

Neil Henry

November 14, 2024

Where: Edmonton, the Orange Hub

Interviewer: Jean Côté

Camera: Don Bouzek

Q: Tell us about your background and life history.

NH: We don't have the next two or three hours, so I'll try and keep it short. I'm an immigrant dating back to 1953. I was born in South Africa of Scottish parents. My mother was effectively a war refugee, although calling her a refugee might not be the right answer. But she went to South Africa with me on the way, and I was born there during the middle of the Second World War. Various places that we lived: I was an army kid until 1953, and my parents immigrated to Canada and particularly immigrated to Edmonton. This has been home off and on, but mostly on, for all that time. My wife and I have lived elsewhere. I do have a wife still, and we had three [boys, although] one of them died. So we've lived in and around Edmonton all that time with jaunts up to Athabasca for six years and to Ontario. Lived in Britain for a year. Not sure what to say. Education at the U of A primarily but also at Queens in Ontario – Bachelor of Commerce, Master of Arts in English, kind of an odd combination. My parents and I lived in various places in Edmonton, but I ended up graduating from high school at Ross Sheppard. I went to the U of A and did my studies there and went to work for a construction company during the summers. The company was McNamara [Construction] Western Limited. It's of interest because they were the builders of Meadowlark Shopping Centre in Jasper Place. I worked for them for five summers and enjoyed it a lot, a good time. Worked all over Western Canada and for one summer on the building of Meadowlark Shopping Centre. I have spent my career working in and around universities and university administration. I worked at the U of A early on and then worked for Athabasca University during its early years – hence the relocation to Athabasca – and worked for the Department of Advanced Education dealing with universities and ended up

at the University of Prince Edward Island for six years. So I went to the Maritimes, but came back to Edmonton in 2002, and we've been living in the Patricia Heights area ever since.

Q: When you were at the University of Prince Edward Island, what was your title?

NH: I was Vice President, Finance and Admin, which means dealing with all of the non-academic sides of a university. That's been my career. I have not been an academic administrator. I have to deal with academics all the time, but that's a different kind of pain. So that's what I did at UPEI; enjoyed it immensely.

Q: When you were with the Government of Alberta, what department and what title?

NH: I was Assistant Deputy Minister in the Department of Advanced Education, which got renamed at some point because of the amalgamation of the ministries of Advanced Education and of Career Development.

Q: What was the neighbourhood like around Meadowlark Shopping Centre at the time when construction started?

NH: I'm not sure I can answer that too specifically, but it would've been on the south edge of Jasper Place. I'm not sure exactly where the boundary lay, but my guess is it must've been 87th or thereabouts, 87th Avenue, because Meadowlark was in Jasper Place, and I don't believe that Jasper Place went much further south than that. That's all I can tell you.

Q: When did you first look at the site where Meadowlark Shopping Centre now is?

NH: Well, as I say, I worked for McNamara Western, specifically for the Chief Financial Officer. McNamara Western was a small subsidiary of the very large Ontario-based construction company. [The CFO was] my boss for all the five summers that I worked for them through university; this was my fourth summer, so I'd been doing this kind of work for quite a while. I was an accounting student in Commerce, so that's why I got hired. It was to do with my fairly low-level clerical bookkeeping skills that Bob hired me. Bob was the name of my boss, but I always had to work not just for him, I had to work for the superintendent of the job, whichever job I was on. So it was kind of [two-way], but I had to fulfill responsibilities in both directions.

Q: Can you remember the first view you had of the site?

NH: Yes sorry, I knew I was missing your question. Bob told me that I was going to be rehired that summer and that he was going to put me on this building job. I knew absolutely nothing about it, but he did tell me where the site was, and I wandered down there. I was still doing courses at the U of A, and I drove down there in March. I can't tell you exactly when, but I suspect it was fairly early March, and they were clearing snow with bulldozers on the site – clearing the snow off the ground. I think I knew at that point that this was going to be a very intensive kind of project. I understand the owners to have been City Savings & Trust, probably a matter of public record if you want to look, and that they wanted it built start to finish was known upfront. McNamara was being hired – and I assume paid – for a very rapid project. That's what happened. They started clearing the snow in early March and they opened it some time, I think, around the end of October. Everything was done and all the tenants – maybe not all of them, but 90 percent of them – were in place.

