Narrator: Leonard Robidaux (LR)

Company Affiliations: N/A

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Summary: Lifelong farmer Leonard Robidaux discusses growing up as a farm boy through the Depression and eventually taking over the family farm from his parents. He begins with the story of how his father came from Quebec to Manitoba and moves into his own history of leaving a Catholic juniorate to stay on the farm. He details the kinds of responsibilities he had on the farm as a young boy and how work changed with the seasons. Robidaux describes having his own family to help on the farm, and shares the story of an accident that left him seriously injured. He details the changes to machinery and technology over the years, the kinds of livestock he kept, the crops he grew in rotation, and the various agricultural clubs he was part of. Other topics discussed include his interaction with Agriculture representatives, issues with grasshoppers and pests, his use of natural fertilizers, the importance of religion to the family, growing up in Francophone Manitoba, the danger of megafarms, and the close-knit farming community.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative
EE: All right. So why don't you begin by giving me your name? LR: Okay. My name is Leonard Robidaux, and I was born the 3rd of July 1924. And I was born exactly on this farm here in an old house, and the new house is pretty much the same place as the old house was.

EE: I see.

LR: Yes.

EE: And you were saying something about how your father got this farm, and why don't you tell me about that?

LR: Yes, okay. My father was farming in Otterburne with his brother, and then he wanted to buy a farm by himself so he went to rent a farm in Haywood. After two good crops, he wanted to buy that farm, but the owner, they were Americans, and they didn't want to sell the farm. So there was a very nice barn here that's still standing that was at that time. I believe he had seen that barn before, but he liked that barn, so he came back and he farmed here.

EE: Splendid.

LR: And he died in 1960, and he was on the farm.

EE: I see. So he was here for more than 40 years, '18 to '60 would be 42 years that he farmed here.

LR: Yes.

EE: And so you were born here in 1924.

LR: Yes.

EE: He had married in between.

LR: No, he had married before. He had married in the east, and my oldest sister was 13 years older than me.

EE: I see.

LR: Yes. And I happened to be, ah, some kind of a surprise. [Laughs] Because my father was 40 and my mother was 38.

EE: I see. So had he come from Quebec province or from--?

LR: Yeah.

EE: From Quebec?

LR: Yes.

EE: So he had come west earlier.

LR: Well, yes. He came in 1912.

EE: In 1912.

LR: Yeah.

EE: And then gradually--. So he was in his late 20s then when he first came here, I guess.

LR: Yes. Well, he got married in 1910, and I believe he was 24 when he married.

EE: Sure. And so he came out of '26, so he had a family to join him when he got the farm established here. Began farming, wife came out, and then as you were saying, a surprise happens, and that's you! [Laughing]

LR: Yeah.

EE: And so you begin helping on the farm. What kind of farming did your father do at the time?

LR: It was mixed farming. Everybody was mixed farming then. Everybody had a barn, and everybody had cows so that they would have milk and a few pigs and hens to have their eggs.

EE: And they would be working with horses in those days?

LR: Yes. They would be working with horses. The only thing they would do with the plow, once in a while they would plow with the old titan, but they were two on the titan. But I seen my father plow with five horses on a gang, and a gang is two plows, or with the sulky, and the sulky is one plow. The sulky was 16 inches, and I believe the gang was 12 inches.

EE: Right. And so five horses would pull that two-share plow, the gang plow, and turn the sod over.

LR: Yeah.

EE: The titan was an old--. Was it a steam engine or was it a gas-pull?

LR: That was a coal oil engine.

EE: It was a coal oil engine. Now, would they hire someone to do it, or did they own one?

LR: They owned one.

EE: Oh, they did actually have one?

LR: Yes.

EE: And it would be used for the plowing occasionally.

LR: And they would thresh with it too.

EE: Powering the threshing machine?

LR: Yes.

EE: The horses would pull the binder?

LR: Yes. Yes. I see. Oh, boy. [Laughs]

EE: I want to hear all about it! [Laughing]

LR: Yes. Yes. I was following my dad all around, and I was standing on the end table of the binder, and I was holding there on the brays that was holding the table, and the guard that was watching or keeping the heads from going too far. And I was standing, I

don't know how long, but for a long time until I drop, I believe. One time, I put my feet on the chain, and it went around the sprocket, and so dad said, "Oh," and he kissed it, and it was okay. [Laughs]

EE: I see. Well, powerful kisses! Machinery can be very dangerous, can't it?

[0:05:02]

LR: Oh. The accident on the farm, you know, with the kids, it happens. But the result of that is they get kids that are very productive, and the kids at 12 years old, they can do whatever a man does, and he's just as responsible as a man, but he's not as strong as a man.

EE: No, no. Not at 12, he certainly wouldn't be. How much schooling did you get in those days?

LR: Well, I went to Grade 7.

EE: Up to Grade 7.

LR: Yes.

EE: Yeah. So that would be seven and six is 13, so somewhere around 1937, I guess, you were finished with--?

LR: Well, no. I was late going to school. I believe I started at 7, and I doubled one year. So I was 14 when I was in Grade 7, and I went to college, to a juniorate. So I had a very hard time with my French because on the farm you do more work on the farm than you do in your books. And I had to--. This juniorate was to make a priest, eh? So at that time, they had to learn Latin. So I didn't know my French too much and I had to learn Latin. And I was very shy. And I said, "That's not a job for me," so I came back home, and I helped my dad. And I liked my dad very much.

EE: So your parents sent you, what, the college, to what, Saint Boniface in--?

LR: No, that was a juniorate of the Holy Family. It was the Oblate Father.

EE: The Oblate Fathers, no less!

LR: The Oblate Fathers, yes.

EE: And where was the college?

LR: It was where the French--. How do you call it there? This--. Oh, boy.

EE: Here in Manitoba?

LR: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

EE: I see.

LR: Oh, yes. Just at the corner there of that street, Des Meurons and Provencher.

EE: In Saint Boniface?

LR: Well, where the French centre is there.

EE: Ok.

LR: That's right there. It was right there.

EE: And that was where they had the college for the--.

LR: For the Oblate Fathers.

EE: For training Oblate Fathers, priests.

LR: To make a priest. And it was closed when they made the big--. Not the big. Oh, I'm losing speed now.

EE: You're doing a good job.

LR: Yes. When they were building, you know, in the city and in town, those big schools there?

EE: Yes.

LR: They were closing the small schools.

EE: The consolidation of schools in the late ‘50s.

LR: The consolidation of the school, yes. Yes. And then the teachers were paid by the government, so they were not paying the Oblate Fathers, so they had to close because nobody was sending their kids there because the other ones were paid by the government, and they were not.

EE: No. So instead of becoming an Oblate Father, you became a farmer?

LR: Yeah. [Laughing]

EE: And I won’t ask whether you’re sorry that happened or not because we’re talking about being a farmer, and you wanted to tell me about that. What do you remember about farming? Because this was just at the end of the 1930s then, just the end of the Depression that you looked at the possibility of becoming an Oblate Father.

LR: No, no. That was through the 1940s.

EE: Yes. Well, I was thinking the Depression, or the war was underway, was getting underway.

LR: Yes, yes.

EE: But you were a boy on the farm, and you mentioned what a 12-year-old could do and so on. What was it like working with your father?

LR: Well, I’ll start before 12 years old.

EE: By all means.

LR: [Laughing] So I was always following my father, and he better told me when he was going somewhere. So we went to the field to pick up some mustard. So I was 5 years old, and I was helping him pick up some mustard.

EE: So this was pulling out the weeds?

LR: Yes. Yes. At that time, you know, we didn't have sprayers or things like that, but there was mustard that you could pick.

EE: Sure.

LR: And we were picking the mustard. So one day, he had some work, some other--. I believe he was cutting or doing something else in the field or doing hay, and he said, "Ok. I'll give you one cent for every mustard that you pick." So. [Laughs] I went to pick mustard. At the end of the day, I had picked 25 mustards, so I ask him 25 cents, and he thought that was lots of money giving to me. So at the same time he bought me a bank, so I put that money in the bank. I was saving that money when I was going to a picnic or to an exhibition or agricultures exhibition.

[0:10:07]

EE: Sure.

LR: So I had some money to buy a cone of ice cream and a drink or a bar. A cone of ice cream was costing five cents then, and a bar was costing five cents too.

EE: Sure. So the 25 cents could buy quite a bit. [Laughing]

LR: Yeah.

EE: Well, that's a great way to begin learning about how to make money on the farm.

LR: Well, yes. That's the only way to--.

EE: Removing weeds and later growing crop.

LR: And I was watching so that I have something left all the time.

EE: Sure.

LR: So that teaches you. [Laughs]

EE: It does indeed. And so, you continued to help your father. In what other ways did you help your father while you were still at home?

LR: Oh, boy. Well, I was always at home, eh?

EE: Lots of work.

LR: I was always at home. You know, when he bought the tractor--. [Laughs] Well, maybe I should tell you the last year that I--. Well, one of the last years I went to school, I was 13 or 14 years old, and then in 1937, that was the nicest crop we had. It was a bumper crop, and it was the first crop after the Depression in 1937. So my father bought a tractor, and whenever he was going with the tractor and the expert that was showing him how to drive the tractor, well, I was going there. And he would bring me all the time because I was always reminding him, "Well, he said that and he said that," and so on, so on. You know? So I started to drive the tractor at that time.

EE: What kind of tractor?

LR: W-30.

EE: A W-30, that's--?

LR: International.

EE: International Harvester.

LR: Yeah. You would see, well, it was going in all the west the W-30. They would go on the train here, full flat cars of W-30.

EE: Really?

LR: Yeah. Full flat cars of W-30.

EE: And they were--.

LR: International.

EE: Demonstrating and selling, eh?

LR: Pardon?

EE: They were demonstrating and selling tractors, eh?

LR: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And that was putting the bigger tractor on the farm then because the big, big tractors they were pretty near too big to work on the land.

EE: Yeah. The titan was a monster, as the name said. [Laughs]

LR: Well, it wasn't a very big tractor, the titan, but the other ones were very big, eh?

EE: Yeah.

LR: The titan, I believe, wasn't more than 27 horsepower.

EE: Oh, yes. So the titan was one of the smaller? I've seen these tractors at Austin at the Agricultural Museum but remembering which is which is the challenge.

LR: Yes. I haven't seen the titan at the museum.

EE: Is there not a titan there?

LR: I don't know. I don't remember having seen one.

EE: Yeah. Well, I'll have to look around for it.

LR: Well, yes, because there are very few. There are very few. The one, you know, they're all bigger tractors there.

EE: Well, they've got those huge steam engines and whatnot.

LR: Oh, yes. This is what they have, eh?

EE: Yeah. They're very proud of those.

LR: Ok. So then, my father had a car, and I was going to school with a horse. So he needed my horse, so what he did, I went to school with a car. [Laughing]

EE: Drove it yourself?

LR: Well, yes. My uncle was right by the school, so I would park the car at my uncle's, and I would go to school. [Laughing]

EE: When I was—1957—when I was 16, just, I didn't have my license yet for the first days and began going to high school in Elm Creek. We had the farm truck, and dad said, "Well, I'll let you drive the truck to town. Park on the edge of town next to Matt Tkachuk's garage and walk across town to get to school. Don't tell people that you're driving because you don't have a driver's license yet! Drive on the country roads." So I mean, that's the way farm boys do that sort of thing.

LR: All over.

EE: Sure they do.

LR: And they became expert. You're an expert at driving, I'm sure.

[Telephone rings] [Audio pauses]

EE: Ok.

LR: So that I went to school with a car?

EE: Well, you had mentioned earlier taking the car to school, but I was wondering whether you might describe how your father was farming before he got the tractor perhaps? Or maybe through that, what's the cycle of the whole year? Starting with preparing the land in the spring for seeding and so on, what--?

LR: Ok. Ok. Well, I believe there was a kind of infection on the grain, and they would put the grain through a formaldehyde cleaner or whatever, and they would treat the grain with formaldehyde. It was for smut or something like this. I don't remember. But they would put it to disinfect it. And afterward, well, it was the--. Oh, boy. What comes out of the sawmill there, you know? It's red, and we were treating grain with that too.

[0:15:16]

EE: Oh, were you?

LR: Oh, yes. That's really some--.

EE: So a by-product of a sawmill was other material you used?*[Note: Could be organic mercury. Editor]*

LR: Well, yes. That goes in the water, you know? It poisons the fish and everything. Yes. I forgot the name.

EE: So these were things that were done to get the seed ready for the seeding?

LR: For spring, and to disinfect it. To disinfect, to have less smut or something like this. I don't remember.

EE: Yes, of course. Right.

LR: But I first remember that he was seeding with a drill that has 20 seeders on there in the drill, and with the horses. When we got the tractor, well, there was two tongues on there. He cut the two tongues, and he made it only one, then he hitched the tractor on there, on that. And further afterward, well, he bought a 24-wrung drill.

EE: Sure.

LR: Yeah. International. And they were a very good drill.

EE: Oh, yes. So your family was an International Harvester family?

LR: Yes. Because there was some International in Ste. Agathe, and he was close. And there was one in Niverville too by the name of Leblanc.

EE: Oh, yes.

LR: Yes, yes. International Harvester.

