Hiroshima.

JR: Yeah. Oh, everybody--. People would go in there with cars to see what was happening and that, you know. The firetrucks were there, and like I say, the firetruck didn’t have ladders high enough there. Here it shows who the firemen were, were climbing up there right to the roof somehow. They had ropes and they were coming down and trying to get some of the guys that are there.

EE: That had fallen in the bins?

JR: Yeah. Not in the bin, no, the ones that were still alive!

EE: I see!

JR: And wounded.

EE: Were the steps that they used, or that ladders that they used, to get up to the top, would they have been blown out as well? Were these fellows up there actually caught?

JR: Well, you know what, I think they had to--. Here's the elevator, and their ladder, they couldn't get up this high at the top. So, they were here some place.

EE: This is the firemen?

JR: Yeah, the firemen. They got in here somehow. They brought ropes, and they went up to the roof. Then they threw the rope down, and a couple of firemen were looking into the different windows and that. I think they were getting a few guys out of there to bring them back out of there, the wounded ones.

EE: Yes. Did the work stop at your elevator that day?

JR: No! They just kept going. Elevator's an elevator, eh? [Laughs]

EE: Grain's got to keep moving.

JR: No, no elevator stopped.

EE: It all stopped next door.

JR: Yeah, oh yeah, that's for sure.

EE: But not in yours.

JR: I'll never forget that explosion. Ah! Just awful. I had dreams for years after that because I seen these guys walking on the beam. I guess there was a walkway, and they were there and all of a sudden, they fall in the bin. There was wheat in there, so I presume they suffocated when they fell into the wheat. The wheat will bring you down, will suck you down, eh?

EE: Certainly, if it's moving.

JR: It's loose wheat, so. Yeah. I couldn't get over that.

EE: I think the most curious interview we've had in this regard was someone who was working in the field near Murillo. The countryside must have been less treed than it is now.

JR: Oh, yeah.

EE: At least so I think. He said that he was walking behind the horses with the machinery, dead inline with Port Arthur that very day. He suddenly saw, you know, a kind of a brown puff and the workhouse sort of popping up. He said he saw it from near Murillo.

[0:15:11]

JR: Oh, yeah? You could see it from a long way!

EE: So, you and he are the two witnesses to actually watching it! [Laughing]

JR: Well, there you go! Well, I was right there. I thought, "Wow!" 15 years old, you know? Oh, jeez. I got out of there. Yeah, yeah. I was scared for a couple of years even to work even. I thought, you know--. But like I said, I went to the paper mill to work on the work gang there. Mr. Dorn was the big boss there. There was the Dorns and the Duke families in Current River.

EE: Oh, the Dukes!

JR: There was always a rivalry between them. There was always somebody fighting somebody.

EE: I've known some of the Dukes.

JR: Well, they had about 14, 15 kids each! [Laughing] Yeah, like that McCoys and that, eh? Yeah, they'd be having fights after school in the area. The rink is there now.

EE: Did you find yourself telling the story to your friends and to others about what you had--?

JR: Oh, yeah. I told many people. My kids know all about it. Many, many of them.

EE: Were other boys interested in hearing about what you'd seen?

JR: Well, older people. I didn't tell young people because they're not interested in that anyways. Once you get as an adult, they'll know, so. [Clock chimes] One of my clocks. [Laughing]

EE: Should've wrung 17 times! Owen?

OM: When it happened, how did you feel? How did you react?

JR: Scared! The flame went up about 300 feet. The mushroom just went like that. Looking at it, there was fire. I guess the wheat was on fire and the combustion, they were still burning the dust like in there. Spontaneous combustion.

EE: Dust and the ignition would ignite other things.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

OM: Did you feel a blast at all?

JR: No, I didn't feel the blast, no, because it went up.

OM: Oh, okay.

JR: It didn't go out, and all the concrete--.

OM: [Inaudible]

JR: Yeah, straight up, and all the concrete from there dropped like that. There was little pieces falling beside me, but that was nothing because it was about 160 feet away. But the big chunks were falling all over the place.

EE: So, it was 300 feet up, you'd say, the fireball was it actually?

JR: Oh, at least 300 feet. If the guy could see from Murillo--.

EE: Yes, well that's--.

JR: He's there, and if it's up like that, oh yeah. It was just flew right up like that. Just like an atomic bomb, the mushroom, go all the way up. Yeah. So anyway, that was one of my greatest things that I ever seen.

OM: Was there a rush of people towards the--?

JR: Not right away. I think the firemen came maybe about an hour or so, and then different people from the other elevators came to look to see what's happening, you know? They didn't come to here, they were right here or there, close to it.

EE: I wonder, would the office at this elevator have been--. It's Pool 5?

JR: Pool 5. This is Pool 9.

EE: Would the office at Pool 5 have been blown out as well so that there would be no one to call the fire department initially?

JR: I guess so.

EE: Because an hour seems quite a long time to wait, doesn't it?

JR: Oh yeah, yeah. At least an hour.