Q: Was there any old building to demolish or trees to clear or anything like that?

NH: My memory is a little dim on that subject, but I think not. I think it was an open field – a bit of guesswork on my part there. I don't think there were any buildings to be demolished; I think it was a farmer's field.

Q: The 1963 city phonebook still lists the Starlite Theatre kitty-corner from there. Did you notice it?

NH: It's funny, I have no clear recollection of it, so I can't tell you for sure. I am aware that that facility was there, but could I have told you that it was kitty-corner across? I wasn't terribly interested in drive-ins.

Q: Was the building of the shopping centre run out of McNamara's regular office or was it run from the site?

NH: It's never quite that distinct. In any construction job like that, it's the estimating staff in the head office who bid on the project – price it out and bid on it. They have a view of how it would go. In my experience with McNamara, their view of how it would go and how it actually went would be fairly different, because the key player is the superintendent in that kind of a building job. The company was blessed with a very good building superintendent – superintendent in the sense of running the construction. His name – and I think I can give this because it would also be a matter of public record – was Joe Steil [pronounced "steel"]. Probably a German name originally, but he was Joe Steil. Most of the volume of work over the whole project was undertaken by subtrades. [For example], there was a lot of brickwork on the original shopping centre, a sort of creamy coloured bricks, which have all disappeared, except for some extras

that were being tossed out for defects that found their way into my mother's garden in St. Albert. They may still be there, for all I know. So all the bricklaying was done by a particular company that did that, and that would've been true over most of it. It's a building job; it's not building a bridge or a highway, which was typical of the projects I used to work on. This was my one building job, as in a building, not a highway. It was done by a lot of subcontracts. If I'm correct, the only employees from McNamara Western on the job were Joe and myself and a labour crew headed by [name unknown]; he was a great guy. He was Portuguese, small rotund Portuguese, great sense of humour and constantly cheerful. But most of his crew was Portuguese, and I think that their [initial] role was bringing in underground services. I'm sure others were involved that brought in backhoes and things like that, but their job was to make sure all those lines were in the right place. They carried on through the project because a foundation wall would be built and somebody had to be around to backfill it properly, [etc.]. So there was a labour crew there most of the summer, headed by this guy. I'm not aware of anybody else who was not also subtrade; they had their own foremen and so on.

Q: Where did you and Joe Steil work?

NH: We worked in a construction trailer on the east edge of the site, which I think would've been just a bit north of the Safeway gas station. But there was no Safeway there then. The shopping centre was anchored by Zellers at one end and Sears at the other. There was no grocery store that I'm aware of.

Q: Tell us a bit more about the office setup that you and Joe had in the trailer.

NH: [phone rings]. . .

Q: It's the spring of 1963 and you and Joe are sharing a trailer. Could you tell us more about the office setup?

NH: It was small, as I recollect. It had an entrance on one end, on the long side of the trailer, and one of those high counter desks, a high counter and then my desk was behind it. There was a bit more space and some table for plans; and then at the far end, Joe had a separate space. The door was always open; he was in and out.

Q: Tell us about the general plan and layout and shape and appearance of the shopping centre.

NH: The shopping centre is still pretty well the way it looks now, with two major anchor tenants – Zellers, which in my time here was bought by Walmart; they bought all of the Zellers across the country, and the sites became Walmart stores. So that store is still pretty well certainly where it was, but it hasn't changed a lot in terms of being a big space. It used to have a sort of canopied entrance on it, sort of curved roof thing. That's disappeared. The shopping centre ran from there through to Simpson Sears at the far end. Simpson Sears, I think, was demolished and I'd guess that land was added to the apartments that were built on the north end of Meadowlark Shopping Centre; my guess is that whole store came out. It was, I understand, the first totally enclosed shopping centre in Edmonton – that's a recent finding on my part. It was a news thing that said it, so I think it's probably true. It had, as it has now, that long stretch between the two major tenants with all the stores on each side. Unlike the present one, it had clerestory windows, windows that are up high. You don't look out of them, but they let light in. That, I think, extended right the way through, in my recollection. Some of that has been closed off, so you just see it now in the centre of the mall area. There were no stores, that I'm aware of, outside at the time it opened. I think there may have been one of the outlying buildings built, but I don't think it was there in the summer of '63.

