

This recording is an interview with Nick Feld, a Dutch man who immigrated to Canada in the 1950s and is a retired longshoreman and member of ILWU Local 502. The main themes are his life as a longshoreman, the danger of the occupation and the various companies operating at the time. Throughout the interview, Feld returns to the danger of the occupation.

Interviewer: Dean Johnson

Interview date: 4 March 2013

Also present: Feld's wife who makes occasional remarks.

Date Range: 1950s – 2013

Sound Recording Length: 1:59:31

Nick Feld, originally Dutch, is a retired longshoreman, who has lived and worked in New Westminster since the 1950s. In 1957, Feld was working for a sawmill, but had a neighbour, Johnny Kruger, who was a foreman for Empire Stevedoring Longshore Company. Johnny got Feld interested in becoming a longshoreman. Despite a rough start, he eventually became a registered as a longshoreman and worked on the docks, boats and in the sheds. When work was slow in New Westminster, Feld worked in Vancouver and Squamish and he eventually became a forklift driver. The companies that Feld mentions that he has worked at are Overseas Transport, Pacific Coast Terminals, Fraser Surrey Docks and Brackman-Ker Milling.

Section 0:00 – 08:02

In this section of the interview, Feld talks about the first five years of his longshoreman career. After a couple of failed attempts, he got his first full day of work, but struggled to find regular work. In his first year as a longshoreman, he worked on average one and a half day per week and money was short. Eventually he got an additional day per week, especially on days with snow or rain, when the regular longshoremen would take the day off. After five years, he became a member of the union and a part of a “steady crew”.

Section 08:03 – 20:57

In this section of the interview, Feld talks about the different products he and his “steady crew” would load and unload on the New Westminster docks. He describes the process of “winging up timber” and how they would load flour that came in railcars from the prairies onto Russian ships. After some years, Feld took a forklift course and was able to take more varied jobs. For a period he had a steady job at the Fraser Surrey Dock, but returned to the hiring hall within a year because he missed the flexibility and variety of tasks.

Section 20:58 – 29:22

In this section of the interview, Feld states that despite the hard work and the danger involved, longshoring was a great job and he had good days. He talks about how he worked in Vancouver and in Squamish, but never on Vancouver Island. Lastly, he explains why he did not like working “logs down below” and the risks and accidents that came with that particular job.

Section 29:23 – 41:57

In this section of the interview, Feld talks about the last years he worked as a longshoreman, with fewer hours and easier jobs. He reflects on his decision to leave the sawmill for longshoring in 1957 and speaks about the sense of community and camaraderie among the men on the docks.

For many of the jobs, cooperation among the crews was necessary, and longshoremen depended on each other to prevent accidents.

#### Section 41:58 – 45:58

In this section of the interview, Feld talks about who taught him the work, and how he observed the various techniques and expectations of the occupation. A large part of the learning curve was how to load a ship with various sizes of lumber. He describes the easy jobs of loading wood chips and ramp truck monitoring, and how the easy jobs came with seniority.

#### Section 45:59 – 54:12

In this section of the interview, Feld describes loading pulp in New Westminster, Vancouver and Squamish using a bar and a hook. Empire Stevedoring provided the hooks, and he would work with another man in his crew to load and stack the pulp perfectly, leaving no holes. He tells the story of the Greek ships that would load pulp wherever they had space, and Karl and Big Arnold, two longshoremen who both made an impression on him.

#### Section 54:13 – 1:01:12

In this section of the interview, Feld returns to his earlier days of work, and describes the various smaller jobs one could be lucky to be given if one was not a member of a “steady crew”. The interviewer and Feld have a discussion about wages, and state that in 1961 the hourly wage was \$2.94. He moves on to discuss the changes he saw in light of the mechanization from 1957 to when he retired.

#### Section 1:01:13 – 1:08:25

In this section of the interview, Feld tells two stories from his life as a longshoreman. The first is about the time a swarm of bees that settled inside a ship on the #7 dock at Overseas Transport. The second is about the time in 1959 when the longshoremen had been on a ten-week strike, and Feld was called for jury duty on a murder case. Feld reports that the lawyers received free meals from King Neptune Restaurant during the court case.

#### Section 1:08:26 – 1:22:47

In this section of the interview, Feld talks about how he cannot remember the first day of work, as there was no official first day, and how the first couple of years most of his work was with lumber. He talks about fellow longshoreman Pete “The King” Pilsner, who was wondering about how Feld could afford a new red Volkswagen and a vacation to the Netherlands in 1968. Furthermore, Feld describes the various European ethnicities present on the waterfront and their interactions with Germans in the post-World War II period. Feld briefly talks about the first container and the first woman in the longshoring industry.

#### Section 1:22:48 – 1:28:29

In this section of the interview, Feld talks about Pacific Coast Terminals and its railway, and the development of Gilley Brothers. Gilley Brothers started out in coal, moved on to cement and also operated fishing boats. He briefly states that today New Westminster is “high-rise city”, but is happy Army & Navy remains on Columbia St.

#### Section 1:28:30 – 1:34:19

In this section of the interview, Feld talks about food among longshoremen. Every morning, one person in the crew would create the coffee list by asking the other members what they wanted. After a shopping trip, or possibly a drink, the person would return for coffee break with coffee, tea and doughnuts for the men. At Overseas Transport, there was a restaurant bus that served meat pies, whereas Pacific Coast Terminals has a small restaurant. Feld did not go there himself, as he ate his lunch at home. He also shares the lengthy story of how he stopped smoking in the late 1950s.

Section: 1:34:20 – 1:52:53

In this section of the interview, Feld outlines how the ships were “equalized” along the dock before they would start the loading process and the various gear used for this process. As an extension of this description, he tells a story about how he in 1978 was in an accident where the turnbuckle broke during equalization and a block was released from the ship that broke his arm and ribs. He spent five months in rehab in Surrey and then another year trying to get back to work.

Section 1:52:54– 1:59:31

In this section of the interview, Feld describes his relationship to Bob Gibson, who was in his crew for many years, and states that the jobs with Gibson were the best. He closes the interview by talking about the good men and the many characters among the longshoremen. One example is a group of men who would rather stay at the longshore hall and play Rummikub instead of taking a job.