OM: I think there were barracks in Current River, and they went.

JR: Yeah, there were the army barracks there.

OM: I think they came down.

JR: In the Casino, like, there was the army barracks, and there was a big place where the dancehall, which was used by the army for meals. It was like a cafeteria there. But, like I said, there was people mulling around there.

EE: How long did the excitement continue around there? Through most of the afternoon?

JR: All afternoon, yeah. The next day I wasn't there. That's it! [Laughs]

EE: What did you do the next day?

JR: Well, I didn't do nothing. I was sort of scared for a while. I just kind of recuperate, eh? You know, the shock! I'm 15 years old and I see this happening, so.

EE: Did you go to see any grown up? What was your father doing?

JR: He was an oiler at Abitibi mill, at Thunder Bay, up there. He was an oiler there.

EE: At the mill as well. Did he provide any kind of consolation advice to you about this? Or your mother?

JR: No, no. He was Ukrainian, you know, and he hardly talked English, eh? He just had a job. He was an oiler.

EE: You'd learned Ukrainian though, I suppose?

JR: Oh, I talk fluently Ukrainian. I understand it too.

EE: So, he could have comforted you?

JR: Oh, a little bit. He say, "Oh, I'm--." [Speaks Ukrainian] That means, "Good thing you weren't in that elevator." They were hugging me like, and my brother.

EE: Yeah, just be grateful you're alive. You're 15 and you're going to survive. Well, you had survived!

JR: Oh, yeah, I survived.

OM: There was a 16-year-old who was in that elevator when it came down.

JR: Well, there was some young guys there, yeah. I remember there was a John Hordy, his face was all burnt and everything. There was a Frank Petrone, there was a lot of young guys that worked part time like me!

[0:20:14]

EE: Did you know any of the ones who were--? Had you known them earlier?

JR: Oh, yeah, I knew them all. Yeah, I knew them from school. Yeah, from the high school there, yeah.

EE: Sure, from Hillcrest.

JR: And they suffered and suffered, like you know. All burnt and that. They had a tough life, yeah. When you're burnt like that, the girls, you know, they look at you and that. The John Hordy, he married a girl—he had a girl at the time—and she was a redhead. She stuck by him, and they had about 3 kids. So, he was very fortunate that she stuck with him.

EE: Redheads are supposed to be more sensitive to pain. [Laughing]

JR: Oh, is that right?

EE: That's what the scientists tell us! For whatever reason, something about their genetic makeup it makes redheads more sensitive to pain. [Laughs] So, maybe she felt his pain and sympathized with him!

JR: I think so, yeah. And you know what happened in the future? They had a couple of kids there. There was two kids they had—maybe 5 or 6. There was three kids, and the ice was on the river and that, the Current River. So, the kids were 6 or 7 years old, and his two kids and one other kid, they drowned. They went on the ice and just—*pwwt!*—that's it. Oh, that was a horrible time.

EE: This was the Hordy family?

JR: Pardon? Hordy, yeah. John Hordy. Yeah, yeah. So, everybody has their cross to bear, I'll tell you that. Everybody! No matter who you are.

EE: Well, we were saying we almost got hit, partly due to my carelessness—I should have been driving a bit more slowly there on Elm—but we were thinking that this trip that we were making was jinxed, that we were in for an accident. So far, so good!

OM: We have to get back yet, Ernie! [Laughing]

EE: Yes, indeed.

OM: I know there were inquiries afterwards, so were you ever interviewed on what happened?

JR: Never. No one ever said nothing. I told some of the guy at work there that I seen it, but never really--. No one said--.

EE: The newspaper didn't come calling?

JR: No, nobody called. No, no. They didn't want to because, you know, all the elevators were there working and that, so.

EE: Did you get the sense, in fact, it was being played down somewhat?

JR: I think it was played down, sure. Well, there were about 15 elevators then, and they say spontaneous combustion. So, you get C.D. Howe or somebody to check it all up and stuff like that, and then they say it was spontaneous combustion. Then, after that, they start cleaning the dust and that, saved the dust for farms or something like that.

OM: Pellets?

JR: For pellets! Yeah.

EE: Oh, they were able to turn it into feed. A cash crop.

JR: Live and learn, eh. All these places, they live and learn.

EE: Yes. You didn't understand the spontaneous combustion right off? You didn't realize that that's what actually--.

JR: No, I just said, “Well, you put a switch on and—*phwwt!*—it’s gone.” Like you can do it in the house too. They got gas leak from your furnace, and you can smell it a little bit, and if you put your switch on it can just blow up your house. That happens all the time. People put their switch on and boom!

EE: Yeah, if you smell gas at all, get out!

JR: Oh, yeah. Get out.

EE: You worry about anything where there might be a spark.

JR: Run out of the house, yeah.

EE: Get the heck out and call someone, yeah.

JR: Yeah, that was my--.

EE: Well, it made you--. And then when your brother died, that would be, what, eight years later?

JR: Oh, that was horrible.

EE: Was it in '53, did you say?