Q: Is the shopping centre just one story with no upstairs?

NH: That's correct.

Q: Does it have a basement?

NH: No. It's possible that there may be the odd pit here and there for mechanical reasons that I'm not aware of, but otherwise it was essentially on a slab built that was stud walls all the way around. I'm not 100 percent sure whether McNamara built those or they were built by a concrete subcontractor. I'm pretty sure all the service lines were put in by Athabasca.

Q: So there were no auxiliary independent outside stores or bank buildings or anything?

NH: Not that I remember, no.

Q: So was the whole site that wasn't building paved as parking?

NH: Yes. My memory is a bit dim about that, so I guess not all of it, but enough so they could manage people for the opening. It opened, I think, late in October, and it was squeaky; it just got done. Work was still being done to finish things when they opened the doors to people; my recollection is some spaces were not filled. The two major tenants were in place. I remember dealing with the gentleman who was running the finishing and filling of Zellers, whom I remember particularly because he scared me to death. He was pretty tough; there was no

question when he walked in the door and demanded something, he wanted it right then and there. That's all he did was open new Zellers stores.

Q: The outside finishing of the store... you mentioned light coloured brick?

NH: Yes, there was a lot of that. I'm sure it wasn't the only covering but, as far as I know, all of the outside of Zellers was, and it's possible that the brick on the outside of the current Walmart is still the old brick, but now painted. I don't know that for sure but I think it probably was. It wasn't all the same brick. I think the stuff around Zellers store was in that creamy beige colour, but I think it may have been a rough-finished brick. Simpson Sears at the other end, if I remember correctly, was the same kind of colour but smooth. That's the one where I acquired some extras.

Q: And you could get into Zellers either from the parking lot or via the mall?

NH: Yes.

Q: And you could get into Sears either from the parking lot or the mall?

NH: Yes.

Q: For a long time, Edmonton Transit had a small bus turnaround or exchange on the west side.

NH: I don't remember that at all at that point.

Q: So that may have come later.

NH: I think so.

Q: Just to get the general commercial outlook, if you went north and east was there any significant shopping centre closer than Westmount?

NH: No. Well, there was the Jasper Place downtown street on Stony Plain Road, but not otherwise that I'm aware of. I think it was the only one in the West End.

Q: Did West Edmonton Mall exist?

NH: Oh no, it's much later. It was built in the '90s I think.

Q: So therefore, Meadowlark Shopping Centre was designed to be the southwestern shopping centre.

NH: Yes, it was definitely the shopping centre of that area at the time.

Q: Since you and Joe Steil were the only ones onsite. . .

NH: And the foreman of the labour crew.

Q: Yes. How did you and Joe divide up your duties?

NH: Well, I wouldn't put it quite that way. I saw myself as – and I think I was essentially – an extension of Joe. My job was... I had a bunch of things that I had to do for my other boss, the finance manager; there was information that I had to supply them or I would've gotten into trouble from that direction. Joe did not have a lot to do with that. It was hours, and primarily it would've been related to payroll, but also approvals. If a subtrade presented an interim invoice for work completed, if he'd gotten to 75 percent of his contract or what have you, and he wanted to be paid, that had to be verified. It had to be verified and signed by Joe, but it was my job to make sure that got done, that it got dealt with, and it got moved. So I was facilitating stuff that Joe was doing. The other part of my job was essentially to do whatever Joe needed doing. I would say that a big part was ordering. On a job like that, they had negotiated a general lumber agreement, in this case with Nelson Lumber, which is still around. The price per board foot and stuff like that would all have been negotiated. Within that they knew roughly what we needed, but Joe would say... I should make a comment about Joe Steil. He was one of the most remarkable people that I had to work for in my time in the construction industry. You may know about the engineering analysis, which was the critical path, where you go through a complex project and you find all the tasks that need to be done to build a shopping centre, and you know which are the ones that will cause the shopping centre to be delayed if they're not done by that date. I don't remember ever seeing a critical path in Joe's office, but he basically had it up here [points to head]. He knew exactly what day something had to be done, so he knew when he needed so many square feet of 2x4 studs, or what have you. That's one of the things we did on an almost daily basis, "On Tuesday next week, I need this here." So, part of my job was to get a hold of Nelson Lumber and say, "Okay I want this delivered that morning because the carpenters are going to be ready for it." So timing was everything in this job, and it was a lot of

pressure from that point of view. But I got along with him very well and we kind of clicked easily. Once he learned that he could trust me, we just waltzed our way through that project. The evidence is, they opened on time.