EE: Provided good service and--.

LR: Yes, yes. This is where we bought the W-30.

EE: So I guess the fields would have been worked in the fall so they would have been ready for seeding?

LR: Yes, they were plowed. They would plow.

EE: Would they plow every fall?

LR: Oh, yes. They would plow. They would plow in the fall with the sulky. Oh, yeah.

EE: Oh, yeah. Or that gang plow that--.

LR: Or there was that gang plow.

EE: One or the other.

LR: Oh, yes. With the horses. And you know, that wasn't fun when it was cold and they would be in the field and in the dust, but with the tractor, it was just the same because there was no cab on there. And it was even worse because we were making longer days. And you would put maybe three pairs of overalls on there and it wouldn't show, you know? [Laughs]

EE: Yes. Oh, yes.

LR: We didn't get the good clothing that we have today. Even if you put a Mackinaw on—it was supposed to be good a Mackinaw—but hell, the wind would go through there. [Laughing]

EE: And of course, you're sitting on the tractor or behind the horses, and the wind blows and blows and you're just sitting there not generating much heat.

LR: Yes.

EE: Yeah, it's a tough life.

LR: And you would get your face sun-blasted, and your eyes would be scorch-red. When we would thresh, it would be the same. We got that, our first combine, in 1941. It was a John Deere combine. They were calling them the "potato bugs" because they were just like a potato bug, and they were made like a car. Have you seen them, the John Deere, the small six-foot John Deere?

EE: I think I have. I remember seeing those little combines.

LR: Yes. They had a hopper of 20 bushels. [Laughing]

EE: Oh, my. Hardly worth it, but it was a combine.

LR: Yes.

EE: So you were combining rather than having to use the binder and stook the sheaths and all the rest of it. I mean, here you were.

LR: Yes.

EE: Would you be combining the standing grain with that machine?

LR: No, never. I tried once, but there was too much green stuff in there.

EE: Yeah. It's just too damp.

LR: Yes. It was too damp. Too much green stuff on there. I had to put the pickup back on there and swath it. But you know, it was good because this was the war years there in 1941, and people were very scarce. And before that, well, we were threshing with a threshing machine. I had an experience with threshing with a threshing machine and the team of horses on the rack on the field, you know, pitching the sheaves on there. But I was on the rack. But the hardest place, the hardest was pitching the field all the time.

EE: Yes, I can well imagine it would be. It's very hard work throwing the sheaves up on the rack to--.

LR: And a lot of them took three, four sheaves at a time, and it took a good man two pitchers in the field and then four on the racks.

EE: Building the load, laying the sheaves down carefully so you get a good full load on there.

LR: And if you didn't have a bin in the field, well, you would have to haul the grain into the yard there with a team of horses or to the elevator or to fill a car with a team of horses and a wagon. And the thing was, you had to scoop it. [Laughs]

[0:20:29]

EE: Into the car or whatever? Or loading the wagon at the farm first, did you mean?

LR: Well, if you would load right away at the car, there was a stand there to, whatever--.

[Telephone rings] [Audios pauses]

EE: Sheaves, the stooks, the threshing.

LR: Oh, yeah.

EE: So you were telling me about threshing with the old threshing machine and bringing the sheaves in from the field and so on and so forth.

LR: Yes. And then sometimes you would have a hopper at the threshing machine. That all depends who you were employing. Instead of putting it in a granary, there was a hopper in the threshing machine, and it would haul the grain right away in at the barn or at the house or at the granaries in the yard. Because, you know, to have granaries in the field, that's something that's not too good because somebody can get it, steal it from you, or when it's opened at the elevators, it might not be good to go in the field, or

too much snow and everything. So they had a hopper too. And at the last years, well, they had a truck too before we had a combine to haul the grain. But everything was done with a scoop. The first thing to do it to elevate the grain was a grain elevator. And my cousin was a kind of a mechanic, and he took from an old threshing machine the elevator, and he made an elevator to elevate the grain into the granaries.

EE: Did he really? Do you remember when he was doing that? During the war or--?

LR: Well, yes. That was--. I believe you're right because we--. No. That was--. Yes, I believe it was around '37 that. Yes, it was.

EE: Even before, at the end of the Depression? Because I remember my father and one of these elevators. A long chain with blades on it, and the grain would drop in, and the succession of blades would move up the conveyor.

LR: Yeah.

EE: And then drop at the other end.

LR: Yeah.

EE: It was slower, and I don't know whether it was noisier than an auger, but it was a lot slower than the augers that came along later on. The screw inside the pipe that--.

LR: Yes. But it was a hell of a lot better than the scoop. [Laughing]

EE: It was a lot better than doing it by hand, no doubt about it. And so having--.

LR: And when I was a small kid, they used to put me in the granary to push the grain further down. [Laughing] You remember that?

EE: Oh, I do indeed. And I joke about the fact that there are two or three things on the farm that made me decide to go to the university and become something else—a professor as it turned out. One of those was being in a granary up at the top in the heat of the summer with the barley coming down, spreading the barley.

LR: Oh, the barley was awful because the dust would burn you.

EE: And the ears on the kernels--.

LR: Yes!

EE: End up in your clothing and so on and so forth.

LR: Into your socks! [Laughing]

EE: Oh, yes. Into your socks and everything because you'd be kneeling in that stuff. Farming life was tough in many ways.

LR: Well, it's still.

EE: Well, it still is, I suppose.

LR: It still is. It takes so much of a capital to make a buck, and if you make one, you're damn lucky. [Laughs]

EE: That's true enough. Farmers try to survive. They don't get rich. They try to survive the bankers and the businesspeople and make a living.

LR: And the lawyers.

EE: And the lawyers too, eh? [Laughing]

LR: I know that now.

EE: I suppose so. So we get into the '40s, and they were using a little combine pulled by the W-30, I suppose, was it?

LR: Pardon?

EE: The combine.

LR: Yes.

EE: Was being pulled by this tractor?

LR: The W-30 with a power takeoff.

EE: Yeah, with a power takeoff.

LR: With a power takeoff. You see, to have a combine for ourselves--. Because we had to wait for the threshing machine to come, and we were in the heavy land here, and they would thresh—the people on the land—because it was ripening faster than ours. And sometimes it was always in September. And if you know, September it starts to be cloudy and raining, and it never ends.

[0:25:01]

EE: I guess that's what forced farmers all across Manitoba and beyond to buy their own equipment, to have their own combines.

LR: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah.

EE: Because they just couldn't wait.

LR: Yes.

EE: You had to grab those sunny days when it was dry out there to do the combining, didn't you?

LR: Yes, yes.

EE: When did you move up to bigger machinery?

LR: Oh.

EE: You know, a bigger combine.

LR: It was, it was, it was--. Uh. Was my father dead then? Oh. Boy, oh, boy. I believe he was.

EE: So it was into the 1960s, perhaps, then before you--.

LR: You're right.

EE: Before you had a big combine.

LR: He died in 1960, and I believe--. I don't remember if we had the bigger International then, but it must have been around that time. It must have been around that time. No, no. He died. We had a Case. We had a Case afterward because I remember now. We had very good neighbours. They were Irishmen, and they had just sold their land, and they were three of them. And my father died. He got sick on the 1st of September, but that year I was worrying about how the hell I would make the threshing.

EE: The harvesting, eh?

LR: And the work. Because my father was 75, and I was wondering, "How the hell am I going to do that?" So he got a stroke, and then a month after he died.

EE: Yeah. That happens.

LR: And our neighbours, they were three by themselves, and I had hired their hired men to help me. When my father died, I had hired men to help me. So they came, the three all older guys, to help me. So I was very lucky in that was that they were very good neighbours those Irish people.

EE: Yeah. That sounds good. I might ask, how much land were you farming here?

LR: I was farming 240 something acres, but we had lots of bush that was half a section. Then I bought 240 afterwards.

EE: Oh, yes. So you ended up with 560? Almost a section of 600--. You were 80 acres short of a section of 640 acres.

LR: Yeah. Yeah.

EE: And your father and you were farming. Did you have any brothers helping you?

LR: No.

EE: You were the only son?

LR: Yeah.

EE: Right. So it was you and your dad. And you were working with him until he passed away?

LR: Yes.

EE: And then the farm became yours?

LR: Yes. Well, no. My mother was still living.

EE: Yes.

LR: And she had a share, eh?

EE: Oh, yes.

LR: She had a share, yes.

EE: Was it an active share? Did she make decisions about farming? You would talk with her, obviously.

LR: Oh, I'm telling you. I'm telling you. I have lots to say. [Laughs] Being the farmer's son and the only son, I had lots to say.

EE: Well, you learned a lot. You learned it from your father, mostly.

LR: And I respected my father very much. If there was something that I knew he didn't like, well, I didn't do it.

EE: No, of course not.

LR: And I liked him very much. I liked my father.

EE: Yeah.

LR: Yes.

EE: And your mother listened to your advice that you learned from the father?

LR: Well, yes. Yes. [Laughs] Whatever I decided, that was pretty near it, but I knew what my father wanted. And he was a very good farmer. Yes.

EE: Yes. Did your mother share the house here or did she have--?

LR: Yes.

EE: I see. And you had married at some point or did you--?

LR: No, I got married when I was 35.

EE: When you were 35.

LR: Yes. She lived three years with us, yes. And she died.

EE: Your wife or your mother?

LR: Yes.

EE: Who died?

LR: My mother.

EE: Oh, yes. I see.

LR: My mother died then.

EE: So she lived another three years after your marriage?

LR: Yeah.

EE: Yeah. So--.

LR: So she lived with us. She, well, you know, that was two women there. So I had to be very careful because I wanted to get married. And if I didn't get married, I would have sold the farm. I said, "There's no use to stay on the farm when you're 35 years old." So I got two wonderful sons. They're away now, but they--. One is electronic engineer. I don't know how can I raise an electronic engineer on the farm, and I ask myself that question. [Laughs] And the other one, he's a big, tall guy and he works for the railway. He could have went to university, but he had too many friends, and he was spending his money with the friends. So he didn't. And he wanted to buy a car. So he bought 13 cars while the other one didn't have a car. When the engineer bought a car, it was a new one.

[0:30:14]

EE: Right. [Laughing] Well, my father and mother raised three boys, five girls. Three boys on the farm, and the oldest became a professor—that's me—the second one is an electrical engineer.

LR: Yeah? [Laughs]

EE: Was with Manitoba Hydro for many years. He's now retired. The youngest brother was—the youngest son—was a Mountie. So it's a little different from your two boys, but there are some similarities in how it happens.

LR: Yes.

EE: Were you mechanical yourself?

LR: Yes.

EE: Did you repair your own equipment?

LR: Well, yes, as much as I could. As much as I could. I'm telling myself that that's another human that fixes that, and if he can do it--. If I had the tools, you know, sometime I would buy the tools. And the boys took that. At 10, 12 years old, I believe, they were starting to beat me.

EE: They were good with their hands and with the tools, eh?

LR: The two boys, they can read something, and they understand it. I had a hard time to understand it. They would take a book there, and they would study it, and they would do it, and they understand what they read.

EE: Sure.

LR: That's not everybody, eh?

EE: No. No, it isn't. No, and it's a fine capacity. It's a good thing, and they must have inherited it from you and your wife.

LR: Well, you know, I always tell them how to do the work. Sometimes I would tell them twice, and they would say, "We heard you the first time." [Laughing] But, oh yes. When I was telling them, I would come back, and I could not have done a better job.

EE: Right. Well, that's splendid. It means they were a terrific help. Now, I was doing the arithmetic. 1924, 35, so that's--. Oh, yes. You married just before your father died then, was it '59?

LR: No, no. He died in 1960. I married in 1962.

EE: Oh, '62.

LR: Yes.

EE: Ok. And your mother then lived until 19--.

LR: Oh, no. I was 37 when I married. When he died, I was--. Did I mention I was 35 when he went?

EE: I thought you said 35.

LR: Yeah. I was 35 when you died.

EE: You were 35 when your father passed away, and then you married two years later, and then your mother lived for another three years.

LR: Yes.

EE: And so the boys were beginning to be useful by the 1970s, I guess. Through the ‘40s, the ‘50s, the ‘60s, it was really--. Or through the ‘40s and ‘50s, it was you and your dad who did the farming?

LR: Yes. Oh, yes.

EE: And when did the electricity come to the farm here?

LR: 1948.

EE: ’48.

LR: Yes.

EE: So much of rural Manitoba must have been electrified that year because it was true for us west of the Red River out at Elm Creek as well, ’48.

LR: Yes.

EE: So also, of course, the machinery. Had you used horses through the 40s on the--?

LR: The what?

EE: Horses. Were you using horses to pull equipment in the--?

LR: No, I didn’t. I didn’t. My father did, but I did not. I started on the W-30. [Laughs]

EE: Right. So the W-30, 1937 or so onwards, you were a machine, a tractor farmer? [laughs]

LR: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

EE: Right. And that would be for pulling the swather or the seeder in the spring, and then the swather and the combine and so on.

LR: And we had a sprayer. And the sprayers started not long after the combine. Because you see, before with the threshing machine you were putting all the wheat in one pile, and you would burn what's left of that pile. With the combine, it was spreading the wheat all over the field, so then it started it was good for the companies, you know? They would sell chemicals.