JR: He died in 1953. I got married in 1952, and he died in 1953. The same year, I had what you call a deep-vein thrombosis in my leg, but I was a hockey player then. I'd tell you about that. But anyways, when I got the clot, I couldn't play hockey after. I was 23 years old. I was finished for hockey. Before that, I was on the Memorial--. You remember the Port Arthur West End Bruins? Well, I was on their team then. I was 17 years old then. There was me, Barton Bradley, and Dave Creighton. We came up from juvenile, and they brought us up. So, I was one of the hockey players.

EE: How far did the Bruins go that year?

JR: They won the cup! The Memorial Cup.

EE: Oh, they won the Memorial Cup?

JR: Oh, yeah. I just come back last week from the Hall of Fame Hockey. I wanted to see it. So, I looked all over. We were there five hours. I took my son-in-law, I said, "I'll pay to see it." I was walking for three hours, and I was getting tired. I realized I'm 82, get a wheelchair! So, we got a wheelchair and wheeled me around for an hour there to look at all the pictures and that.

EE: Was there a Memorial Cup section?

JR: Well, it just showed the cup, just showed the cup, yeah, with the name on it.

EE: I see, right. So, you've been at the Sports Hall of Fame in Thunder Bay, I suppose?

JR: Oh, yeah. I been there many a time, yeah.

EE: Because that, of course, would be the place where your win would be memorialized!

JR: Yeah, yeah. [Laughs] Well, I've even got a picture here of our team when we won the cup, just before we won the Memorial Cup. They took a picture of our team behind Maple Leaf Gardens on the sidewalk. So, we were all there with--.

[0:25:22]

OM: That looks like Creighton there, is it?

JR: Let me put my glasses on. I'll tell you who they are. That's Red Olsen. That's our coach, Ed Lauzon. That's Red Olsen. That was Peter Durham—he's passed away. That was Benny Voit—he's got Alzheimer's right now. That was, I think it was Danny Lewicki, and that was Art Harris. That was Jerome Zager—he was the spare goalie—and that's me. That's Robby Wrightsell, Barton Bradley, Bill Tomlinson—he was the president. Ted Whalen, he was the manager there. Then here is the--.

EE: Who's in the centre there?

JR: Oh, Sike Hedge. Remember Sike Hedge? He was a real avid curler.

EE: Owen's got to have the memory. I came to town in '78, so. Yeah, so it's Owen that--.

OM: 19--.

JR: That's Danny Lewicki—he was a pickup. There was three pickups: Danny Lewicki, Al Childs, and Johansson. That's Al Baccari—he passed away a long time ago. This was Alfie Childs—he passed away a long time ago. I think this was Bert Fonso, Buck Forslund, Rudy Migay—he was the captain. He was a very good player. Oh! Good stick handler. That's Bobby Fero, and I forget--. This is Hygaard. I forget his name now.

EE: You've got a good memory, Joe!

JR: The trainer, the trainer. I was just thinking about it now.

EE: Who's got the original of the picture?

JR: Well, I've got one on my wall here.

EE: Oh, you have one framed?

JR: Yeah.

EE: I was going to say, when you have a picture of this sort, you'd want to take it down and get it framed! The framing post will do a good job down on--.

JR: My son-in-law did that! He put the names on there and everything in my--.

EE: Oh, very nice!

JR: I'll show you! You want to see it?

OM: Sure!

JR: Did you want to turn this off or--?

OM: Well, we'll see it after.

JR: We'll see it after. There's no hurry for it now.

EE: Just in case we've got something--.

OM: Maybe I'll take your picture beside your picture there.

JR: Yeah, okay!

EE: Yeah, that would be a good way to go. In the death of your brother on top of what you'd seen eight years earlier, did that have you thinking about how dangerous work was?

JR: Oh, yeah. And you know what? They wouldn't take no blame or nothing, the paper mill. About a few years later, what they did then--. Okay, this is the paper roll where they rolled it, and my brother was holding like that. They would put pipe here, pipe here, so that you couldn't get past the pipe. A railing, so you couldn't reach. That was later. It was always too late, eh? Same as over here. Accidents. No bridge or--.

EE: One person dies and then they do something.

JR: Yeah! Then they think, "Well, we should do that." Like right now on John Street here, we have a sidewalk coming up from Valley Street. You come up John, and at Chercover here, the sidewalk goes a little bit and then it stops. There's two people that have property, and they didn't want to have the sidewalk on their property. There's about 230 feet, so there's no sidewalk there. Then it goes up and there's more sidewalk. I said, "The people that walk on the sidewalk, they go on the road part!" I told that to Gertuga. I told him, I said, "You know what? There should be a sidewalk there. Cut the trees down that are there. Who cares about the trees? Put the sidewalk in there." But I say someone's going to get killed, mind you, and then they'll say, "Oh, we better put a sidewalk there." That's too late. Now's the time to do it. But!

EE: Was the sidewalk being built on peoples' property?