Q: You mentioned City Savings & Trust. Are they the people who owned the land?

NH: I think they must have bought the land, and they would've hired the architects who designed the shopping centre. They also, of course, were a factor; I have to tell you, I can't remember their names anymore. I'm sure we could go look it up but they, of course, were around a lot – not always the senior guys, but whoever was, from the architects' point of view, in charge of this project. That would be somebody that I had to deal with on a regular basis. But that was all a matter of kind of low-level organization, making sure that that person had the right people for a meeting. I didn't play any role in the decisions; that was between him and Joe and the subtrade, typically, so they were another quantity that had to be dealt with. I didn't finish answering your question. City Savings & Trust, I think, has long since disappeared, but it was a city of Edmonton organization. They were in effect the owners. On a building project like this, there's the owner, the most important quantity, but well back from the action. The architects had their hands there all the time; the contractor, whom I worked for; and then a whole bunch of subtrades. Those are the organization for what you need in place. City Savings & Trust had a manager, a senior executive in their organization, and he would show up every once in a while – every two or three weeks – just to see for himself that things were proceeding. He would've been getting reports indicating progress all the time, probably through the architects.

Q: What did City Savings & Trust intend to do with the building once it was built? Were they going to sell it?

NH: Oh no, this was kept. Whether it was ultimately sold – well, it clearly was eventually – but I have no idea what they were going to do with it eventually. It was opened as a functioning shopping centre.

Q: So the shops that moved in were tenants?

NH: Yes, they were all tenants.

Q: And they were renting from City Savings & Trust?

NH: In effect, yes.

Q: Were you usually at your desk in the trailer during the day?

NH: Yes, most of the time, but I also... you know, if somebody surfaced... we were the reception. You couldn't go onsite without coming to the office, and that's typical, so I had to deal with whoever might show up. Most of that was organized for a time, but occasionally somebody would show up and I had to then go and try... no cell phones; I know it seems odd, but true. We didn't have walkie-talkies or anything set up, so if Joe had to be found I had to go find him. So I had to wander around the project.

Q: And Joe wasn't sitting at his desk all the time either.

NH: Oh no, Joe was very hands-on. He was out a lot, so I was quite often on my own. That wasn't a problem.

Q: Were you the only person onsite doing bookkeeping?

NH: Yes, all that paper handling stuff.

Q: How about paying?

NH: Payments were made through the McNamara office in Edmonton, McNamara Western. They were headquartered in Edmonton. They had a building out on what is now the Yellowhead; my other boss worked there, and his staff. Invoices from suppliers, invoices from subtrades, all that sort of stuff, sometimes would go to the head office and then be sent to us. But, in any event, it didn't get paid until Joe approved it. But I had to make sure that he had whatever he needed – packing slips as well as the invoice, the stuff actually arrived. If he was unsure about it, he would get up and say, “Did that heating unit actually arrive?” Or whatever it was.

Q: Were the cheques actually physically issued on the Yellowhead Trail?

NH: Yes, from the head office.

Q: How about you?

NH: Yeah, I got paid that way too.

Q: But did you or Joe ever issue cheques in the trailer?

NH: No. I have thought about that, because you raised the question earlier. No, in this case not. Other projects that I was involved in for McNamara, I actually had to issue the cheque. It was signed by the super, but I had to put it all together. Up in the Northwest Territories, if somebody got fired or just decided to quit, they had to be paid.

Q: How about purchase orders?

NH: That would probably have largely been issued by the head office. I mentioned Nelson Lumber. I am pretty sure that an overarching purchase order or purchase agreement was written before I ever started between McNamara Western and Nelson Lumber. That would've probably been in place even before Joe. As soon as they got the job and knowing that there was a very tight timeframe, they would've had a list of critical suppliers and they would've been dealing with the alternatives, because Nelson Lumber wasn't the only possibility. So they probably would've sent those specs out to a select group of suppliers of lumber and they would've negotiated and they would've fixed on the lowest price or the price that suited them most. So, in effect, everything was [ordered delivery]. I ordered a lot of stuff, but I did not have to sign separate purchase orders in this job.