EE: I see. Well, it's quite clear. You've made a very good point then. With the combine and the spreading of the wheat seeds, you really needed those herbicides, and the companies began making them about that time, I guess, in the 1940s.

LR: Yes. And using fertilizer too. The fertilizer we used, oh, I don't remember. We used that before the discer. And we used that on the seeder. That must have been around 1945 too, you know. We started to have so much wheat, and then putting fertilizer and not doing summer fallow.

EE: No.

LR: Before that, we would do summer fallow. One third of the farm in summer fallow.

EE: Right. Yes.

LR: Yes.

[0:35:01]

EE: So, this field would be summer fallow this year, and then it would be, what, wheat the next year?

LR: Wheat, barley, and oats.

EE: One or other of those in the second year. What about the third year?

LR: Sometimes flax.

EE: Oh, yes. I see.

LR: Yes. That was what we were seeding, eh? If it was getting to be late, we would seed flax.

EE: Sure.

LR: Yeah.

EE: Oh, yes. Because sometimes the second year might be just wheat, and then you'd be planting oats or barley in the third year as well, or not. Would you?

LR: Well, yes. Yes, it could be that way. It all depends if it would have been a field that you would have clover, eh?

EE: Yes.

LR: Because clover was very good for the land, and we were feeding clovers to the cattle then because that was before we got the alfalfa. Yes.

EE: Yeah. I see. When did alfalfa come in then?

LR: Well, the alfalfa, I believe, came in, oh, around I believe the '40s. I'm not sure now. But--.

EE: Ok. But clover had been available earlier?

LR: Yes. We were threshing there down the hill and we had a field of alfalfa there. And we were threshing with a threshing machine. Well, it's--.

EE: Because there's quite a difference between the crops.

LR: Yes.

EE: Sweet clover will grow four and five feet high. In fact, a man could walk into a field when it's growing well and disappear.

LR: Yes.

EE: Whereas the alfalfa is usually quite a small plant, isn't it?

LR: Yes, yes.

EE: Especially when you're keeping it, cutting the alfalfa. I remember my father bought another farm in 1959 into '60, and that farm had an alfalfa field. I don't think that the first 240 acres ever had one, and dad didn't use sweet clover much for fertilizer either, as you were saying. Whereas our neighbours—we had McIntyres who were probably Irish neighbours like your Irish neighbours, and very good neighbours of ours—and they had a lot of land, a couple of thousand acres, and they would put whole fields into sweet clover, and then plow it down to enrich the soil.

LR: Well, we did that. I did that a few years, but not very often because, well, for some reason, well, you know, you were losing one year there.

EE: Of course.

LR: And now we had fertilizer, you know, to seed all the fields. That was a little bit different.

EE: I have a memory of, was it, Elephant Brand fertilizer from Cominco?

LR: Yeah. [Laughing]

EE: I lived for nine years in Nelson, BC just up the river from Trail and Consolidate Mining and Smelting, Cominco, had the big smelter there.

LR: Yes.

EE: And I think maybe the fertilizer was coming out of the operation. I remember my grandfather who farmed north of Sperling used fertilizer quite a bit. More, I think, than my dad did. And it's the old bags of Elephant Brand fertilizer I remember laying there.

LR: Oh, boy. Yes. If you had a cold, it would build your cold for some reason. It seemed as if the fertilizer was--. Because you were always smelling that dust of fertilizer when you were putting it into the seeder. Whatever you had, you had a seeder or discer, eh? Yes, that's what. And you know, farming is not an easy job, and when we started to spray, we had no protection at all.

EE: No.

LR: If you had a nozzle that wasn't working, then the water would run into your hand—the spray and everything—and still, you know, if you could not get the nozzle unplugged, you'd blow in it. Then you get some in your face. [Laughs]

EE: Yeah. We were incredibly careless in those days back in the '50s.

LR: Well--.

EE: Because I've helped my father with spraying, you know, the big tank on the tractor. And in goes the water and the chemicals and gets mixed up, and then out you go. And if there's any kind of--. Well, you don't want to do it when it's really windy, but even if there's a bit of breeze, the stuff drifts around, and we had no protection, as you say.

LR: No protection.

EE: Nothing for the nose. You ended up getting it on you.

LR: Yes. And treating the grain too with that red outfit there I don't remember, it, oh--.

EE: Yes, you were mentioning purifying the grain earlier. Whatever it was that was put on. The formaldehyde and then this other treatment.

LR: Yes. You know, I can't think of the stuff. It was just as red as this here, but I--. It's no use. When I am searching for the word or a name, I better not try.

EE: Well, I'm going to research that. You know, historians are supposed to learn all these things even if you can't mention or name it. You have described it.

LR: Oh. And it's something that the--. Whatever, there's a sawmill there, they threw that stuff in the river, and that goes in the fish, eh? And the people cannot eat too much fish because there's this stuff in the fish.

[0:40:22]

EE: You're not saying mercury by any chance? Ah, ah. [Laughing] You're thinking probably of the paper mill at Dryden that poisoned the English River system. Yes. Ah, yes.

LR: Mercury.

EE: Yeah. Mercury is incredibly dangerous.

LR: Yes. So we would treat that with mercury for a long time.

EE: I see. Mercury and formaldehyde being used.

LR: Now you cannot do it anymore.

EE: No. No, you certainly couldn't. [Laughs]

LR: Yeah.

EE: Ah, the things that were being done.

LR: But, ok. I'm going back now to spraying.

EE: That's fine.

LR: This is where I pretty near lost my life one day spraying. It was a year that we could not seed, and on top of that, we could not hardly sell our grain. And I had made lots of expenses, and I was all by myself then, and I had a young family. I owed all my payments on the land for three years, on the tractor, and--.

EE: And the taxes too, I suppose.

LR: My taxes.

EE: And with three years of arrears, you're up for tax sale, aren't you?

LR: Yeah. Everywhere. And it was in September, I was going to spray some thistles on the land that was worked, you know? I was very, how do you call that there, stressed.

EE: Really anxious about things, I'm sure, and stressed, very stressed.

LR: I was very stressed when I was in the field because it was something awful. So I thought maybe I would lose everything, eh?

EE: Yes.

LR: Lose everything. So going in the fields, spraying there. So I was spraying, and there was some nozzle that wasn't working good. So I had the small John Deere H with a hand clutch. So usually when I was going out on the tractor, I would take the gear shift, I would put it in neutral.

EE: Put it in neutral.

LR: Then that morning I forgot, and I stood in front of the tire and put the clutch on. As soon as--. I had forgotten which nozzle wasn't working. So as soon as I put the clutch on, the tire grabbed me, and I went under the tractor. Now I hold on the hitch. So I thought I better hold onto the hitch, but I could not hold enough. I went under the sprayer, the same thing. And that was an 80-gallon sprayer, and it was half full. My thought then, I thought the tractor was idling, eh—I thought, "I better catch that tractor if it didn't go over my head if I can." So right after, I got up and I caught the tractor, but I knew that I was injured. What saved me was that the ground was soft, and I was wearing a corset because I had a sore back from driving a caterpillar.

EE: I see.

LR: [Laughs] So--.

EE: That was a close call.

LR: Yeah. So I came back home, and I had to go through a pasture. I had to open the gate, and that was early in the morning, maybe 6:00, 7:00 in the morning because I had gone before I did my choses, eh, to spray when it wasn't windy. So to open the gate, it was ok to go down the tractor, but I had all the trouble to go back on the tractor. It was starting to hurt pretty bad.

EE: Yeah, the shock begins to wear off.

LR: Yeah. So I came here, and I parked the tractor by the barn, and the wife said, "I thought that was darn funny. You put the tractor by the barn." So I came in the house, and I told her, "You get the priest." And I told her, "You get your brother to take the chores," because I thought she wouldn't stand it to drive me to the hospital. That's why I told her to get the priest.

EE: Yes.

LR: So, well, I could walk, but once they put me on the bed in the hospital, I couldn't move. And it was hurting so much that I had trouble to breathe, and I had trouble to swallow my saliva. I had to make an effort for that.

[0:45:16]

EE: Right. Yes.

LR: So they took an x-ray, but they carried me, you know? They carried me from the bed to the x-ray, and then from the x-ray to the bed, and they carried me in the bed. So the doctor told me, "You had an accident." He said, "I believe you have some broken ribs." He said, "You've got some muscle torn from your chest." So they leave me in bed for 13 days, and they told me, "We cannot do nothing for you." So I came back home, and I started to walk quite a bit, but to lay down, I had to put some ice on there because it was hurting very much. And to lay down, I had to, oh, it took me maybe 10, 15 minutes to lay down because I was laying down a little bit at a time, a little bit at a time, a little bit at a time. So that happened in September, and in May, you know, I was always taking some exercise. But about a month and a half or two after I had my accident, I went to see a chiropractor. And the chiropractor, he was a rough guy. I thought, "If I got to see this guy, he would break me more." [Laughs]

EE: Yes. Well, I've heard of rough chiropractors. I don't go to them, myself, and hadn't in years and years and years.

LR: Well, I did a lot.

EE: Yes.

LR: I knew him, so I went there. Oh, he said, "You had an accident." Well, afterwards he said, "You look so sick that I can't touch you." So he gave me some electric treatment to get the muscle working.

EE: Relaxing a bit.

LR: And that was good, you know. That was good, electric treatment. And I went to see, I believe, a masseuse by the name of Hebert in Steinbach.

EE: Oh, yes.

LR: And she helped me too to get stronger, to make some exercise, and to get stronger.

EE: Was she a physiotherapist perhaps?

LR: No, she was a natural chiropractor. You know the Mennonites have lots of natural chiropractors in the early days?

EE: Yes, I guess they did.

LR: Yes, they had.

EE: I had one in Winkler fix an arm where I'd broken a bone back about 1950, so I know what you mean.

LR: Yes. Oh, yes. There was lots of them. There was some of the French people too.

EE: Oh, were there?

LR: There was one in Summerfield, Mr. Hildebrand. He was very good. Oh, boy. He had to trade, that guy. It was awful. Full room all the time. And in Steinbach there was another one there. I don't remember his name. Oh.

EE: Well, you know, the treatment for ribs and so on, I understand, hasn't changed very much. Basically, you just have to heal, be very careful, don't move too much, and let those bones heal again.

LR: Yes.

EE: But of course, it would also take time.

LR: Yes.

EE: And so that was a tough fall/winter for you. You had livestock to worry about?

LR: Oh, yes.

EE: Yeah.

LR: Yes. Oh, yes.

EE: So of course, the boys--.

LR: That's not a small barn for that time. That was a big barn for that time.

EE: And I'm guess--.

LR: And I had a hog barn too.

EE: And I'm guessing this was sometime around 1970, was it? So that the boys were only 5 or 6 years old, or am I wrong? Were your boys older than that?

LR: They were 5 and 6, yes. They were--.

EE: I was guessing from what you said that it was about 1970 when this happened. September of '70 maybe?

LR: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That was about maybe 4 and 6, maybe 4 and 6 or 5 and 7.

EE: Yeah. And that's too young to help very much.

LR: Oh, boy.

EE: But you had you brother in the--.

LR: Well, you know, at Christmastime that year, my sister. She was a missionary at Devil's Lake--.

EE: Oh, yes. In Minnesota?

LR: Yes. Yes. She was a Grey Nun, and they could not get no Grey Nun for the Indian mission there. There was no nun in the United States who wanted to go there, so they came to the Grey Nuns in Saint Boniface, and they went there, and they were living on charity. They were having a rummage sale. You know, they would get all kinds of stuff, and at Christmastime, she brought up clothes and toys for the children, and clothes for us. [Laughs]

[0:50:01]

EE: Very, very helpful.

LR: Yeah. So five or six years after, I took an x-ray at the hospital here. The man came back to see me, and he said, "You had an accident." I told him, "How the hell you know that?" [Laughs]

EE: The ribs show it!

LR: Yes. He said, "Your ribcage is flatter," he said, "on the right than on the left."

EE: Really?

LR: Yes.

EE: So it healed that way?

LR: It healed that way. But I was for a long time it was, like, sleeping on my right side was just like I was sleeping on a plank. So that exercise, that brought me back.

EE: Yes. It takes a long time to restore a body when it's been injured that way. The muscles, too. The bones are healing, but the muscles waste away almost, and you have to build it back up again.

LR: Oh, yes. And you know, I could not use my arm, my right arm in the hospital. And for a long time, it was ok. Then suddenly, hell, it wasn't bending as much. So that was from that accident, something that went wrong in there.

EE: And so, you have a limited movement in the arm as well?

LR: Yes, quite a bit. Quite a bit. Yes.

EE: Yeah.

LR: I can write good, but now I'm getting something from my shoulder and my arm, you know.

EE: But you're not touching your nose with that hand, I don't suppose.

LR: Oh, yes.

EE: You don't do--. Or--.

LR: Well, yes, I can.

EE: Oh, you can?

LR: Oh, yeah. Well, yes, I can. I can and I can go quite a bit.

EE: Oh, splendid.

LR: Quite a bit. Oh, yes. I've got a hell of a hard time to put a tie on and put that small button there. [Laughs]

EE: Sure.