JR: No, no, on the city property. It's on city property. Like come on! I said, "They're only people."

EE: I'm going to say that's bloody awful.

JR: Oh, jeez! I was so mad.

EE: How in the world would the city yield to that?

JR: Yeah, yeah. If you go up, you'll see. There's a little house on the corner, sidewalk, and then there's two houses—there's a new house and another one there—and there's no--.

EE: Yes, I think I've canvassed along there, and I think I've noticed that. I've got a vague mental picture of what you're describing.

JR: And people are walking on the side there!

EE: That's just plain disgusting.

JR: Oh! But anyways, so that's one little issue I have here. [Laughing]

EE: And a very good one! When did you decide to be a carpenter?

JR: Okay, I decided when I--. I used to buy and sell real estate, eh, in town. Buy a lot or something and sell it. I like doing that.

EE: Does that buy the groceries?

JR: Oh, yeah. I never lost money on real estate. I'd double up or whatever.

EE: So, you actually were dealing in real estate was your occupation?

JR: Oh, yeah. I'll spend my income tax too as a, what do you call it, real estate man. The first year they said no, then I sold a few lots, and they said, "Well, you're in the business." So, instead of getting a 50 percent discount on the income tax, I paid the full shot. So, I said, "That's okay. I'll pay the full shot." So, I'd buy here and there. I bought this 15 years before I had the subdivision here.

[0:30:28]

EE: Yes, it takes patience. You have to be patient.

JR: Yeah. I think I paid \$5 for a one-acre lot here. I bought five lots.

OM: Well, that's a good return on your investment!

JR: Then I join onto here, you know. I had Bruno Construction do everything—paving, sidewalks, sewer, and water.

EE: Servicing it, yeah.

JR: And he was a good man too. Yeah, Silvio Gregorio.

EE: Carpentering was done on the side?

JR: No, that was my full-time job.

EE: When did you start doing that?

JR: Okay, I was—let me see—1970, about '73. 1973.

EE: That's 20 years after--.

JR: I told my wife, "I'm going to buy a lot and build a house." "Well, you don't know how to build." But I learned, slowly.
[Laughs]

EE: So, you'd been—I won't say dabbling—you'd been dealing in real estate and then you decided after 15 or 20 years of that that you were going--?

JR: What happened, I bought that property—that College Park property—with my lawyer. We were partners. I made them a bundle of money there, and then I went to be a carpenter after that. I went golfing the first year in the summer, I thought, "I'm going to go golfing. I'm retired at 40," I said. I'm going there and I see these guys, they're old guys, they're 65 and 70, they're hardly going. I said, "You know what? I'm 40 years old, what am I retired for?" [Laughing] So, I bought a lot, and I started building after that. All of these are all of these buildings I put up here. These are all my buildings I put up.

EE: Did you receive training as a--?

JR: No, nothing. In fact, I don't think I even knew what part of the hammer to hold! [Laughing] The head or the--. See I was a building--.

EE: Oh, well you knew that! Had you done work at home? Did your father build?

JR: No, no. See, I was a building inspector for a couple of years in Port Arthur.

EE: What training did you have for that?

JR: Just grade 12, that's all. That's all there was, yeah. Then what happened, I lost the job because after the war, the guys that came back, they had seniority. So, this one—I won't tell the name—but he got the job because he had seniority. He was in the army, so, you know.

EE: Did you go to building inspecting right after your graduation? Because that would have been one--.

JR: No, no, it was few years after. I can't keep it in order, but--.

EE: But it was a veteran who go the job then?

JR: He got the job, yeah. Anyway, he didn't do a good job anyways, but he knew nothing about construction. He knew office work. [Laughing]

EE: Of course, you knew a hell of a lot yourself! But you learned?

JR: I remember old Tom. You remember Tom Jones Sr.? He come in there for a permit there and that. Big cigar, big hat. "Goddammit!" Oops. Better watch my language. He'd be swearing.

EE: If you're going to tell the story, you may have to do some swearing I've heard! [Laughs]

JR: I told the old man, I said, "You know what? You don't swear in our office because we have ladies working in here." He was using the F-language and all that. So, he looked at me you know, then after that we were friends. [Laughing] He took it to heart,

like, “Whoa, this guy, he’s telling me off!” You know? He was in the hole so much, income tax and all that kind of stuff, but he built up the company there, Tom Jones. Tom Jones. Well, Tom Jones Jr. and Peter Young, the lawyer, we used to go for coffee because I was retired and I was building and that, so I didn’t have to work for nobody. [Laughing] That was funny. My biggest job there, I built a six-plex.

EE: I was going to say, it was top of the heap, I think, when you passed them over. This building?

JR: This is the one.

EE: Okay. Same building?

JR: No, it’s a different--. That’s my son-in-law. But this is the building, my pride and joy.

EE: On Victoria Avenue.