Q: When did you actually start work on the project?

NH: I can't put an exact day on it, but it would've been at the end of exams at the University of Alberta, and that probably would've been around the third week or towards the end of April.

Q: And when did you stop work on the project?

NH: I don't again know exactly when, but it would've been probably early September when classes started.

Q: You took me on that tour in very late August.

NH: Yes, that would've been close to the end of my time.

Q: When you reported for work at first in April, what was the state of the site?

NH: As I recollect, it was muddy. It was kind of melting snow. I know they cleared the snow but, as I recollect, piles of snow around the outside edge and the ground was wet. They were digging trenches, and a lot of that stuff was already started before I started.

Q: What sort of things had been done before you started?

NH: Basically underground services and the beginnings of trenching for the wall footings.

Q: By services, what do you mean?

NH: Water, gas, electricity – all of the above.

Q: At the time you stopped work to return to classes in the fall, what was the state of the building?

NH: It was finished, including the original floor and the inside of the mall, which was all terrazzo. I think it's now been replaced with tile. Terrazzo is a material that's poured in wet in between a metal framework, then made relatively smooth but then polished by machine to form a very strong, impervious surface. My living room in our house is terrazzo, so I know what it looks like.

Q: So, what you're saying is that not very much had been done by the end of April. So that means construction. . .

NH: That's not what I meant. There was relatively little work done on the structure, but you have to understand that bringing the services in was a major piece of work. To the best of my knowledge, that was done by McNamara Western itself. That's where the labour crew came in. They were an experienced labour crew, so I think a lot of that work was done. As soon as they cleared the snow off in March, trenching would've started. I can't say I saw that, but. . .

Q: Aside from the utilities and excavation, the work on the building would've been May, June, July and August?

NH: Yes, pretty well.

Q: So, at the end of August, the building itself was largely complete?

NH: I would say yes, very close. The structure being complete and the major surfaces, all of them on the outside as far as I remember, all the brickwork and everything, was done – the concrete aprons in front, all the glass doors and windows. I don't have a very clear recollection, but I think that there were spaces that had not been painted inside, but they would've been the ones not occupied. Zellers was there and everything; they put the counters in. What was delivered by McNamara to Zellers was the space – all the electrical and lighting stuff. I think they may even have put the lights themselves. There was some division between the contractor's responsibilities and the store fittings. That's what this guy did, the one who scared the hell out of me; he was responsible for those fittings. The store counters and so on, they were all built and delivered, and he had them installed.

Q: In that September and October period there would've been a lot of work going on, but much of it would've been done by the tenants or their contractors, not by McNamara.

NH: Or by the subtrades; I think they were probably still around here and there. But the bulk of that work was all done before the stores got occupied.

Q: So the building itself was built in not much over a four-month period. Was that standard for the time?

NH: No, I doubt if anything like that had been done in Edmonton or Jasper Place up to that point. I'm not saying it hasn't been done since, but it was made clear to me that this was a very unusual project. I think that normally they would've expected to take at least two years to do it.

Q: Once the plan was set out, it was managed by you and Joe.

NH: I don't want to use the word "managed" by me. Joe was the centre of all that stuff. How he handled it... he didn't have an assistant superintendent; there was him and the labor foreman and myself. Maybe I'm missing somebody coming in to do something that I don't remember, but as far as I know, it was just the three of us to begin with.

Q: How old were you then?

NH: I would've been 22. It was good fun.

Q: Did you still have another year to go to get your BCom?

NH: No, I graduated. But I was coming back to university because I have this odd combination. I came back after a Bachelor of Commerce with a major in Accounting, and started on a Masters degree in English Literature. So that's what I was coming back for.

Q: So very early in the construction of the shopping centre you received your BCom?

NH: Well yes. I don't know what happened, it must've been a summer convocation. I think I must have left the job to pick it up. I didn't want to do that at all, but my parents did.