LR: Hell, I don't know why they put such small buttons there for the man. [Laughing] Son of a gun, you know? They should put something a little bit better.

EE: That's right, they certainly should. And who cares if it's a big button?

LR: Well, yes. I wouldn't care.

EE: You mentioned that this happened when you were far behind on your bills, debts, taxes, and so on, but you didn't lose the farm.

LR: No.

EE: How did you get out of the hole?

LR: [Laughs]

EE: Because it was a terrible hole to be in when you're in such terrible shape!

LR: You would not believe it. When I was on my back on the hospital, my wife went to the credit union to borrow some money to pay the taxes. And I was saying to the company, "Well, I'm going to get some hogs to eat that grain," because I had lost my fodder, eh, and I was out of hogs. And hell, hogs were the biggest, you know, mortgage payer on the Prairies.

EE: Dad said that all the way through the '50s. [Laughing] I remember. I was born in 1941, so I begin remembering things, I guess, from the late '40s. I started school when I was almost 7 as well in 1948. But I remember through the '50s we had the hogs. My brother and dad would milk the cows and so on, take care of that. My job was taking care of the pigs, feeding them, taking out the manure in the wintertime and so on. But Dad always said the same thing, "Mortgage raiser." The pigs were the ones that provided the money when they were sold to pay the mortgage, make the mortgage payments.

LR: Oh, yes. And this is what I did. And on top of that, I had a life insurance that I took out to live.

EE: I see.

LR: Imagine that. I was in bed pretty near all the time, and I was taking away my life insurance. [Laughs]

EE: Now, you were cashing in the life insurance?

LR: Yes.

EE: To get more money to survive?

LR: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Yeah. Things one has to do! [Laughing] Yeah, that's tough.

LR: That's fighting out, eh?

EE: Yes. Yes.

LR: Yes.

EE: Well, we've touched on some things through the '60s now almost into the '70s. I don't know whether I should ask you about further changes in the farm machinery that you were working on?

LR: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Well, yes. When my--.

EE: You mentioned the discer earlier incidentally. From the drill to the discer. So let's--.

LR: Oh, yes. The discers we had one when my father was living, so that was before 1960.

EE: Sometime in the '50s already?

LR: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes.

EE: And did you continue using the discer on after his death when you were in charge and so on and so forth?

LR: Yes. I used the discers all the time. I changed the kind of discers. The first discer we had was International, and it was plugged all the time. Then we took the John Deere. The John Deere was more like a disc, a one-way disc. It was big, and it was high, and it would go through anything.

EE: We had one of those old one-way discs first too, and I guess there were some with even bigger discs, but I remember this one maybe about a foot or so wide, the disc. I don't think it was much more than eight or ten feet. It was quite a small one. Then of course, the bigger discers you're describing came along.

LR: Yes, yes.

[0:55:02]

EE: So you continued using the discer up to the present time on the land here?

LR: Well, yes. I used the discer until 1988.

EE: Ok. And then what?

LR: Then I started to rent the land because the boys went away.

EE: Sure So--.

LR: The boys went away, and I did the land a few years after the boys went away. So yes, I rented the land afterwards.

EE: So you used the discer all the way through. This is interesting, and I'm pursuing this a bit because a farmer friend I was talking to a couple of days ago who farmed northwest of Fannystelle described going from discers really to cultivators, the big shovel cultivators which didn't break up the land, or left the stocks and so on, the stubble, on top.

LR: Yes, yes.

EE: But I guess then you didn't go to those deep-tillage cultivators?

LR: No, no. It was starting there quite a bit in 1988, eh? There was quite a few around. They were the bigger farmers, I believe, and the more industrial farmers. They wanted a change, and they were younger. Maybe they were--. That man you interviewed there maybe was younger?

EE: Well, he's my age, so he is younger. He was born in 1941, and so he farmed--.

LR: Well, he's still a young guy. [Laughing]

EE: Of course!

LR: I'm 1924!

EE: Yeah.

LR: Not very much old.

EE: You were 17 years older. I think it also had to do with the soil.

LR: Yes.

EE: They worried about drifting and, I guess, blowing. Did you have to worry about that here in dry years?

LR: Well, you know, in the dry year in this soil here, it will blow too. It will blow too. Because I remember the neighbours—the Irish people—there's one of them, he liked to make the ground black. And one year, it blew so bad that it filled all his ditches. [Laughs]

EE: Yeah. Well, I remember that happening in the early '50s where I grew up, not far from this farm. We were northeast of Elm Creek. And my brother and I had some gopher traps in this ditch. There were gopher holes along the road south of the farm, and that ditch filled up one fine day with soil, and that was that for the traps. They were buried.

LR: Well, this is a lot lighter than here.

EE: I didn't think of the land there as--. You know, Red River Valley gumbo I thought was fairly heavy soil, but I think it may be lighter than what you have here. Because if you haven't had to worry about drifting and using a cultivator here, then you have heavier soil that you don't have to worry about as much.

LR: Well, yes. In the early years, we wouldn't worry about that, but after a little while, well, we worried about that. I believe it was because there was more land open. There was less land open and--.

EE: And you had the bush around you to shelter it, you mean by that. Less land cleared.

LR: Yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. A lot of them got cleared after the war. After 1950. Then we went into bigger and bigger tractors. Well, ok. In 1937, we bought a W-30. In 1950, we bought a TD-9.

EE: Aha!

LR: [Laughs]

EE: Yes, you had mentioned a caterpillar earlier. The TD-9's an International Harvester caterpillar tractor, isn't it?

LR: Yes.

EE: Did you use that for years and years?

LR: Oh, yes. I used this to 1966. In 1966, I bought a 1206. It was starting to be the dual wheels there, and I bought one of them dual wheels. It was one of the bigger tractors around.

EE: Right.

LR: Yes. There was very few around. Oh, they said, "You're going to buy some more farm?" But I wanted to farm more sensibly because I had stock, eh, and I have land. And you put lots of work in the stock, eh? You cannot--. And so this is why--.

EE: So you want to say a little bit more? You had livestock, you mean?

LR: Yeah.

EE: And what was the intensive farming that you were explaining? Or what did it involve? You were feeding the livestock, I guess, from your own crop?

LR: Yes. Yes. Well, I had--. But I was all by myself, eh?

EE: Yes.

LR: I was all by myself, and I had cattle. I went back into hogs too to pay my debt. And that was 1966. That was six years after my father died, and in 1970, I had the accident. I still have the stock, but--. Ok. And I was lucky that my brother-in-law helped me out too to thresh sometimes. Yes, because all by myself. There were four guys, eh, so.

[1:00:29]

EE: The livestock would require feed grain so that oats and barley were important crops for your farm. Wheat wasn't as important here, although you grew wheat.

LR: Oh, yes. Wheat was important. That's a wheat country. The Red River Valley is wheat country.

EE: Sure.

LR: And what I had in mind there? Oh, I forgot. Ok. Well, ok. We were set up a little bit like you. We were selling grain and giving the skim milk to the hogs. [Laughing]

EE: Sure. Yes, well that, of course, that's part of raising the hogs. Yes, they like the milk. [Laughing]

LR: I'm telling you they would keep their nose down until it was finished.

EE: They knew how to put it away.

LR: Yeah.

EE: And of course, the game is fattening those pigs as fast as possible to get them off to market.

LR: And they were healthy.

EE: Yes. Oh, yes.

LR: Yeah.

EE: How many cows did you have?

LR: Well, as a rule, we had 16, 20 cows.

EE: 16. What breed?

LR: Breed? Well, we had the four--. My father, when they came here, they had shorthorns, and they were the best breed for a farmer, the shorthorns. They were beef, and they were milk.

EE: Yeah, but they gave milk.

LR: And they were tough.

EE: Yes, I daresay.

LR: And they were tough.

EE: Did You keep with shorthorns then?

LR: No, we went to the Holstein, eh? We had the Holstein because the Agricultural representatives were going around with the artificial insemination, and it was the Holstein, eh? Holstein. Well, they were good cows, but they were not as tough. Then I tried the Angus. You know, I wanted to go to beef cattle, but, hell, I thought that, "I'll be dead and I won't pay the money that I bought them." [Laughing]

EE: They were expensive?

LR: They were not expensive, but beef, there's not much money in beef.

EE: No. No, I suppose not.

LR: As far as I'm concerned. Hell, you better not have very high taxes to grow beef. Don't you think so? [Laughing]

EE: Yes, I daresay. So did you come back to Holstein then?

LR: Then we, yes. Well, I put some more hogs in the barn and less milk. Then the chiropractor told me, "Well, sell your land or sell your stock," because my heart was giving up. I could not stay in bed sleeping sometimes. My heart would pound so much that I could not stay in bed sleeping. He had to give me hell three or four times before I decided myself to sell the stock, eh? So I sold the stock, and that was the best thing I ever did.

EE: I see. And then it was just grain after that?

LR: Yes. So I could get ready to seed in the spring, get the things ready, and everything. Before that, I was always running and being later, being all by myself, eh?

EE: Yes.

LR: And my wife never milk a cow, so she was not used around cattle. She was raised on a farm, but the oldest sister, she helped her father, and she was the second one, so she helped her mother. And they had 11 kids, so they were the oldest. So she worked in the house, and she was used to work in the house, and she was afraid of stock.

EE: She was a housewife?

LR: She was a housewife, and a very good one.

EE: As the old phrase has it.

LR: But around the hogs, she would help me around the hogs, but she was afraid of horses, and she'd never milk a cow.

EE: Did she have a garden?

LR: Oh, big garden.

EE: Big garden?

LR: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

EE: And she canned, I suppose?

LR: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

EE: I mean all those things that a housewife did to reduce the expenses on the farm to provide for the family.

LR: Yes. But she never hoed. I believe she never hoed. She wasn't a very strong woman, but she was smart, and she was agile with her hands. To can, oh, she could can, and she could mend, and she could sew, because she was doing that at home.

EE: She sewed things?

LR: Oh, yes.

EE: That's what you meant to say? She sewed things, clothing and so on?

LR: Yes.

EE: Yeah. Well, those are other ways the expenses are kept down.

LR: Yes.

EE: Because of course, you don't want to send too much money to the store if you can avoid it.

[1:05:04]

LR: No. She was very good for that. She was very good to plan. Yes.

EE: Yes. So you'd been growing the various grains earlier including flax sometimes, and the oats and barley was largely used on the farm, I suppose. Your cash crop from the fields would be primarily the wheat and maybe the flax?

LR: Well, yes. Yes. And the barley, but the oats, we would feed the oats to the pig then. We would not feed barley to the pigs then in the early days. We would feed oats. Yes.

EE: Ok. And you had a crusher, I suppose, too?

LR: Yes. Oh, yes.

EE: Oh, yeah. That other use for the tractors and the belts that ran the crushers. [Laughs]

LR: Yes, yes.

EE: Did you cut silage or anything of that sort?

LR: It happened. You see, we live in the bush here, and we were having the pasture in the bush. And we would seed corn to feed the cattle when the grass was getting too short in the bush. That's how we operated. And we did a little bit of silage with the corn an odd time, but the corn was to feed the cattle when the--.

EE: When the grass was lower. The pasture was not sufficient, eh?

LR: The grass was too low in the bush. And in the later years, well, we pastured in the alfalfa.

EE: Oh, yes.

LR: Yes.

EE: One of my father's jokes was about salads was that cut feed was for cattle. Because of course we had the cutting box, and so you'd blow the loft full of the cut feed, and the cows would eat that through the winter. I guess it was actually cut straw much of it. It can't have been terribly nourishing. Well, you could mix oats in with it and so on to give them some more nourishment. But he never cared for salads much.

LR: Well, you had the grain corn in there too.

EE: We didn't actually, on our farm, do much in the way of raising corn. My father was—as I remember him—very traditional on the first farm. Later we did have this alfalfa field close to the barn, close to the farmyard of the second farm, and he certainly cut that. But of course, there was a lot of baling of hay along the road allowances and so on.

LR: Yes, yes. Yes, at one time. Then we changed to cutting the alfalfa and chopping it instead of baling it. You see that big tread there by the barn?

EE: Yes, I did see that.

LR: Well, you see, instead of baling it, we would chop it. And we would haul there, and that was a lot easier than handling the bales. Handling the bales was a killer. [Laughs]

EE: Oh, yeah. That's one of my other reasons for not being a farmer if I want to think about things I did on the farm. I helped our neighbours, especially the McIntyres, with haying. And there's nothing like being on a hayrack for a mile while the baler is driving—the tractor and baler and wagon—are driving into the wind, and you're behind the baler stacking them up. The stuff keeps blowing over you. That's another of the reasons to say, "Other people can do that." [Laughs]

LR: And the next morning you could hardly open your eyes. Yeah.

EE: Oh, yeah. That was--.

LR: That was very, very good this way that we were doing it. We would fill it, you know, with the lower there, and the cows would eat anything, everything.

EE: Now, alfalfa cut--.

LR: Otherwise, they would leave the leaves in there. But--.

EE: Alfalfa cut that way would be marvellous feed for the cattle.

LR: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Yeah, because it was one of these cutting boxes you were using too do that, I suppose, was it?

LR: Well, we had a chopper in the field there.

EE: Oh, I see. Out--. What, that you pulled with the tractor?

