

This recording is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of several interviews with Dean Johnson, a retired Local 502 longshoreman and former shop steward. The major themes of this interview are the different docks where longshoremen worked, Pacific Australian Direct (PAD) ships, the transition to packaged lumber, well-known ‘characters’ he worked with, as well as some stories about his life.

Interviewers: Andrea Walisser; Peter Hall

Interviewee: Dean Johnson

Date of interview: 23 July 2013

Date range of topics covered: 1961 to present, though Johnson also mentions memories from his childhood growing up in New Westminster, estimated to be between c.1945-c.1961.

Sound Recording Length 1:52:24

Johnson was born and raised in New Westminster. He discusses his early memories of life growing up in New Westminster, which he remembers fondly. He got his first longshoring work in Prince Rupert at age 16, but then in 1961 when he was 17 he starting longshoring in New Westminster. In 1969 he got married. In 1974 he became a Christian. In 1975 he started a steady job at Westshore Terminals. This is Part II of the interview that was begun on July 18, 2013. Johnson has made some notes that the interviewers refer to.

Section 0:00:00 – 0:18:36

- In this section, Johnson describes the different docks that were in New Westminster, and what it was like working on the docks. In addition to the “PCT docks”, the “Gilley Brothers docks”, and the “Brackman Ker docks” (“B&K”), Johnson cites the “Overseas docks” which were the docks nearest to the Pattullo Bridge and handled plywood and lumber. “Overseas” had straddle carriers and forklifts. They had straddle carriers in the 1960s. West of “Overseas” were “Evans Coleman” docks which were in “rough shape.” Johnson also describes retail and distribution businesses in and around the area that serviced the docks and also catered to farmers. Down from Overseas, Evans Coleman and B&K was the Gilley Brothers, which supplied fishers, stored fishing boats and supplied coal. After the Gilley Brothers was the Pacific Coast Terminals (“PCT”), which had five berths. PCT had a warehouse that stored concentrated lead delivered by boxcars, and an icemaker with which they supplied ice to fishers. Johnson’s father went fishing with the Gilley Brothers. The fishing boats came from Steveston, New Westminster, and Gilley’s Brothers docks.

Section 0:18:37 – 0:21:26

- In this section, Johnson describes the King Neptune Restaurant, which Johnson notes was poorly treated given the City of New Westminster’s desire to build condos in its place..

Section 0:21:37 – 0:34:35

- In this section, Johnson resumes talking about the docks, as well as the Queensborough Railway Bridge. The grain elevator (in Surrey) is also described. Johnson would unload grain and describes how they would count workers going in and count them going out. He speculates that this was because of worries that workers could get buried by the grain. The Grain Elevator was removed to make way for the Surrey Fraser Docks. He reports that there was a deep sea dock on the other side of the Pattullo Bridge which was not under the jurisdiction of Local 502; it contained self-loading ships, which involved a conveyor belt system, minimal loading by longshoremen, and no packing, though Johnson has no knowledge of how it works. Another dock, the Johnson Terminals, were limited by their

philosophy that they would only take cargo that their trucks could accommodate. He reports that Johnson Terminals did not treat their customers very well. He describes an incident where the employer at Johnson Terminals was watching him, hoping he would slip up, while moving containers around for a Pacific Australian Direct (PAD) ship. PAD ships were known as party ships.

#### Section 0:34:36 – 0:39:56

- In this section, Johnson talks more about PAD ships. He suggests that New Westminster (Local 502) had a better work ethic than Vancouver, and as such, PAD ships, which at one point moved over to Vancouver, came back to New Westminster. PAD ships had five decks with big doors, and that you could work all five decks at once due to interior ramps.

#### Section 0:39:57 – 0:45:05

- In this section, Johnson talks about the change from scows and loose lumber to packaged lumber. He says that workers loved not having to pack lumber piece by piece. He mentions “the assassinator” and how they were replaced by lift trucks. The effect was that it kept the gang size down because not as many men were needed to pack lumber, but because the work was easier the workers liked it anyway. The “assassinator” was dangerous. He heard of people being hurt by the assassinator, but was not around when it happened. When the transition to packaged lumber happened, “the idea of a tight stow went by the way”; previously, every square inch of loose lumber was packed tightly into the ship. He tells a story of how some timbers had been packed so tight that longshoremen could not get out of the ship’s hold.

#### Section 0:45:06 – 0:48:25

- In this section, Johnson describes parties on the dock and stories about “the beach.” He relays the story about when strippers first started to arrive into New Westminster. At one point the employer called down to the union to see if everyone was on strike because the guys gone off to see the strippers at “The Dunny” [the Dunsmuir Hotel]. He also spoke of sex workers that hung out around The Dunny and The Windsor, and would often go onto the ships. Section

#### Section 48:26 – 52:16

- In this section, Johnson describes drinking with the old guys who were war veterans. One veteran, Baxter, had been a commando, and said to one young coworker “I don’t want to hurt you, but I can kill you.” Many of the longshoremen who fought in World War II hated the Japanese. He describes an incident where an incoming ship flew the Canadian flag upside down and no longshoreman would board the ship to work until it had been fixed. Veterans on the docks would often talk about concentration camps and prisoner-of-war camps.