Q: Aside from the outside buildings that have been built since, the one big difference then is there used to be, at the north end, a Sears store that's gone now.

NH: I'm drawing that conclusion. I never saw any of that happen.

Q: At the time, that was a big shopping centre.

NH: Yes. Westmount existed, and Westmount was on the same sort of scale but not closed in. When Meadowlark was built, Westmount was still an open shopping centre where you had to put your coat on to travel in the winter. I lived close to Westmount.

Q: And you lived close to Ross Sheppard.

NH: Yes, just across the park.

Q: Is there anything we've missed about Meadowlark?

NH: Not particularly, except a silly story. One day towards the end of the summer, must've been August, this senior manager from [...] City Savings & Trust, arrived in the office unannounced. He just dropped in every week or two. He put this apple on my counter. I somehow or other

drew the conclusion that it was for me. Then he headed off into the project, which was well underway and nearing finishing, looking for Joe. I thought, "Well, hell, it's the middle of the morning and I'm hungry," so I polished off the apple. He came back and asked for it, and it turned out to be the only apple he had grown on his single apple tree and home, and he was wandering around the world showing off this apple, and I ate it. That was faintly embarrassing.

Q: What was the result of that?

NH: I don't think there was any consequence, except he moaned a lot.

Q: This was the period when the Town of Jasper Place still existed and there was a town council.

NH: Yes.

Q: You spoke about the City of Edmonton.

NH: I'm sorry, I wasn't being very accurate. It was the Town of Jasper Place at the time.

Q: That was the Savings & Credit Union?

NH: Yes. It didn't mean a lot for me. I didn't do anything with them. I don't remember ever seeing a town official.

Q: Did any of the subcontractors come from Jasper Place?

NH: That I can't tell you. I wasn't terribly interested in the municipal jurisdictions. For me it was my summer job. I knew where it was, and I knew what I had to do. Could I have told you that I was in Jasper Place and not in Edmonton at the time? I must have known, but it's nothing that I remember as having any real significance for me. I'm sure it did for the project as a whole, but not for me.

Q: You mentioned that McNamara Western had their offices on what is now the Yellowhead.

NH: Yes, but in Edmonton.

Q: Was that in what was known as the Industrial Area?

NH: Yes, it was definitely an industrial area. I'm just trying to pin it. It would've been I think. . . that road has changed so dramatically. It wasn't even a through road at the time, it was an industrial road but not a high-volume traffic artery like it is now.

Q: Near the CN main line.

NH: Yes. I would guess probably somewhere in between 142nd and the Trail, somewhere in that area. That building is gone. For a long time, it sat there and I could identify it, but it's gone now. It got torn down and something else got built.

Q: Was it one of the first enclosed malls in Edmonton?

NH: I have read in a news story I looked up the other day on my computer that it was the first fully enclosed, built as enclosed, shopping centre. It was enclosed before Westmount got enclosed and decades before West Edmonton Mall came along and there were others built elsewhere. But it was claimed to be the very first.

Q: What was the scale of the construction activity. How many people would've been on the site?

NH: It would've varied considerably. At the peak, which would've been June, July and August, I would guess with the trades it would vary. An electrical contractor would come in to do this, so he might have 10 or 12 electricians and their assistants working. Then they'd all be gone, because the next thing was going to happen. It could well have been, I would guess, 80 to 100 at its peak. I doubt if it was much more than that, but it could've been. I never counted them, and they weren't people I had to track at all.

Q: Considering how fast this came together, was there a lot of overtime or people working into the evenings?

NH: I can't answer that directly. My assumption is the [owners] paid through the nose to have it built. In other words, when they put it out for tender, they made it clear it had to be built in this timeframe. I think there were penalties for failing to do that. Well, when you do that, you're also going to pay a hefty premium to get it done. McNamara would've counted on a fair amount of

costs, not typically for themselves, but for their trades. Towards the end, if you had to have the painters working 12 hours a day, that's what you had to have. My understanding is that McNamara did well out of the project. I can't give you chapter and verse, but that's what I got from my other boss. It was a moneymaker, so [the owners] paid for it. City Savings & Trust was controlled, I think, in the era – I may be stepping out of line – by the Belzberg family, who were very well known in the city here. Not anymore, because they've moved. I think that's public record.