LR: Which I pulled with a tractor and filled the wagon there.

EE: The wagon.

LR: We had two wagons. We had to have four tractors for that. We had on the chopper in the field, one on the wagon, one on the blower, and one to put the skid in the wagon so that as it was falling from the wagon, we had the small John Deere, and it was handy. We knew with the hand clutch there, you didn't have to go on top, and pulling the skid a little bit, it was just falling there. It was very easy job. Oh, yes. The kids would do that.

EE: Yes. Sounds like quite an operation. Almost like a factory out there when you're preparing it.

LR: Yes. Yes, it--. But it was saving the people. And when you'd done ten acres, it was done. Nothing in the field, nothing.

[1:10:00]

EE: Yes. Cut right down quite short.

LR: Yeah.

EE: Yes.

LR: Well, we had to swath it just the same, you know. We had to swath it or crimp it. And oh, that was the best way. And they're talking of putting it back that way because they say silage gives a little bit of a taste to the milk.

EE: Oh, I see. Whereas this cut feed doesn't?

LR: Well, cut feed, if it's dry, it doesn't sweat. It doesn't mold.

EE: Well, the sileage ferments a little bit, doesn't it actually? Because it's wet.

LR: Oh, yes. It ferments a little bit. And when you go out in the yard there, I've got some plastic that I bought from my neighbour that he cut and he put away, and it smells sileage like the devil, eh? It's strong. It's strong smell. Well, you know, in those silos, people better watch because there is some gas in there.

EE: I guess it can knock you out and kill you, actually, if you're not careful.

LR: Oh, yes. Oh. Sure, sure. Yes.

EE: Well, focusing on, this is all about the grain trade of course, but we're talking about all your farm operations, which is just fine. But as far as the wheat that you grew, with whom did you deal as far as selling it is concerned?

LR: The United Grain Growers [UGG].

EE: So you were United Grain Growers all those years. Where, in Otterburne?

LR: In Otterburne.

EE: Right.

LR: Oh, yes. There was an elevator in every town.

EE: There was, of course, in those days. Or two or three sometimes. [Laughs]

LR: Yes. I should tell you, in 1937, that was the best year we had.

EE: You were mentioning.

LR: And that was a very good year for us because my father had bought some foundation of Thatcher wheat, and he sold a carload of Thatcher wheat in 1937 for $1.50 a bushel. And it went to Regina. It was registered.

EE: Oh, really? So he was growing seed wheat?

LR: Well, he grew seed wheat for that year, and it was registered from the Agriculture Department.

EE: Yes. Well, would it be the Canadian Department of Agriculture, the federal one?

LR: The Canadian Department of Agriculture.

EE: Right. Yes, yes.

LR: Oh, yes. They've got field guys, and they go inspect the fields if it's clean, if whatever, if there's no wheat in there, and how it tastes. Oh, yes. And he brought it to the elevator, and the elevator man, Phil Carlo, he said, "Ok." He said, "If you haul your car here, I can sell your wheat to Regina somewhere." Yes, it was Thatcher wheat. Yes.

EE: Sure, sure. Did he do--.

LR: And he bought a tractor, the W-30 with that. [Laughing] And a disc.

EE: I can imagine.

LR: Yes. $1,000 and a disc was around $500, a one-way disc.

EE: I see. Came out of the proceeds of that particular crop. Did he grow registered seed after that, or was it just that year?

LR: No, no. I believe it was only one year.

EE: A very lucky year.

LR: I can't--. I believe it was only one year.

EE: I mean, it was very fortunate, because in the spring no one knew it was going to be a big crop.

LR: No.

EE: So he got this seed, and he grew it in a year of a great crop, and he was able to leap up to better machinery as a result of it.

LR: Oh, yes. People were telling me, "Oh, you go and see that guy there. He's got such a good crop." [Laughing]

EE: He's a farmer to watch, eh?

LR: Well, you know, and my mother was an organizer, and she had--. I was young there. I'm sure. And they went to go get that seed with the Model T Ford in the city somewhere. [Laughing]

EE: Well, well, well. Because of course, you had to make contact with the Department of Agriculture to get the seed.

LR: Well, I guess he applied. He applied to have his field registered, and they did, and they came, and that's what he got. He passed the grade and that's what happened.

EE: Right. What other ways did government help your father and yourself in farming that you remember?

LR: Oh, boy. Ok now. [Laughing] I was in the 4-H for 16 years.

EE: 4-H clubs?

LR: Yeah.

EE: Which kind of club was it?

LR: St. Pierre. The St. Pierre 4-H club.

EE: Did it have a specialty?

LR: Pardon?

EE: Did it have a specialty? Some 4-H clubs were seed clubs and some were cattle or livestock or whatever.

LR: No.

EE: Or was yours everything?

LR: It was everything.

EE: Everything, ok.

LR: We started--. It's too bad, you know, I move all my--. What I got there?

EE: You've packed your mementos already? Your medals and things, eh?

LR: Yes, I have. And they're away there at the other house.

[1:15:00]

EE: Your plaques and so on?

LR: Well, you see, we were two clubs. Or three clubs? Two clubs. And the boys when they were 14 or 15, they would drop out from the club. We started the garden club, and in three years, I got two firsts and one second in the garden club.

EE: Did you now? Well, well, well.

LR: [Laughs] Then we went into grain club. Then we went into dairy club. That was dairy cattle, eh? And what happened there, I don't know if it was right or not, but ok. We had to be four members to have a club. And we were supposed to stop at--. Maybe I should not say that. [Laughing]

EE: Well, whatever you want to say.

LR: Ok, ok. Ok, so Lafrance, that was the Agriculture representative, he put St. Pierre club and Otterburne club together, and we had to be four to have a club. So I was past 21, and ok, there was nobody else but those three boys. I said, "Lafrance," I said, "I'll join the club just to learn more, even if I'm older." "Ok," he said. So at the end of the year, hell, I was, I don't know, 24 or something like that, 25. So the two boys that were supposed to go to Toronto to judge the cattle in Toronto, they went to Brandon, they went to Carman, and they won everything there. That was Manitoba, eh? So they came first to St. Pierre for their regional cup. Regional, eh? You know in St. Pierre there is a little club?

EE: Competition?

LR: In St. Pierre. But I was quite responsible here on the farm, and I had some hay to make, and I thought, "Well, maybe I won't go tomorrow. I've got some hay to make." But the next morning it was hazy, and it was partly raining. It was dropping a little bit, so ok, I went there. I was in a very good mood, and I was sitting with the two older boys there that were the champions. They were nervous, and they were going around. What I told myself today, "If a young girl 12-year-old beat me today, I'm going to congratulate her." And you know what happened? I won the cup. [Laughs]

EE: You won the cup.

LR: Against those two guys. But then I was disqualified to go to Toronto because I was over 21.

EE: Sure. You were too old to be doing this, actually.

LR: And one of our boys came second in Toronto and the other, fifth.

EE: Did they really?

LR: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Well, that's terrific.

LR: They were the Courier boys.

EE: Oh, yeah.

LR: They were with Les Millington for a long time. He was a real dairyman, Les Millington. Maybe he wasn't right all the time, right man all the time, but he was a real good dairyman.

EE: Sure.

LR: Les Millington, yes. He was with the best cows in Canada. Of course, he had one cow there that was giving 100 pounds of milk a day, but now lots of famer have one.

EE: Yeah. Well, the breeding continues, and they produce cows that are more and more productive.

LR: Yeah. And they're big now. You see, what, 1,200-pound cow. And there's a Heffer that's two years old, you would think she's a 10-year-old cow.

EE: Really?

LR: But she won't live there.

EE: What breed are they?

LR: Pardon?

EE: What breed? Are these Holstein cows?

LR: Yes.

EE: They are Holsteins.

LR: Holstein cows.

EE: Big-uddered cows. My father had a small number of cows—it was really a herd—but it was mixed with the big Holstein cows, the main milk producer, and the others. I'm just trying to remember what. Was there a Jersey in there? They may have been somewhat mixed breeds, actually, we had, but that one pure-bred Holstein—we called her Molly—was a very important cow in the barn at producing milk.

LR: Yes, yes. Well, we had a big barn, eh? And my father always kept it full.

EE: Sure.

LR: So, that's--.

EE: Well, in the wintertime you want to keep it full so the animals will heat it properly too, for that matter.

LR: Well, yes. Yes. And in 1944, well, we installed water in the barn, in the hot barn, and here in the house. That was water by, how do you call that, by depression? No. By--.

EE: You sank a well, I suppose. Did you have a well?

[1:20:01]

LR: Yes, we had a well, but we--.

EE: And pump and--.

LR: We pumped it in a tank by gravity.

EE: By gravity. Sure, gravity feed.

LR: By gravity. And in the garage, we had the fire going there all the time all the winter because it's an insulated garage, eh?

EE: Yes.

LR: Yes, I installed--. Oh, boy.

EE: So your mother will have thought she was very fortunate to have running water in the house in those '44s. It's four years before the electric pumps are available come to think of it.

LR: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And you know, that was before we had backhoes too. [Laughing]

EE: Yeah. So it was hand digging?

LR: Yes! [Laughing] Yes. Yes, yes. We dug from the barn to the hot barn that was over 100 feet. Then we dug a hole, a store for the house, another 100 feet, and at some places it was pretty near as high as this but not quite. With shovel. All summer.

EE: You'd earned what you were building, what you had as the end result. You really earned it.

LR: I believe that. [Laughs]

EE: So you stopped school, but you were in the 4-H club for about another ten years after you'd dropped out of school from what you were saying.

LR: Yes.

EE: Was the Agricultural representative—or we just say Ag-rep—the Ag-rep was quite important over the years to your farming, I suppose?

LR: Well, yes.

EE: Providing advice and so on.

LR: Well, yes. Yes. And after that, I was a spell of a time there when I wasn't going to meetings or things like that because I was all by myself to do the chores and everything. I was tied up, you know, 15 hours a day there seven days a week!

EE: It's really tough with livestock and especially with those cows when you have to milk them morning and evening and it's your job. I mean, you've got a few hours in the middle of the day to do something, but the cows expect you there morning and evening.

LR: Well, you always had something to fix, eh? In the hot barn or--. And we had the young pigs in the wintertime so that in the summertime we had more time to work in the field. Then after that spell of a time that I didn't go to meeting, then I started to—after having those chores—I started to be in the Agricultural Society. I was for the Agricultural Society now for over 22 years.

EE: Oh, yes. Which one was this? In Hannover? No, you're in De Salaberry here.

LR: De Salaberry.

EE: Was it a De Salaberry Agricultural Society?

LR: No, it was a St. Pierre Agricultural Society.

EE: Oh, St. Pierre. Oh, yes. So--.

LR: It's still operating.

EE: So this is kind of a 4-H club for grown men, I guess, was it? What did it do?

LR: Well, when it started the Agricultural Society, that was all agriculture. The cows were there, and everything was there, but now there is no more cows around, so it's not quite an Agricultural Society anymore. It's a flower society. [Laughing]

EE: Back to gardening!

LR: Yeah. Well, yes, and the people like the flowers, and there's just as much flowers as anything else. But yes. And canning and everything, you know? So it's over 20 years that I've--.

EE: you would have an annual fair, I suppose, in the summer or fall was it?

LR: Oh, yes. Summer.

EE: When was it usually?

LR: Well, the last week in August.

EE: Last week in--.

LR: No, not August. September? The first week in August.

EE: The first week in August. So it's kind of a midsummer fair then?

LR: Yeah, yeah. Well, let's see now. Come on, I should--. No, it's the last week in August because usually we have some tomato and things like that. I should know better, but--. [Laughs] And of course, beans. Well, I was always a guy that was if there was nobody to do that job, well, I had it. So I was president there for some time.

EE: Were you now?

LR: I was president for four years. There was nobody else, and it was going to close. I said to the guys, "It's going to close now if you don't--." That was five years ago. It's going to close because--. So, you know who joined? There was two Agricultural representative that joined, so boy, they made the job--. Oh, boy. They could go with their electronic there--.

EE: Sure. Laptops and all those.

LR: Organization and things like that, you know? Oh, they were making a deadly job, and I told them, "By gosh, You boys are doing a deadly job now." Because it was going down, and it's hard to have organization because people seems to be so busy, and the people have got no time.

EE: Have you seen land, farmers selling out to others? Have you seen a reduction in the number of farmers around here? A growth of farms?

[1:25:05]

LR: Oh, yes. Something awful. Something awful. In 1936 or 1940, I would say, one third of the Manitoba population was on the farm. And now, I don't know if there's two or three percent.

EE: Yeah. That certainly is true for the country. I think it's below one percent for all of Canada, but when you have one of the Prairie provinces and it drops that way, boy, that's a shift.

LR: Yes.

EE: An enormous shift.

LR: Yes. I believe it's too bad because, you know, well, they get so nice wages and you've got such an overhead if you're on the farm, eh, to make a buck. And you're lucky if you make one.

EE: Yes. The life in the city if you can get any kind of training and so on—tradesmen occupations, professional people particularly—there's a lot more money in that, and much of it is much less of a worry than on the farm where, as you say, the cost of farming goes up and up. You have to buy machinery and whatnot.

LR: Well, maybe I should not say that, but I am a toastmaster.

