

This interview is with Tom Mark [deceased], who owned a marine gas station in New Westminster.

Interview Date: May 20, 2014

Interviewer: Jackie Gootee

Date Range: World War II, 1940s/1950s to present

Sound Recording Length: 41:29

Tom Mark was born in 1923. In 1941 he joined the Air Force and spent most of the Second World War in Yorkshire, England. He married an English woman, who he met at the local dance, and together they moved back to Canada at the end of the war. By 1948 he got his first job as an attendant at a diesel service station on the New Westminster waterfront, and around 1956 he was the sole operator of the Shell service station beneath the Pattullo Bridge on the New Westminster waterfront, which serviced ships and boats.

The interview was conducted as part of Hist 451: Oral History Practicum offered at Simon Fraser University during Spring 2014

Section 00:00 – 10:54

- In this section, Tom talks about his background as a volunteer, as an employee of Shell, and his family life. He volunteered with the “Burnaby Health Department... helping old people.” He identifies the location of [King] Neptune restaurant (“our first elegant dining”), built in 1953, on the interviewer’s map, as well as a Shell service station near the Pattullo Bridge. He worked on commission: the more diesel he sold, the better he did. He said his mother was “very Methodist,” and joined the United Church, and his wife was Roman Catholic. So neither his nor his wife’s parents were happy about the marriage.

Section 10:55 – 17:40

- In this section, Tom talks about the job a bit more, including technology and safety. He came home smelling of diesel every day. The station he worked at was not in the most appealing location, but Shell needed a deepwater location for the ships that Tom serviced. Tom doesn’t recall many technological changes that fundamentally altered the work he did at the Shell service station, but as Tom retired, it was just at the time that they were switching to metric. In terms of safety issues, they were strictly told not to smoke at work. He tells a story about the time he got commendations from Standard Oil and the New Westminster Fire Department around 1965 when he put out a fire. There was a strike ongoing by the IWA. The tugboat fleets were all tied up. They had a picket boat that someone had lent them to patrol the river, to ensure no one was moving logs. There was an oil spill, and there was an explosion and Tom ran up the trestle and down the ramp with two fire extinguishers and fired it off in the hatch of the picket boat. Other fishing boats rescued a person who had been blown into the river as a result of the explosion. He said “it was an exciting morning.”

Section 17:41 – 21:59

- In this section, Tom talks about unions and the Fraser River economy these days. He didn’t belong to a union at his job. He thought unions and grievances were valid, and New Westminster was a “workingman’s town.” However, he also notes that sometimes they caused him to lose money, during strikes in the fishery or timber industry. Unfortunately there are hardly any tugboats left, he says. When asked why he said, “We cut all the trees down.” He said he had Saturday helpers, and some employees near his retirement, and he

would get extra days off, but it was a very demanding business. He opened at 7:30am and closed at 5:00pm. But, he was on-call all the time, and couldn't really tell customers "no" if his shift was over.

#### Section 22:00 – 24:59

- In this section, Tom talks about trying to get his son into the business, but his son was afraid of the river. Tom said the Fraser River is not a leisure place, it's a working river. On occasion they would go to the King Neptune for dinner, but not often. He lived about 4 or 5 miles away from the waterfront. He liked gardening and he raised "all kinds" of birds: canaries, budgies, finches, and quail. He also sold them. He sold over \$1,000 worth of birds through Woodward's and Safeway and pet shops.

#### Section 25:00 – 28:18

- In this section Tom talks about where people in New Westminster would get food, and also mentions going into Vancouver to go shopping. There were milkmen and people who delivered bread. A Japanese man with a pole on his back and two baskets on either end would deliver fish to his mother. A Chinese man had a truck out of which he would sell "all the vegetables and fruits you'd need." He would take the "Inter-Urban" electric railway into Vancouver to go Christmas shopping.

#### Section 28:19 – 30:20

- In this section, Tom talks about his wartime service. He joined the Air Force because his brother was in it in Victoria. He worked in the shipyard around "Liberty boats." After his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1941 he joined the Air Force. He wound up in England without any flying training; once there, he was told that the school was full but that he could "Follow the sergeant around" and listen. When the war was over he came home to New Westminster.

#### Section 30:21 – 32:39

- In this section, Tom talks about his early years, both as a child in New Westminster, and as a new employee with Shell. The first gas station was in 1948. It was down by the King Neptune, sharing a wharf with BC Packers. They built a brand new station out by the Pattullo Bridge. He thought that was super because he had his whole wharf to himself, and that happened in 1956 until 1976. But he said that it was 27 years in total, and said he might have gotten the dates muddled. As a 10- or 11-year-old child he used to play amongst the freighters by getting a little rowboat.

#### Section 32:40 – 37:19

- In this section, Tom talks about the Fraser River freezing over, and the gravel business. The Fraser River would freeze over completely in the cold weather. They had to separate the logs to take them up into the mills. So when the river froze over they would use dynamite and you would hear "bang, bang" he says. He said Mary Hill was a big sand-and-gravel pit.

#### Section 37:20 – 41:29

- In this section, Tom talks about the changing landscape of the New Westminster waterfront and what the future might look like. The roads, the wharves and the waterfront have all changed, he said. He said the logs are all gone from the coast. He said thirty years from now the New Westminster will look like "casinos and stuff." Marinas are farther down the mouth

of the river. He said his happiest time was seeing all the boats and seeing a big sailboat come in. He saw a Japanese navy training ship come in to visit.