Q: Did you have a sense of subdivisions going up in the area at that time?

NH: I can't be very accurate about that. It wasn't something that I paid a lot of attention to. My very suspect memories are that this was all under development, but the subdivisions that surround Meadowlark were not all in place. It's a dim recollection, so can't remember the drive-in.

Q: How did you get there, and what was the state of the roads?

NH: I don't remember the roads being a problem. I think they were all pretty well in. The roads around at least the east and west edges of the shopping centre area, so 156th and 159th, had been paved. Again, that's just what I recollect.

Q: Was the public library at the north end already there?

NH: Oh no, I don't believe so. I don't think there was anything like that there.

Q: It was put up by the Town of Jasper Place.

NH: Oh, was it? But I don't think it was there.

Q: And the firehall wouldn't have been built yet.

NH: Not likely, but I don't remember. I don't think so.

Q: I think the transfer of ownership of Zellers went through The Bay first.

NH: That's right, The Bay owned Zellers. That's all much later. I think Zellers was owned by Woolworths.

Q: Let's talk about the part of town which is west of 159th Street and south of 76th Avenue. Is that generally called the Patricia Heights area?

NH: Patricia Heights is west of 159th; 76th must've been along the edge of Whitemud on the other side.

Q: 76th is the one that runs east through Rio Terrace.

NH: Yes. Patricia Heights narrows like that. Okay, yes, that's the general area.

Q: I gather that you have acquired some information about the unusual history of that neighbourhood.

NH: To the best of my knowledge, that part of the County of Parkland was annexed mid- '60s or thereabouts. Patricia Heights is on the Patricia Ravine, which runs from about 170th Street in the west all the way down to the river. That's the ravine proper. There are several subsidiary ravines, but a big one which is the pathway through that ravine of the road I think built by and at least partially owned by the Edmonton Golf and Country Club. I live in a house on the Patricia Ravine, and my lot plan still calls the pass along the foot of the ravine the Old Country Club Road; that's the phrase that's used. I also know that the Country Club still owns – well I shouldn't say now, I don't know now – but when I looked at it when I had a surveyor 10 or 12 years ago, the Country Club still owned a sliver of land. My neighbour and I... although we have property that runs down to the bottom of the ravine, there is a long triangular sliver that runs across the bottom of both quite large acreage lots still owned by the Edmonton Golf and Country Club. I can't actually access the city off my property without stepping across something owned by the Edmonton Golf and Country Club, and I believe that there are two or three others. It's a silly little piece of information. That road, I understand, was built for the Country Club to get access from Edmonton through, not just that ravine, but also the Wolf Willow Ravine via a bridge that crossed that to find its way out to what was the third site. I think I mentioned to you that you should take a look at the history written by the Edmonton Golf and Country Club, just published last year. It's got much better information than I have that is historically interesting. That road, I assume, must have run through... probably along 156th, so along the edge of Jasper Place roughly.

Q: Northeast of there it ran through Rio Terrace and east.

NH: I think it did. Yes, you're right.

Q: East to 149th Street and then it crossed the Quesnel Ravine, which was actually quite shallow.

NH: Okay, I simply don't know. I just know it wandered generally. It was a mud road, I believe.

Q: How about the people who got land subdivided or bought lots, some of the earlier inhabitants?

NH: I should talk a little bit about my house, which is one of nine lots along the north edge of the Patricia Ravine. That subdivision I understand – and I have a bit of direct knowledge, but I can't remember the details, because I once saw the subdivision plan; [my surveyor] managed to pry the original documents out of the City – that subdivision occurred early in the last century. [I think] I would guess either just before the First World War or in the 1920s, I don't know which, but before the 1930s, before the Depression and the Second World War, and remained I think without any development through that period, for obvious reasons. It was intended as a sort of country cottage development, miles and miles outside the centre of Edmonton. Those nine lots are still legally defined, although one of them is now owned directly by the City, at least zoned [...], treated by the City as part of the ravine [as] parkland. The other eight lots are now all built on, but the last one was built on just in the last three years. It was a difficult lot and sat vacant until three years ago. Houses were built largely, I think, in the late '50s early '60s, my house in 1961. It's a great house, we just love it. It was built by an architect for himself.