JR: I drew the plans, framed it. My wife was helping me frame it, my son was helping me. It took nine months from scratch to finish to build it. In here, I have a dentist. I’m renting it to the main floor, the dentist, and upstairs I have two floors for myself. I had 900 square feet per two-bedroom unit at the back and the front too. So, I kept the two stories myself, and I built the three--. I had 1800 square feet for myself. I’m going to live there, eh? Ten years I’ll live there. I had three bedroom, had a family room, had two bathrooms in there, washer and dryer. It was self-contained, and I lived there. My wife and I we lived there. So, we made our living through that.

EE: Well, it’s one of the ways to go because I had an uncle in Winnipeg who was a carpenter, a contractor--.

JR: My family would help, my son-in-laws would help me too, lift walls and stuff like that. But I would put up the walls, and I would put on the floor joist myself, all the floor joists up there. Ordinarily, our docks nailed. None of the boom, boom, boom, boom stuff!

[0:35:11]

EE: Hammer work in those days!

JR: Oh boy! And we used the ardox nails. They're like screws, eh? If you make a mistake, you almost have to have a hacksaw to cut it off.

EE: They want to stay in.

JR: I would put the floor joist on, and then I put the bridging—like this, the cross pieces there—and my son would help me. I'd lay it out and he'd nail all the bridging in there. Then the plywood, I'd get Peterson Lumber and he would--. No. Nor-Ont Supply on Memorial Avenue, I'd get all of my material from him. He would drop the plywood on the roof, then I would scatter it around to put it in place and that, you know. It had tongue and groove, so we had to bang it with a hammer and 2x4 to get it together.

EE: And you did all of this work by yourself?

JR: All myself, yeah. I told my wife, "Look it! My hands, small little hands, and I did all that work." Yeah, cutting and everything.

EE: Did you ever think of hiring some guys to work with?

JR: Well, once in a while. I wouldn't do the roof. I would hire the roof out because I said, "I won't do that, no."

EE: Yeah, because you would need someone--.

JR: This is a truss roof, so I hired a guy to put the truss roof on. They had the machine, eh? So, they put the truss roof, put the plywood, and put the wood fascia on there. Then the guys put the aluminum on after, yeah, and there was 52 doors and windows on the outside. My son-in-law, he's a carpenter—his name is Paul Facca—he's well-known here. He works for Michieli, and he works for them, does all the finishing work for them.

OM: Who did your brickwork?

JR: Pardon?

OM: Who did your brickwork?

JR: Oh, boy. Just the front, I'm trying to think. Morrison or Mason or something like that, anyway. It's such a long time ago. Nick Torpey, I think it was, yeah. We were all young, eh?

EE: But having a finishing carpenter available is great because that's a skill you want someone to apply very carefully.

JR: Yeah, yeah. He would hang up all the--. We would both build the cabinet, the kitchen cabinets. We'd use melamine board, eh? So, we'd cut the pieces, and then they say, "Okay, Joe. You do the rest." So, I have to have the doors to cut the groove. When you put the plastic on, and you put in on and go like that, and you hammer it down and glue. I did all the doors myself. He cut all the doors for me. He made the framework and everything.

EE: Mounting doors all by yourself is not an easy thing to do either!

JR: No, I know! Yeah.

EE: Put the hinges on and--. It would be nice to have at least one pair of hands there to hold things with you.

JR: Yeah! No, like I said, I was a one-man team [laughing] and I enjoyed every bit!

EE: Was that partly because you just didn't want all the paperwork and so on and so forth of employing others or--?

JR: No, no. I just took it on myself.

EE: You were happy to do it by yourself?

JR: I was happy to do it. My wife wanted to work with me. She worked with me. We were married 57 years, and she passed away almost 5 years ago. Yeah. She was my right-hand man, and she would get up on the roof nailing about a foot away from the edge. Like she's nailing, and I said, "Be careful, Nettie!" I said, "Be careful there, you know." She'd be, "Oh, I'll watch." She had boots with steel toes, no helmet. [Laughs] Nobody come around! Anyways, we would do that, and my son was helping us too there. We'd get it up, get it all done.

EE: No one ever fell off?

JR: No, no! No one got hurt or nothing.

EE: No workers comp claim to be filed! [Laughing]

JR: No, no, nothing at all, no, no.

EE: And, of course, when you're working by yourself and for yourself, in that sense—you're with family—you can also pace it--. You can do as much work each day as you can. You didn't work in the wintertime I don't suppose?

JR: No, no. Just summertime.

EE: Take care of the golfing season.

JR: It was easy to sell them days. You built it, you sell it. Not that much money, but you made money there anyways. Yeah. Every winter we go to Florida, Bahamas, or Aruba for a trip, my wife and I, a couple of weeks at a time—and Florida. Every second year we took our kids. I have four kids—three girls and a boy. We went to Florida, Bahamas. It was cheap to go then! You pay maybe \$700 for two-weeks' holidays in the Bahamas. Now you pay almost \$700 a day in the Bahamas there. So, we did a lot of that stuff, travelling.

EE: A long way from the Ukrainian village.

JR: Oh, yeah! [Laughing]

EE: Was your wife Ukrainian as well?