#### Section 52:17 -- 55:07

- In this section, Johnson discusses drinking on the docks and the personal lives of longshoremen. He said sometimes it was unhappy drinking, but mostly it was happy drinking, and when he did it, it was happy drinking. Johnson described the drinking that happened as not good for family life. Most guys were married.

#### Section 55:08 -- 59:34

- In this section, Johnson talks about foremen and job actions. He mentions that the foremen had their own union, Local 514. When the foremen struck, Johnson notes that supervisors, who didn't know as much as foremen, had to direct the longshoremen what to do. But they didn't know what to tell them, so the longshoremen had a bit of fun with that. He describes good reasons and bad reasons for one to get fired. Personality disputes were bad reasons. Falling off the ship was a good reason. Johnson relays the story of delivering general cargo in Vancouver: one annoying winch driver asked them to send up a pail of water. When they were too busy, he came down and knocked over some of the loads. Everyone got fired. Doing so caused the foreman to insist they come back and that the annoying winch driver would be replaced, but they refused and went home.

#### Section 59:35 -- 1:01:20

- In this section, Johnson relays a series of funny stories: Kruger was the name of the head foreman, who was known for smoking a pipe. One day when checking the hatch, and roughly around the same time that "grass [marijuana] was first starting to come in", which he describes as the 1960s, Kruger noticed that Johnson and his friend had a "new tobacco". He packed his pipe with it and smoked it and got high, and then climbed the ladder out of the hatch much to the worry of Johnson and his friend.

#### Section 1:01:21 -- 1:10:23

- In this section, Johnson continues with funny stories, including one about getting drunk in 15 minutes. His partner had hidden a bottle of 180-proof rum. Johnson had thought it was strong coffee. 15 minutes later, he couldn't even get up to move a load. This was a ship with a female Russian captain. The head foreman arranged for a coworker to drive Johnson home, and then fired him. When asked how they stopped the drinking on the docks, Johnson said all the older men who were the biggest drinkers just retired. He told the story of one individual who drank himself to death.

#### Section 1:10:24 -- 1:18:27

- In this section, Johnson talks about women, and some of the strong characters he knew on the docks. He claims that no women had the strength to be longshoremen.

#### Section 1:18:27 -- 1:22:42

- In this section, Johnson discusses ways people tried to get jobs. He said he doesn't know of any examples, but one would "hear about it." Once you were registered, no one could get ahead of you. But before that, rumours abounded about people buying bottles of alcohol to persuade the those in charge of hiring to get them a job, or the best job, and Local 502 member's sons would usually have an upper hand as well. Johnson himself got a job for his son after he finished his computer science degree.

#### Section 1:22:43 -- 1:26:39

- In this section, Johnson discusses his commute and his residence in Alberta. He states that he had had the longest commute in the industry. For \$1,000.00 he bought 80 acres of property in St. Paul, Alberta. At the time he used to get return flights back and forth between Edmonton and Vancouver. He drove 2.5 hours to the airport, 1.5 hours on the plane, and the drive between Vancouver airport and New Westminster.

Section 1:26:40 -- 1:29:38

- In this section, Johnson discusses his son, and working together with him.

Section 1:29:39 -- 1:33:56

- In this section, Johnson discusses the freedoms and benefits that work as a longshoreman allows you. He says as long as you pay your union dues, you can take as much time off as you want. Some people who left wanted to come back. Some people decided not to come back, or, were sons of longshoremen who opted not to follow in their father's footsteps, and regretted it. He also says that daughters were encouraged to take jobs there, but not back in the day.

Section 1:33:57 – 1:36:35

- In this section, Johnson discusses when applications came in. In the 1960s, '70s and '80s you used to just show up and seek out work, but then, in some unidentified year, they decided that the applications process needed to be brought in. He says this was because they wanted people who were better educated rather than "rounders" and people on welfare.

Section 1:36:36 -- 1:40:07

- In this section, Johnson talks about death. He tells the story of one unnamed union president who died while mowing the lawn, right before his last shift before retirement. He talks about what a close-knit group the longshoremen were and how he didn't feel that good when people died and their families asked for family-only funerals.

Section 1:40:08 -- 1:42:06

- In this section, Johnson briefly speaks about the Women's Auxiliary, which was an organization of longshoreman's wives that did not last long.

Section 1:42:07 -- 1:52:24

- In this section, Johnson talks again about New Westminster. When he was younger he climbed the Grain Elevator but was afraid of climbing back down. He was sad to see it torn down. He talks about Mandrake the Magician. The rivalry among New Westminster Queensborough kids..