EE: Toastmasters Club?

LR: Yes. And I'm with the city guys and some teachers there. And you know, I believe, and I think I'm right when I say I'm bringing some speech that are most wonderful sounding. Some of them, they are teachers, but they don't talk of what they do very much. They do a story of when they went on vacation. They had such a hard time there and over there. [Laughing]

EE: You've got real things to talk about. [Laughing] Well, let me--.

LR: Yes. Well, one time, I brought my weed book, and I showed them. And I showed them a small bottle that was maybe a little bit bigger than that. It was Clean Green. "You know how much that cost?" They asked. "$175, one small." And that can change the potential of a 500-gallon tank. It can change the potential of what it can do with some other chemical.

EE: Yes. These would be things that you would learn from the Ag-rep?

LR: Oh, yes.

EE: Or did company representatives come out here as well?

LR: Well, the company representative would come, and they would make a meeting of the farmers, but the Ag-reps were the great guys. I believe the Ag-rep are the greatest guys in the country because of the work they do with the farmers and what they make the farmers do. And I told them sometime, "You should go to some other trade and show them how." [laughing] Because--.

EE: Because they're certainly showing you how.

LR: Because at one time, we were buying a half-ton truck for 1,000 bushels of wheat at one time.

EE: Yes. That was the sort of ratio in terms of income on the wheat and the cost of the truck. And how has it changed?

LR: 12 times. We got to grow to 12,000 now. But the grain went up last year, then it went down like a stone.

EE: Yes.

LR: Yes. And the fertilizer went up too. It came down some, but not as much.

EE: How did that inflation, that rise in wheat princes around 1973 affect--? Do you remember that period?

LR: Yes. Yes.

EE: How did it affect you?

LR: Well, it did a lot, but I still had the cattle then. I believe I had the hogs then too. 1970, no, no. I didn't have. I did not. Well, it was a hard time. It was a time that I had my accident.

EE: Well, I was thinking, you had almost lost the farm a couple of years earlier.

LR: Yeah.

EE: Did this terrific increase in wheat prices and so on increase your income, make it easier to get rid of your debts, or did it not?

LR: Well, it was hard time.

EE: They were hard times, eh?

LR: It was really hard time. The other people would send their kids here to learn or to swim or to skate and things like that, but my kids never did.

EE: There wasn't the money?

LR: No money.

EE: Well, I'm familiar with that. Eight children on 240 acres.

[1:30:03]

LR: Yeah. Yes.

EE: There's not much cash around.

LR: No, sir. No, sir.

EE: No. Six of the eight of us have ended up with university degrees, but--.

LR: That's good.

EE: Yeah. By one means or another. Well, I was a scholarship boy, which helped, but it's tough.

LR: You were smart guys!

EE: Well, so it seemed. [Laughing] The other government programs, crop insurance, did you insure your--?

LR: Yes. Yes. In 1987 there or '88, which was the dry year? That was 1988 the dry year.

EE: You're telling me. I don't remember. I wasn't farming. [Laughs]

LR: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, you know, it goes away. Now I'm not sure. I was sure for a while. For a time, I was sure of my dates, but now I'm not sure anymore. [Laughs] Not with that.

EE: But there was a bad year in there?

LR: Yes, there was a bad year in there. That was 1988, I believe that was. I never seen a dry year like that even in the 30s. In the 30s there, we had—how do you say that there?—we had lots of grasshoppers, lots of crickets.

EE: But crops grew?

LR: No, nothing.

EE: No. I see.

LR: We had rust.

EE: Yeah. I see.

LR: We had rust.

EE: So the 30s were very bad, even here in eastern Manitoba?

LR: Oh, yes. In French we say [inaudible**]** It's one bad years after the other. Yes.

EE: Well, they're the Dirty Thirties.

LR: Well, yes. Well, I remember when I started school, you know, they didn't have money to buy a boy's coat, so I went to school with my sister's coat. My youngest sister's coat. [Laughs] Yeah. And my mother would dress us with sugar bags. She would make pants and shirts with sugar bags or flour bags.

EE: Well, that's where the mother with a sewing machine really helps the family.

LR: Oh, you bet. You bet.

EE: And saves the expense.

LR: Well, at night there, you would go in the field, and on a stem of oats or a stem of flax, you would see four grasshoppers there on the stem. Yes. And if you would cut the grain with a binder and the sheath there, the crickets especially would cut that small tread there that would hold the grain, and it would be full of grain on the ground.

EE: So crickets were parasites as well?

LR: Oh, something awful.

EE: You know, you hear them when you grow up in the country. You're familiar with crickets, but I hadn't realized—grasshoppers I know—but crickets did that as well?

LR: Oh! Beside the clover stack there, it was dark with crickets. My grandfather, he had a big shed in his barn, and it was so full of cricket there, he called a priest. He said, "Make a prayer," he said, "for them crickets to go away." I don't know if they did or not, but to do less damage. But it was black with crickets. We had some old house then, and the crickets would come in the house, and they would *qwik qwik qwik* all night, you know?

EE: Oh, yeah. They're noisy those creatures.

LR: And we didn't have no electricity then, no fan, nothing. Some old house. We could not sleep. And too, maybe I should say that too. We would make smudge for the cows.

EE: Yes. Yes, of course.

LR: You remember that?

EE: Yes, you'd pile up some straw or whatever and light it underneath, and then it smouldered and produced smoke.

LR: We would put a piece of wood or something underneath, and then some branches on top. Then we would put the dry straw that we could take from the manure pile.

EE: Yeah. Sort of half-rotten.

LR: Yeah. The dry straw. Then on top of that, we would go a little deeper into the manure pile and take the wetter manure, and that would stay all night until the morning. And as soon as we would start that, the cows would know to come around. That was about maybe 25, 50 feet from the manure pile.

[1:35:03]

EE: And somehow or other it drove the mosquitos away, didn't it? Because that was the intention to sort of drive the insects away, wasn't it?

LR: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. They would stand in the smoke, and they would stay there. They would know where it is. Yes.

EE: I'm glad you described it. I haven't seen a smudge for a long time, and so I've forgotten details of doing it.

LR: Well, I started when I was that small, and I did that for part of my life whenever we had stock, eh outside. Especially in the bush, eh?

EE: Yes.

LR: Because if you're out in the open, well, they're a little bit less.

EE: Yeah. The wind carries the insects away.

LR: The wind carries them. But you better not be--. One time I had to fix the discer and the open, and there was lots of tall grass and green grass around. Boy. There were tick on me. That was something awful. And the '30s too, the grasshoppers, they would eat, and the rust. That was bad, the rust there. I've seen some wheat—it was especially in the wheat, eh—I've seen some wheat that was maybe a foot and a half long. It was starting to put the short blade, and it caught the rust, and in two weeks it was laying down. And I seen my father put a match to the field. My youngest sister was with us, and she cried.

EE: Yeah. When you have to burn a crop you expected to harvest, its very painful.

LR: And there was sleeping sickness too on the horses.

EE: I've heard of that, yes.

LR: You've heard of that, eh?

EE: Yeah.

LR: Yes. My dad lost his best working horse there with sleeping sickness. And the people that say there that they don't want to have spray for the mosquitos, they should have seen that horse suffer. How he was suffering when he died. And my father to that time, he cried when he lost. He lost his best buggy horse with some poison that they had put for the grasshoppers.

EE: Oh, no.

LR: You know they were spreading some poison around the field for the grasshoppers that was mixed with sawdust, eh, and [inaudible].

EE: Yes. Oh, my.

LR: And he went in the water, one of them horses, and he licked it, and he died. Another horse did that too, but we ahd a barrel that was full of skim milk—you know, we had lots of skim milk from the cows—and he drank some skim milk and that, and the veterinary said that's what saved him.

EE: I see.

LR: [Laughs] Oh, boy.

EE: You had experienced this.

LR: There was another story about that that was maybe funny, but not funny for the guy. [Laughs] They were making some of that poison there in an old cheese factory that one of my old uncles had. So they loaded--. And that was in bags. They would put that in bags, and they would spread it in the field, on the side of the field with, I believe, they had a rod [inaudible] to spread that in the field because that was stricken in there. My old grand uncle when he went in the field, he sit on the bag. [Laughing] He didn't sit very much for a week after, eh?

EE: Oh, really? It burned his flesh or skin?

LR: Yes. [Laughing]

EE: I see. Well, you learn lessons.

LR: Yeah. Oh, boy. We learned. We pay and learn.

EE: Yes. Yes, as someone once said, "A couple of hard knocks of experience. First, the test, and then the lesson." [Laughing] Turning it around.

LR: Yes.

EE: Let me take up some of these other questions here. We've done a great job of sort of traversing your life or going through it at the various stages. What would you like people to know about the work you did through these years?

LR: Well. What I like people to know? I don't know. I'm not sure if it's worth it sometime because they say that's not true what you say. But what I'd like them to know is it's a good life they've got today, and they don't know that. That somebody has done something before them.

EE: Yeah. There's been a lot done before people today.

LR: Yes.

EE: Yeah.

[1:40:00]

LR: You know, I realized that I thought I was the centre of the world, and I realized that when I went down east. That was with the train there, with the CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] coach. How did they call it? The Flyer. We call it the Flyer, you know. I don't know if you called it the train there. Well, how they call it there?

EE: This was the passenger train to eastern Canada?

LR: The passenger train, you've got it. The passenger train. Well, when I went down east then, we started to cross through these tunnels in the mountain down east there. We were crossing the tunnel. Well, I said to myself, "Hell, somebody's done some work here to cross the tunnel with some pick and shovel."

EE: Yeah, yeah.

LR: It took me--. And to blast them.

EE: If it's CPR, it was done in the 1880s.

LR: Well, yes. Yes.

EE: Pick and shovel it was, and of course, they did a lot of blasting in those days too, and men died in the blasting too. Yes, you're right.

LR: And I remember now when making new land, I blasted some stumps too.

EE: Did you?

LR: Oh, yes.

EE: Did you and your father clear much of this land?

LR: Well, he did. He did most of it. Then when he went older, we brush cut some land, then we plowed it, and we had to take the stump off and everything. And I believe that's the best way to keep the good land on the land. After that, they had the bulldozer, and the bulldozer maybe had a tonne of nice dirt there they were putting in the pile, eh?

EE: Yeah, yeah. Whereas you need that dirt on your field.

LR: Yes. I don't like that. I don't like that.

EE: No, no. You need it.

LR: Because you're taking the best of the land, and you're putting it in the pile.

EE: Do you have yourself from your experience of farming a feeling that the soil has suffered over the years, that it's poorer soil, or not?

LR: Uh--.

EE: Did you spread the manure on the fields?

LR: Pardon?

EE: You had livestock. Did the manure get spread on the fields?

LR: Well, yes. We did that. I believe that's the natural way to do it.

EE: I agree with you. [Laughing] Yes.

LR: And some people, well, they say it stinks too much when we go by.

EE: Fresh country air!

LR: Well. But that's the right way to do it.

EE: Yes.

LR: Because in this heavy clay here, it granulized the soil. And that heavy clay, it's got to granulize the soil. And by granulizing the soil, it promotes the action of a fertilizer. It makes the action of fertilizer better because in this heavy clay, it kind of takes the fertilizer and keeps it inside, eh? It's hard to go outside that heavy clay.

EE: Sure. Well, the stuff can stick together too, can't it?

LR: Yes.

EE: And get terribly hard and lumpy very easily, can't it?

LR: Yes. And so, if you spread some manure on, that's my best thing. I did some with the manure boat, eh?

EE: Oh, yes.

LR: [Laughs] You remember that thing?

EE: Yes.

LR: We called that the manure boat in the field. After I had the barn cleaner—I never got the spreader—and I would pull the manure boat in the field, and I would spread it, especially on the alfalfa. And by gosh, the next year you would get some alfalfa, I'm telling you.

EE: Sure. We should explain for people who haven't seen it that we're talking about something like a sleigh, which would often be called a stone-boat, I guess, was another of the terms we used.

LR: Yeah.

EE: And it would simply be pulled across the field.

LR: Yes.

EE: It was like a sleigh, but you'd pull it across dirt and grass and pasture or whatever. You didn't worry about whether there was any snow there or not. But that's what we're talking about here, and you'd load the manure on that and take it out into the fields.

LR: Well, we would put two sleds on there. And ours was a big one. Two sleds, and that was maybe 12 feet long and--.

EE: Ok. So we're talking about two sets of sleigh runners underneath.

LR: Yes.

EE: And the wagon or the flat deck, I guess, we could say from trailer language on which the manure was then loaded.

LR: Well, yes. We were pulling that. It would slide on the land. Or in the winter. And ours was for sure 12 feet and four feet wide.

EE: Now, were you spreading it with forks, by hand? Tossing it out on the field and spreading it around?

LR: Yeah. Yes, spread it by hand.

EE: And of course, where you'd done that, the stuff would grow the next season. The alfalfa and so on.

LR: Yes. But that's work every day,

EE: It is work every day. But it is in fact keeping, getting that nourishment back on the fields.

[1:45:05]

LR: Yes.

EE: I mean that's the way farming—I'm tempted to say—farming should be done, but of course, it's changed so much. Just grain and big machinery.