JR: Oh, yeah. She was full Ukrainian.

EE: So, you could speak Ukrainian at home?

JR: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Did the children learn Ukrainian?

JR: No. Little bit, but they didn't learn. I kept my language up, and my wife kept her language up too.

EE: So, if there was something you wanted to discuss in private, it was done in Ukrainian?

JR: You talk Ukrainian. You got it! [Laughing] That's right on the button. We'd talk, and they'd say, "Dad what are you doing? What are you talking about?" "Oh, we're just talking." [Laughs]

[0:40:00]

EE: My parents did—I'm the oldest of eight—and they would do it in German or even in Low German. But, of course, if they do it enough, the kids begin to pick it up. [Laughs] It was probably in Low German because we were speaking German generally, so it would have been the dialect. Then a neighbouring family moved in for a while and they spoke Low German all the time, so we picked up that. So then we knew what our parents were--.

JR: You probably picked up some swear words, eh? [Laughing] Every language has swear words.

EE: Yes, there surely were some in there. [Laughing]

JR: Like I said, I was busy, busy, busy. I played hockey. Okay, I played hockey when we won the Memorial Cup. After that I had signed with Boston Bruins because we were affiliated with Boston Bruins.

EE: Farm team, eh?

JR: So, I had signed with Boston, and they gave me \$300 for signing. Big deal, eh, 300 bucks? It was a C-form, so they sent you wherever they want.

OM: Basically, a chattel.

JR: Yeah, a chattel!

EE: Into their farm system?

JR: Yeah, so we went to training camp to Hershey, Pennsylvania with all the pros and that. Oh, that was a big deal! We took a train. Two days to get there by train. We put our shoes up out there and the porter would polish them up in the old days, you know. Oh, yeah! Signed a bill for the food.

OM: Would you have known Pentti Lund at that time?

JR: Oh, yeah, I knew Pentti. He was across the road from me on Ambrose Street, and Joe. Joe too, yeah. He passed away a long time ago.

OM: So, your thrombosis, was it a hockey injury?

JR: No! They didn't even know what it was there, the doctors.

OM: What did you have a swelling?

JR: Oh, my leg was all swollen and that. The doctor, Dr. Shahroar or somebody, said, "Oh, you got like milk leg," like when women get pregnant. I said, "Well, I'm not a woman. I'm not pregnant!" So, I went to St. Mary's hospital in Duluth.

OM: You were playing hockey at that time?

JR: Yeah, I was playing hockey then, yeah.

OM: Where were you at that time?

JR: Pardon?

OM: Where were you playing hockey?

JR: I was playing here, the Bearcats.

OM: Okay, the Bearcats.

JR: The last year, but in the meantime, I played down east. In 1948, I played for Kitchener-Waterloo. They used to call them the Flying Dutchmen, and Bobby Bauer was the coach, the Bauer brothers. Then the next year I played for Owen Sound Mercuries, and then when I played there, I got homesick, and I got married. I came home before it ended. They sent me some money for making money there, so. But I got married in 1952 to my girlfriend, so we got married for 57 years.

OM: I've got a tough question for you. Who was the captain of the Bearcats when you were playing with them?

JR: Ooh, let me think now. Gee. It wasn't Bill Mackie. I'm trying to think. Hmm! I don't know who it would be now.

OM: I had an old picture of a Bearcat, black and white, but he was a captain. But nobody has been able to identify it.

JR: Oh, I see. I'd have to look at the picture.

OM: Yes, I'll arrange for that.

EE: You'll have to have coffee together somewhere.

OM: Yes, that's right! [Laughing]

JR: I've got, like-- This is our junior. After the Memorial Cup, we played again and we went out west to play for the Memorial Cup again, but we lost to Regina Pats as we were going out. So, we lost then. I kept all these pictures all these years.

EE: Well, you should have, sure! You'd want to get them framed.

OM: They're vintage!

JR: You know, so many of my friends are dead. This guy just died, Pete Polowski, in the paper the other day. We had like a Bowry gang in Current River. We got together and that. I'm the only guy left now from the gang, the Bowry Boys from Current River.

EE: That's the downside of living on. Your friends are gone.

JR: Yeah, yeah, they're all gone. But you got to survive! Do what you want, travel.

EE: You look in superb good health, I must say!

JR: Oh, yeah. I'll be 83 pretty soon!

EE: Good for another 10 or whatever.

JR: I lost that weight, that 60 pounds, you know. So, I feel great!

EE: Skin does contract when you lose the weight?

JR: Oh, yeah! Yeah, that's the next year, the picture there.

EE: Because I've been just sort of whittling away at my weight a little bit over the last way.

JR: You know, it's the toughest thing. When I lost that 65 pounds, that was the most struggling thing that I could do. I was eating salads every dinner. I didn't have no red meat. I'd eat fish or turkey or chicken and my salad. During the day if I'm hungry, I would have a fruit or a vegetable I chewed on. That was just losing weight all the time there.

OM: A lot of these people played for the Bearcats in the '50s and '60s too.

JR: Oh, yeah. I'm sure of that. Oh, yeah, yeah.

EE: Had you enjoyed red meat a lot before that?

JR: Oh, well we always had steak when we played hockey, eh? We'd have steak and carrots and maybe a small potato. We'd be playing, the team would pay for it.

EE: You get used to enjoying that kind of food and you can afford to buy red meat, given the rich real estate operator you were!

[0:45:10]

JR: Oh, yeah. I used to love that real estate. All the guys--. My kids, they give me a nickname. They call me Chief, I said, because I did everything for them. I built their houses too while they were working! They were working and I'm doing the work like I'm doing, footing and everything else. They would come after and lift up the outside walls when we got plywood.

EE: Because you'd nail them down while lying on the ground and they just need to be erected.

JR: Yeah! The plywood on the flooring and the joist, and they'd come after and lift the wall. Then I'd do the inside walls. I built each kid a house. I built two of them here for them. There was one just over, second door over. It looks like my front, and my daughter's over here five doors down. I helped them build that one. My other daughter, I helped them build on Vaughn Crescent, a house there. I used to love that!

EE: That all worked well because these things in a family can sometimes kind of create difficulties and so on.

JR: Yeah, three girls and a boy. You know what right now? I told them, "You guys are within a mile of each other." There's two in River Terrace here and there's one daughter here—my youngest one—and my son-in-law Paul, he lives on Spence Street, just off of Victor Street there. I say, "You know what? I've got you guys like this like a big turkey wing. You're in my wing like that!" [Laughing] We all get along good. My son-in-laws get along good with each other. One needs help, they all help.

EE: That's terrific!

JR: Oh, I say we have such a good family.

EE: That's a great achievement.

JR: I have eight grandchildren and four great grandchildren. I enjoy them all. We have a party at Easter and a party at Christmas. We all get together. Then birthday parties and that. I always buy the turkeys for the parties. [Laughing]

EE: I see! Maybe we should return to the grain trade to this extent.

JR: Oh, okay! [Laughing]

EE: I should ask you, you've lived in this city all of your life?

JR: All my life, yeah.

EE: You've watched things change over the years. Have you had thoughts about what was going on in the elevators? Had you had friends in the elevators?

JR: Oh, I had friends there too. Oh, yeah. You know what I think? When the union came, eh, remember that Frank Mazur?

EE: Indeed.

JR: He was here, and you know what? They were always saying, “More money! More money!” So, in the end, the elevators, that’s it! They shift to either Churchill from Winnipeg or go out on the West Coast. All the elevators started closing after that. They were getting too much money, you know what I mean?

EE: So, you blame the unions for--?

JR: I blame the union for it, yeah. It was doing good without them, like they were getting good money and that. No, but the union, hungry for money, money you know. Bah! What’re you going to do? Yeah.

EE: You never belonged to a union yourself, I don’t suppose?

JR: No, no, I never did. No, no, never did because I was on my own. Yeah, so.

EE: Is there anyone else that you would think of as affecting the way in which the grain trade has developed?

JR: Well, I knew Bob Southern, he used to be with the grain handlers, eh? I knew a few guys who worked there—four or five guys I know. They had good jobs. They were grain handlers. They were testing and stuff like that. They had a good life. They’re all retired now. So, you know, yeah. But I said the union killed everything. Yeah, yeah.

EE: Okay. Well, we won’t debate the perspective. [Laughs] We’re here to get your perspective! I won’t debate it.

JR: I’m just giving you my theory about it.

EE: Because there are various explanations. The Russians get blamed as well, you know. They stopped buying, [laughing] and so on and so forth. Well, Owen, I guess we run our course on this narration.

JR: On the elevators and that, yeah, yeah. [Laughing] I had a good life! I played hockey and that down east and there. Once I got the blood clot--. I was owned by Boston, but when I got the blood clot that was it. “No more hockey, Joe.” I was married.

EE: You mentioned going to Duluth. Did they do a better job of treating things down there?

JR: Oh, yeah. Well, I went there, and they said to me--. My wife went shopping, and I was there--.

EE: That's Duluth!

JR: There was two doctors—Dr. Bardon and Dr. Wolf—and they looked at my leg and said, “No, we better get you to the hospital, Joe.” So, they took me to the hospital in a wheelchair, and then my wife came back and says, “Where’s Joe?” “Oh, they rushed him to the hospital.” “What!?” So, she came to the hospital, and as she came into the door, I was getting my last rites because the doctor said, “Joe, you’ll live or die in 3 days.” I had a kid. I had a daughter 5 months old. I thought, “Oh my god!” My brother died that same year, you know? I thought, oh, that would be horrible for my mother and dad to see that happen. But my dad died 13 years after that with a heart--. Of a broken heart because my brother died, and he seen it happen to him. That was the worst part. I’m sorry.

[0:50:30]

EE: Oh, brother. It would be perfectly awful to be pulled into one of those machines.