LR: Well, I agree with those that spread manure on the field very, very much because then you put more nature in the field, and there's some worms there. And if you put this anhydrous--?

EE: Anhydrous fertilizer?

LR: Yes. You kill every worm that's in the field with that.

EE: And that's bound to make the field dead in time. The soil goes dead.

LR: Yes. Yes. The more it goes, the more you've got to put on.

EE: Yeah. The more fertilizer you have to put on. Yeah.

LR: Yes. But I believe--. Ok. You were going to say something there.

EE: Well, I was actually going to change the subject a bit. You mentioned the TD-9, the cat that you had for a while.

LR: Yeah.

EE: What advantages did using a caterpillar tractor give you?

LR: Well, it was that it wasn't packing the land as much at the tire.

EE: ok, so the wide tracks reduced the amount of weight that was on the soil.

LR: Yeah. And it had some traction, but it was very hard on the person because it was always shaking like this, eh? And the harder it would pull, the harder it would shake.

EE: Of course. Yes, the vibration would--.

LR: And it would make a hell of a noise.

EE: Yeah, they were noisy beasts! [Laughs]

LR: Yeah.

EE: I'm thinking that did the International Harvester company offer those, push those TD-9s in the 1950s? Persuade people to buy them or not?

LR: No, no. It happened like this that some farmers got it, and it was just you could go everywhere with that thing, you know? If you be careful. If you were not careful, you'd get stuck bad too.

EE: Well, yes.

LR: And it was stronger, and it had more traction.

EE: I'm asking this question partly because my father never had one, but two of our neighbours—including our good Irish neighbours the McIntyres—had caterpillar tractors, and I've done a certain amount of field work as I remember with that caterpillar tractor myself,

LR: You did?

EE: Yes, I've done some back in the '50s, and that's what had me wondering was it maybe being offered to farmers at the time so that some of them were buying these machines.

LR: Well, they were a machine that you could pull more, I believe, with it.

EE: Yeah.

LR: It would pack the land less, and sometime if you had the big load there with the rubber tire, you had a hard time to turn the corners. It would not turn as soon as you would like to. You might turn in the ditch or in the wire, you know. But with the caterpillar, there was no question., You would pull on one of the levers and, boy, it would turn.

EE: Turn on a dime.

LR: Yeah.

EE: [Laughs] Yes, I know. The first time I ever drove one of those was at another neighbour who had a smaller one, and he had me climb on and start moving it. I was maybe 15 or 20 feet from a fence heading straight at the fence that I panicked but good at first because I didn't know what to do, and I was heading straight for this fence. Then he said, of course, "Pull a lever," and *whoop,* it whips around, and you're going a different direction.

LR: Yeah.

EE: It's a real lesson in how to operate a caterpillar tractor when you're young that way.

LR: Well, yes. How old were you?

EE: Well, I probably wasn't much more than 12 or 14.

LR: Oh!

EE: When this happened. I think probably in the early ‘50s is the memory I have of thinking for a moment that I was going to destroy one of his fences, run right through it with a caterpillar tractor.

LR: Well, he would.

EE: Well, it would have if I hadn’t turned it! [Laughing] Oh, yes. That’s for sure. What might interest or surprise people most about the work you did? Are there any things that--. You talked to your Toastmasters club. I suppose you tell them things. Do you remember things that have surprised them from what you’ve told them?

LR: Well, I made them a speech once on beef cattle or dairy cattle, whatever. And I argue with them that they were not polluting the earth, that they were doing something good to the earth.

EE: Ok. [Laughing]

LR: And they never argued with me. Ok. “Ok,” I told them. “If you’ve got dairy cattle, that’s nature that you’ve got to feed them. And you have to feed them alfalfa, whatever. And alfalfa grows deep in the earth, and it brings up glucosamine,” or something like this, you know?

[1:50:10]

EE: Ok. Yes.

LR: That’s very important for the health of people. It grows deep in the earth, and it brings that up, and it’s in the plant.

EE: And it ends up in the milk then, does it?

LR: In the plant of the alfalfa. And I haven’t got the right word there, but it’s something like glucosamine.

EE: Yes. Well, I won’t try. I’m not sure. But you’re saying a word that I can visualize, and if it’s not the right word, we can go finding it. But in any case, you were saying?

LR: Yes. So, I told them too that takes carbon from the air, the alfalfa. That takes some carbon from the air, and that's good. That purifies the air. And I said, "Everything that's natural that God did, He said that's good for the earth. He said if it's something that's not good for the earth, most of the time it's done by man."

EE: Yeah. [Laughing] Because what you were dealing with was they thought that the methane that the cows give off adds to global warming?

LR: Yeah, yeah.

EE: And you were fighting that.

LR: Yeah. I am fighting that. [Laughing]

EE: Nicely done.

LR: Yes. Yes. And so, and I said that, "Alfalfa too improves the land. You put some nitrogen in the land, so it's natural nitrogen. So that's always nature that is working there." And I don't know if I had something else. It seems to me I had something else. I don't remember right. But you know, when I write something, well, I always add. It never comes clear the first time.

EE: Well, of course not.

LR: I have to work on it. And alfalfa too or clover, well, you can make green manure with it then, you know? Put it back in the land.

EE: In fact, there are people—maybe out of England—who will actually call sweet clover a natural manure because it enriches the soil. Yeah.

LR: Yes. Yes. Well, they asked me, "How long does it take to rot there?" Well, I told them, "It takes one year to rot."

EE: So sweet clover actually breaks down within a year?

LR: Well, yes. Yes.

EE: Is it because of the nitrogen that's in there partly?

LR: Well, it's--. If you plow it down?

EE: Yes.

LR: Well, it's got to rot, eh?

EE: Yes.

LR: It's got to rot. This is when the nitro--. Well, it draws some nitrogen--. It puts some nitrogen.

EE: It does, yes.

LR: But you've got to inoculate it. Oh, yes. I forgot that. You've got to inoculate the seeds so that it produces nitrogen, and that's some nodules on the seed. And they were looking at me with the big eyes like that. [Laughing]

EE: Yeah. They learned some things.

LR: Well, yes.

EE: Yes. You were teaching them some things.

LR: Well, there was one that told me. "There is always something very profound in what you say." [Laughing]

EE: It went beyond their knowledge of the world.

LR: Well, yes. Yeah.

EE: Yeah. What are you most proud of in the work that you did, in the farming you've done over all these years?

LR: It was to, I believe, to come back from my accident.

EE: Yeah. From the near death.

LR: Yes. And to be able to enjoy. It changed my life completely. Being close to losing your life changes your life completely.

EE: Yes. Yes, I daresay.

LR: After that, I was happy to be with my wife and my kids, and I didn't give a damn about those guys that go south. [Laughing]

EE: Well—and I'm thinking of your boys now—this happened about the time that they were, did you say, 5 and 7 maybe? Or 4 and 6?

LR: Yeah.

EE: So they had a happy and grateful dad for most of their lives, actually.

LR: Well, I hope so. And I believe they liked me very much because anything I asked them, even if it's not quite right, they'll do it for me.

EE: Well, and that's a tender age for children, around 6, to have them almost lose you. They would've been grateful for the rest of their lives that you survived.

LR: I believe they are. I believe they are. I believe they are. Yes.

EE: Bound to be.

LR: Yeah.

EE: Well, let me see. This is getting into the changes and challenges and so on. If you think back over these years as a farmer, what have been the major changes that have taken place over the years? In the way you did it, in maybe the economy, the society in which you operated.

[Telephone rings] [… Audio pauses]

[1:55:06]

Back to, we were--. Oh, let me put this back on. I was wondering about the major changes that you've seen in your life as a farmer.

LR: Oh, it was the changes of farming. I believe farming has done more change, and they're producing more, and other people, I believe, are benefitting from that more than the farmer.

EE: Yes. Well, that's true. Cheap food for the rest of the population.

LR: Yeah. Why do people come to Canada? Because it's cheap food!

EE: Well, among other things, but I'm sure cheap food is pretty basic.

LR: Yes. Yeah. And good food.

EE: Yes.

LR: And the guys that were hearing me there, "You're getting the cheapest food and the best food in the world." [Laughing]

EE: You've told them that at the Toastmasters club, have you?

LR: Yeah.

EE: Yeah, because you started--. Your farming started with horses and then tractors and different kinds of machinery and all of those ways--.

LR: Going to school with a horse. Going to school on horseback. [Laughs] And when I was going to school, I was bringing some of the cream to the station, to the railway station. And I had to be there before 8:20, and I had to take my breakfast at 7:00. So that was a long ways to suppertime to have a good supper at suppertime. I brought my dinner to school, but hell, when it was in the wintertime, it was cold. And we didn't have coffee in school or whatever. Cold water, that's what we had.

EE: Yeah, it was hard times those early years.

LR: Yes.

EE: Yeah. Life became better over the years, of course. More comfortable. You built the house in which we're sitting at the moment.

LR: Yes.

EE: You built that at some point to replace the house that your father had?

LR: When I got married, I said to myself, "If I get married, I build a new house."

EE: Right.

LR: This cost $12,000.

EE: Did you build it yourself mostly?

LR: No, no. I'm not a--. I had enough chores to do, eh?

EE: Sure.

LR: I hired somebody.

EE: So you got a contractor. Carpenter had came in and built it for you for $12,000?

LR: Yeah.

EE: Yeah. What were the major challenges that you faced over the years, other than surviving this terrible accident?

LR: What changed in the farm, and challenge, eh? Oh, boy.

EE: There may be nothing that sort of stands out as a big thing other than that terrible accident, but I suppose, prices for your crops fall, costs. For what you were saying about the truck, of course, 1,000 bushels would bring in enough to buy a truck at one point, and then later, you're needing 12,000 bushels to do the same thing.

LR: Yes.

EE: Those are enormous challenges, and you just--.

LR: Oh, yes. I believe now the farmer is one of the greatest managers there is.

EE: Really has to be to survive.

LR: Yeah. Otherwise, he won't survive.

EE: Did your mother do some of that helping your father manage the farm?

LR: Yes.

EE: Did your wife help you similarly?

LR: Yes. Yes. Well, my mother was a lot more farm woman than my wife, but I believe my wife did her household the way she was raised.

EE: Yes. Sure, of course.

LR: The way she was raised.

EE: She was bound to. The paperwork, all the keeping the accounts, did you do that in the household?

LR: Yes. Yes. I did my taxes, income tax, for a long time because we were helped by the Agricultural representative, and there was sessions there to help the farmers how to operate and to do everything. And we had some income tax too—people—that were filling the incoming tax. For a while, I was doing it myself. Then I got to somebody who was more professional to do my income tax. Yes.

EE: Yes. Well, that helps. I've done my own all of my life, and this fall I finally—because I had some additional income—so I went to an accountant, my wife and I. Well, we were thinking about income splitting too. I hadn't bothered last spring. So for the first time, I had an accountant look at my tax returns and so on, and I guess I'll end up with $2,000 or better off than I would have been under my own filing. And so I'm with you, but even later than you, I've turned to a professional. [Laughs]

[2:00:07]

LR: Yes.

EE: For getting that kind of advice done.

LR: Well, yes. It was changing so much, and there's so much as a farmer that you've got to figure in the income tax, eh? There's so much in there. You've got so much to report there.

EE: Yeah. I'm sure there is. It gets more and more complicated.

LR: Yes.

EE: But again, the Ag-reps have been enormously important in helping you be a successful farmer.

LR: Oh, yes. The Ag-rep is a very important man for me. He's the best man I can meet, and I believe they like their work. Oh, boy. They're great guys.

EE: Do you have thoughts about the way in which the grain companies operated? You were never involved with the Manitoba Pool Elevators, I guess, or were you?

LR: The what?

EE: You weren't involved with Manitoba Pool Elevators?

LR: No, no.

EE: I guess you were with UGG all the way through.

LR: Yeah. Well, yes. UGG went out here in Otterburne, then we went to Pioneer. And they had Pool elevators in Dufrost, and I believe in Niverville, but I never went there because that was a very busy place, Niverville, because lots of farmers around there, beet farmers and things like that. And after bears, you get a good crop, and you know--. Yes, it was very, very busy in there, but there's no elevator nowhere no.

EE: No. So in Richardson--. Pioneer Grain, of course, is the Richardson business, and so you were dealing with them. The whole quota system and all the rest of it—the Wheat Board and so on and so forth—I suppose you lived within that system, obviously, back in the '50s. The quotas and so on and so forth.

LR: Yes. Yes, yes. When we were dealing with the Grain Exchange. [Laughs]

EE: And that wasn't always happy?

LR: Well, no. That wasn't very happy. In the fall when we were threshing, the grain wasn't worth nothing, but when it was March or January or whatever, it was worth lot. Well, they had the grain then. [Laughs]

EE: Yeah. They had and you didn't have it. Farmers didn't have it.

LR: Yeah.

EE: No, that's the sort of thing that the Wheat Board from 1935 onwards really protected. So you'd be a supporter of the Wheat Board to the present day, I guess?

LR: Oh, yes. I am for that because if they take the Wheat Board away, then our grain will go down to the States, and they'll take it if they need it. If they don't need it, they'll shut the gates.

EE: Yeah, yeah. We need the Wheat Board. I feel the same way.

LR: Yeah.