JR: Oh! Yeah. *Pwwt!* That’s it. Squashed and that’s it, nothing left there. Yeah, anyways.

EE: Lived another 13 years when he was a broken man in some ways. He continued working at the mill?

JR: Yeah, well he came from the army. He got wounded twice. He was in the army going there. He got wounded twice. He was a radio man. He got shrapnel in his leg and that. He come back here, work a little bit, dead. That’s it. Got killed in the paper mill.

EE: This is your brother?

JR: My brother, yeah, yeah. But he was wounded twice in the war, there, you know. The second world war. So, there you go. Yeah. Tragedy, tragedy. Everybody’s got tragedy.

EE: Some more than others.

OM: I don’t mean to make light of what you’ve just said because it is a horrible thing, but I really am interested to find out what happened in those three days that allowed you to be here today to be interviewed.

JR: Well, okay, what happened, the doctors said, “We’re going to have to soak your leg,” hot water, eh, “and we’re going to give you these pills, they’re called dicoumarol pills.” So, what these dicoumarol pills did, my big vein was say this big. “We’re going to give you these dicoumarol pill and you’re going to have a vein going through your blood clot this big,” through my leg. So, that’s what happened. My wife stayed there five weeks because the nurses, they couldn’t put hot pads on me because they could only do so much. My wife stayed there five weeks—night and day—giving me these hot pads on my leg. I survived.

EE: It took that long actually?

JR: Five weeks I was there, yeah.

EE: The pills would be, what, anticoagulants? They were breaking up the clot?

JR: Yeah, yeah, that’s right, yeah. That’s what they were, yeah. So, I’m here. I said to my kids, “You know what? I’m on borrowed time, and I’m enjoying it!” Yeah, there you go.

EE: Were you active in the Ukrainian organizations at all?

JR: No, no. I went to church, the Ukrainian church. I was active in the church.

EE: Which one?

JR: The Church of the Holy Protection. It’s been sold on north Court Street.

OM: Right!

JR: McDougall--. They’ve got that UF Senior building next door.

OM: My father-in-law lives there.

EE: This is the one that is now the Evangelical Free Church?

JR: Yeah, it’s another church now. Somebody else.

EE: It's a beautiful church!

OM: Oh! Inside it's concrete and everything, paintings, all concrete, big furnace. I think it cost about a million point two in the long run.

EE: Did you work on it at all in the building?

JR: Pardon?

EE: Did you work on the building?

JR: No, no, I was on the committee to get the property from the City and then oversee the guys and the contractors and that. That's how I sort of learnt about carpentry. I could read a blueprint and that, so I sort of learnt that way. Yeah. Then they sold it. I think they sold it for a quarter of a million dollars, like peanuts, peanuts. Big church, you know?

EE: Oh, it's a terrific buy.

JR: But what are you going to do, eh? The people aren't coming. The young people aren't coming. It was all the old people there, you know, and then little by little the young people don't go to church. They don't go to church now, the young people!

EE: It was an orthodox church, right?

JR: Yeah, yeah, Greek. Greek orthodox.

EE: Greek orthodox, which meant that the language remained Ukrainian as well?

JR: Yeah, Ukrainian and there was English too. We had English mass there too.

EE: There was some English mass as well?

JR: Yeah, for the benefit of the people that talk English.

EE: Yeah, the youngsters they need that language change. I know well from--. The Mennonite churches used to be in German, and they had to make the transition and so on.

JR: And like I said, in time the young people don't go to church, so they couldn't keep the church. So, they got rid of it.

EE: Were you involved at all with the building of the senior's facility that--?

JR: No, no, I wasn't there, no.

EE: That was done by the church?

JR: By the church, yeah, and that's a nice building too.

EE: So, that's what, 30 years ago would it be by now?

JR: Oh, it's at least that. At least that, yeah.

EE: At least that. Yes, it's very nice. It seems to me I've been in it many, many years. Of course, when you're a member of parliament you get into places others wouldn't get into! I was in it a long, long time ago, back in the eighties. Well, thank you very much for this interview!

JR: Yeah, okay!

EE: Giving this narration this fine sunny afternoon.

JR: I said, if you want to look at this, my life history, you can look at it. I wrote it all down in a couple of days, but I want to give my kids before I die, I'll say, "This is my history. Now you can--. What I did."

EE: None of them has interviewed you, eh?

JR: They always say, "Oh, dad, you should write something about yourself." Well, I did now! Right from scratch, from what I did there and that. Yeah. Well, like I say, I'm enjoying life now. Go dancing every Friday at the Polish hall here up here.

EE: On Court Street?

JR: Court Street here. No, no, on Cumberland. Yeah.

EE: Oh, yeah, the Polish Combatants Legion.

JR: It's the Polish Church. Yeah, yeah, that one there. So, ah! I enjoy it.

OM: Well, you were witness to two of the most important events ever in Thunder Bay: the elevator explosion and the West End Bruins.

JR: That's right! [Laughing] Two explosions, yeah!

End of interview.