EE: Well, are there any vivid memories you would like to mention? Other than the accident. I think we've got that one.

LR: Well, you see, I'm always talking about my wife, but we're not living together. She was brought by a father that had obsession, eh? That was really, really obsession. Then you get somebody that is obsessed with obsession. That, you know what that is? Obsession is to bring other people down to raise yourself up. You can maybe even hang other people, and yourself, you have the reason to do it. The priest told me that's the worst thing on earth.

EE: I see. Your wife is still alive, I take it?

LR: Oh, yes. Yes. And we connect together because I cannot leave a person like that.

EE: No, no. But she's not living with you any longer, then.

LR: Yeah, yeah.

EE: I see. How long has she been away? Or when did she leave?

LR: Oh, in 1997.

EE: I see. About 10, 11 years ago.

LR: Yes.

EE: Boy, that's another challenge in life.

LR: Well, yes. Yes. I went through some awful thing there. Well, that's not her fault. She inherited that from her father, you know? The way it works, you know, I studied that with the good father and the priest. It's worse than being an alcoholic.

EE: Is it really?

LR: Yes. Because alcoholic, you hurt yourself. You hurt other people, eh? But you do something that hurts you. But then the other stuff, you don't notice it, and you do it.

[2:05:08]

EE: Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Your church has been important to you throughout your lifetime?

LR: Oh, very much. Very much. Very much.

EE: With a sister as a Gray Nun, that would be a special thing. Well, your father hoped you'd become a priest, I guess, or an Oblate Father initially.

LR: [Laughs] Well, I had two sisters, and they were both nuns.

EE: They were both nuns? I see.

LR: Yes.

EE: Well, well.

LR: One sister asked me, "Will you go as a priest?" "Oh," I told her, "I don't think so." I thought, "There's enough. Two in the family that are in the religion. You don't need a third one." [Laughing]

EE: The church is important, but we don't all have to be religious.

LR: Yeah. [Laughing]

EE: Yes, I suppose so. That's interesting that your father would actually--. Where did he come from in Quebec, do you remember?

LR: Oh, he come from Windsor Ville, and my mother come from close to Windsor Ville. And my father come from Sorrel. Sorrel, that's a place where there's lots of shipping going around, mining.

EE: Yes. Big shipyard.

LR: Iron and things like that, eh?

EE: Yeah. Had his family worked in the--?

LR: Well, my grandfather had a brickyard. He was making bricks to build buildings.

EE: I see. He actually owned the brickyard?

LR: Yes, yes.

EE: I see. So why would your father have moved to Manitoba then?

LR: Well. Oh, boy. [Laughs] I don't know if I could say that.

EE: Well, you don't have to. I'm not pressing you.

LR: Ok. No, I will. I will. He was quite a religious man, my father.

EE: Raising two nuns, obviously.

LR: Well, I'll tell you, you know. To get Holy Communion in the early days, you had to not eat or drink since midnight.

EE: Ok.

LR: So he was doing his chores in the morning, getting up in the morning at 5:00, and he would go to church in St. Pierre at 8:00 without anything in his stomach.

EE: Now this wasn't everyday?

LR: No, that wasn't everyday.

EE: This was on Sunday?

LR: Once a month maybe.

EE: Oh, once a month.

LR: But I thought it take a very religious man to do that.

EE: Yes, indeed.

LR: And do it miles with horses, eh? Yes. Oh, yes. My mother too. Oh, boy. What was I thinking there?

EE: Well, I wondered why they came to Manitoba if the father had a business and--.

LR: Ok. Ok. Then--. Ok. You know, the Frenchmen, they swear quite a bit, eh?

EE: Yeah, it's part of the culture. [Laughing] *Sacre-bleu!* [Laughing] *Mon Dieu!*

LR: Pardon?

EE: *Mon Dieu!*

LR: Yeah.

EE: And other things. [Laughing]

LR: So, he didn't like that to work on the shores there with the other men there. And my grandfather said, "Ok. There's some land out west there. Maybe we should go and establish there." And the land that they were on over there wasn't very good. And my mother, where she was raised there, there was lots of stones. They had to pick stones before they pick potatoes, eh?

EE: Sure.

LR: So, she was always glad that she came west, yes, on the land. But of course, they had a hard time, you know, going through the '30s and that. They went through--. They always had faith in God. I believe that was the greatest thing that they had faith in God.

EE: Well, faith in God has kept many people going. My parents, I'm sure—though they were Mennonites—felt that same faith in God that kept them going. One of the interesting things about your family's being here, you know, coming to a province which had stopped being English and French around 1890—years earlier—the French Canadians of Manitoba didn't have the Catholic schools

that they wanted, nor did my ancestors, Mennonites, who wanted their own schools. I mean, that also went around 1890. So they were coming to a province which was going to be English.

LR: Yes.

EE: And probably Protestant if they could do it. Did your parents, did you have any feelings about the province of Manitoba? This is some distance from farming maybe, but--.

LR: Ok. I thought I wouldn't say that, but ok. I will say. I will say it. When I went to school, I was an outlaw. I went to school with a car when I was 13 or 14. I was an outlaw. And the English people would go out of school *[inaudible]*, and I would have to stay after school until 4:00 to study French. So I was an outlaw there too. Sometime in the middle of my lesson I had to stay after 4:00, so I was an outlaw there too. [Laughing]

[2:10:19]

EE: The school here in town or the Otterburne community, was it mostly French? It was mixed?

LR: Yes. It was mostly French. There was a few English. There was the McVicars, there was the Reynolds, and there was the Sawatzky.

EE: Well, Sawatzky would be Mennonite probably. Yeah.

LR: Yeah, yeah. And what I thought that was very funny there, the young boy, Sawatzky, he wasn't good in school, and he would be able to talk French. The other English people, they were good in school, and they could not talk a word in French. [Laughing]

EE: Well, it isn't intelligence that's required. [Laughs] I remember sometime in the late '60s, there was a columnist in the *Globe and Mail* named George Main, and he wrote a column once about some sort of a mental failing that people in western Canada had. They couldn't learn French. [Laughing] He was being sarcastic, of course, but I'm interested. So this young Sawatzky boy learned the French from the other students?

LR: From us, yes.

EE: Yeah. From the students.

LR: Yes. And he wasn't very good in school at all.

EE: No. What did he become later on?

LR: I don't know. He went to Winnipeg, and he worked on the railroad. That's a funny thing, you know. My son lives in Winnipeg, and Sawatzky met my son in Winnipeg, and he ask him, "Are you the son of Leonard Robidaux?" He said, "Yes." Because when I was young, you know, sometime I would hire a young man to help me when I was 12, 13 years old. My dad maybe had a sore back or--. He had a sore back lots of time, you know, the long back. And they would come and help me. Of course, I would pay them. They would come and help me to do some work, you know, on the farm. And he liked that, that Sawatzky liked that because--. Yes. And I worked with the Mennonites quite a bit. When we wanted to keep the family farm, I worked with a few Mennonites there and, boy, I thought I was pretty good with them. And I liked their way. They were looking at the things and, yes, there was a minister there, and the other guy was--. Was he an Ag-rep? No. There was a minister, and the other guy, what was he?

EE: Where were they from?

LR: Well, he was--. Of course, the minister came from the States, and he was a young guy. And he had tried to make a church and it didn't work. Sometimes that doesn't work, eh, to establish a church.

EE: No, it doesn't always work. That's right.

LR: And it didn't work, so he worked for this organization to try and keep the family farm.

EE: Oh, yes.

LR: Yes.

EE: What's the organization called, do you remember?

LR: The what?

EE: Do you remember what this organization is called?

LR: No. It was to keep the family farm, and we had some people from quite a few countries there coming to the meetings. One time we had a guy from Chile. We had a lady from the Philippines. We had some guys from the States. Boy, you know, being a farmer down in the States there is not fun.

EE: No, I don't think it's fun at all. In fact, for some, it's pretty close to hell, I think, actually, if I may use that word.

LR: Well, you know, for a dairy farmer down in the States it was hell. They didn't have the floor price on the milk, and they built barns from here to I don't know where. And some guys from the city came back on the farm and built big barns. Then they flooded the country with milk. Then there was no bottom, so lots of them, they lost the farm.

EE: Yeah. That's happened with pigs and chickens and whatnot in the States, this big scale of agriculture that has made it almost impossible to keep the family farm going. It's been very difficult down there.

LR: So, that's a fact all over then. How come those guys want to be like the States there? They want to take the Wheat Board out, and I believe those guys are all truckers.

[2:15:10]

EE: Well, they may be. Yeah.

LR: They're all truckers.

EE: They'd like to haul the stuff. Yeah, yeah.

LR: Yes. And once it's done, it's done. It will be--. What is the big company there that's for the States there? I forgot the name.

EE: Not Cargill?

LR: Cargill, yes. Well, they'll--. Ok. If they need the grain down the States, they'll take it. But hell, if they don't want it, they'll close the gates.

EE: Sure. It'll just sit in the granaries. Yeah.

LR: Yeah.

EE: True enough. Well, those are some of the challenges of the future, aren't they?

LR: Oh, boy. Yes.

EE: Rather than the past.

LR: Yes.

EE: Yeah, they're very real things.

LR: Yes.

EE: Well, maybe I'll ask as sort of a last question, are there any questions that I should have asked you? Do you have any answers to questions I haven't asked? Or have we done a good job of covering your life?

LR: I believe you've done a wonderful job. I told you something that I thought I'd never tell you. [Laughs] Especially that thing of being an outlaw there. [Laughing] I thought I'd neve tell you that! But.

EE: Well, we have our school experiences. I grew up speaking only German at home until I went to school, and I was the oldest in the family. And so I started Grade 1, and I didn't know very much English at all, and so I had to learn it in school. I was bright, so I managed Grade 1 and so on. And the teacher was married to one of the McIntyre boys, you know, half a mile down the road which probably helped. She was morally inclined. In fact, we visited her—my wife and I—in later years until she died in Portage la Prairie. She was a dear friend. She never had children, and so I think quite frankly that I'm the son that she never had. But you know, I have that sense—I could use a German word or two for it—of being a sort of an outsider or feeling sort of peculiar in the school. In fact, I remember from that first year because it was a one-room country school.

LR: Yes.

EE: So there were the eight grades, and maybe there were some Grade 9 students. There may have been. I don't remember. And I remember listening to the older ones, and they were studying literature, and I tried to say the word. You know, my tongue was adapting. I went from saying "muhter and fahter" to saying "mudder and fadder," and then I got to "mother and father." So it had to

adjust to the *th* sounds. And I tried to say "literature," and I couldn't. I remember thinking to myself, "You know, Ernie, you're going to be a failure. You can't even say that word. How could you ever succeed in school?" Which is a little different from what you said, but it--.

LR: Ok, I'll tell you something there about the neighbours too. Well, maybe I should not have cut you.

EE: No, I'm finished.

LR: Ok, ok.

EE: By all means.

LR: Ok. Well, our neighbours were Irish, eh? And the Irish people won't marry unless they're very rich it seems to me anyway. But they went through the '30s, and they ahd lost some land. And they were four brothers, and they had a hired man, and they had a maid to make the--.

EE: The meals and so on.

LR: The meals and everything. She was an ancient schoolteacher. So I was the only boy around. Can you imagine having five, six old guys there or older people there seeing at 12-year-old guy around? It's an attraction, you know. [Laughing]

EE: I can imagine.

LR: And one of them got married, and he built close to here. They were living far north. He built close to here. He got married, but he got married when they were, I believe, 40 years old.

EE: Oh really?

LR: Yes. And she was a schoolteacher, and he had gone to university. Yeah. Yes. He had gone to university, and they were living close here. Well, you know, I was calling them my second parents. That's a fact. There's pretty near nothing there I could not borrow, but if I broke something, I would fix it, eh?

EE: Sure. Well, that was true for my father with the McIntyres. They had a good machine shop, and I'm sure Dad has borrowed some fair number of tools from them. And when he was clearing the land, he was able to break much of it because he had to break the farm that he bought in 1939. It must have still been bush. So as a child with my brothers and sisters, we were gathering up the roots that kept being cultivated, pulled up from the soil, and piled up and burned. He couldn't clear away a couple of clumps of oak trees that were in the middle of one of the fields, and I think it may have been as late as the 1960s, you know—20, 25 years after he bought that farm—that he had the McIntyres come in with a caterpillar tractor and pull those oak trees out of the ground because they were so hard to get rid of. So these are similar instances of working with the neighbours.

[2:20:34]

LR: Well, yes. Yes. Yes. You know, oh, we got some real help from all of them. And when I got sick, well, I was lucky to get my brother-in-law too. But living close to the Red River, they didn't have no well there. We had the running well, a running well, an artesian well. And this is why we had the stock. And they were four boys there in the wintertime, and they didn't know what to do. So hell, I said, "I'll give you some work." [Laughing]

EE: I bet!

LR: But we were broke, and he was the oldest boy. He was my wife's brother, so it was ok. I was lucky to get him there for a while there to take me out.

EE: Well, you know, I think we should call it an afternoon. I'm just looking at my watch, and I think it's two minutes to 6:00! [Laughing]

LR: Ok.

EE: It looks dark out there. So I'm going to push this.

End of interview.