Q: Just before we get to the house, can you tell us a bit about the people who lived in that area?

NH: The story I have – and I want to emphasize this for this interview, that we’re entering into hearsay – I have heard roughly this history from a gentleman who has since died but was an old-time resident of one of these lots. Not the original owner/builder there, but the second as I am, in fact, the second owner of [our] property. But his memory dated back a lot longer. If you ever want to pursue that, I know his son and I think he would be amenable to being asked, because he grew up on that property. But at some point, I would guess in the late ‘50s, several of those lots were bought by an Edmonton family. I can give you the name I have heard. I don’t think we’re talking about stuff that couldn’t be found from title documents, so part of the public record. I believe their name is Bohomoluk, at least that’s what [I was told]. They [owned] the biggest lots. [All] these are lots that meander along the edge of the Patricia Ravine. Mine is close to two thirds of an acre but most of it is like this, [a steep slope with] a small building area, which is why it was one of the last houses built there except for the one built three years ago. So the difficult lots were left to the end. That whole property is interesting just as a piece of history of the area, and I think there are probably people around who are more knowledgeable than I am. But it’s something you might pay attention to. I won’t go into the history of the Bohomoluk family as I understand it, but it’s something that you should look for. I think there is extant a house [...] that is the original house built there. The name associated is either Richards or Berretti from the engineering firm Richards & Berretti. It’s an engineer’s house, you can tell by looking at it; it’s still there. I don’t know what the current owner knows but anyway it’s there. My house and the one next to it are both original but they were built a bit later than the others, because of the difficulty of the site. When it was built, as far as I know, Patricia Heights was just a field. It may have had trees on it, I don’t know. But that whole stretch between the ravine and the Whitemud Freeway. . . was that called the Quesnel Ravine?

Q: The Quesnel Ravine and the freeway coexist closer to 149th Street. The Quesnel Ravine north of Patricia is further north of the freeway.

NH: Oh, okay. As far as I know, when the architect and original owner of my house built my house, he had no City water. [The house was situated, I think,] in the County of Parkland, [not in the City of Edmonton]. He had a cistern, which is still there, and [he] had it filled by a truck that came out. I heard that from him; I knew him quite well. He also had a field sewer arrangement. When the City annexed that whole area, which I think they must've done not too long after he built – three or four years at most – of course they required all of the properties to connect up with City sewer, which is difficult if your house is – as ours is – four or five feet below the level of the street. So we have a really complicated arrangement. We have a huge two-storey garage with a sewage tank into which the house sewage now feeds; then it has to get pumped up to the City because we're down below the City's sewer line. So it gets pumped about eight feet into the City. That will remain true, unless you raise the house on stilts. Nobody in their right mind would [remove] that house, because it sits on an enormous concrete pile structure. That I know, because I've seen the heads of some of these piles, 18 inch 20 feet deep, according to the plans. So it's an interesting structure.

Q: What about natural gas?

NH: Good question, because I don't know the answer. I don't know whether he had, say, propane when he first started. When I bought the house, it was all on natural gas.

Q: When he built the house, was there a power line out there?

NH: Yes, he had power.

Q: And telephone?

NH: Must have, although telephones weren't nearly as easy to acquire.

Q: When was the house built?

NH: It was built in '61. [...]

Q: The cistern was always filled by a truck that brought the water?

NH: Yes.

Q: The original owner of the house didn't have a well or a pump?

NH: Nope. He had a cistern, and he did have a septic field. But he had a tank, apparently still there 20 feet down, and then it was one of those setups where sewage sort of drained slowly off the top and he probably had to have [the tank] pumped out [as well]. I shouldn't say it was a field. [...]

Q: The water in the cistern would've needed a pump to run it up to the tap.

NH: And there was such a pump in the next space, which was the utility room. I actually had that taken out; it was still sitting there when we moved in. The cistern is now a cold cellar with a door in it, very useful actually.

Q: Were some of your neighbours' houses also built before there was City water and sewerage?

NH: I'm pretty sure, yes. In the original set of houses built there, our lot and the one next to it were late, both designed by the same architect. He designed his own house and the one next door. They share resemblances, you can tell. They are both interesting, because they're houses that were modern in their day. They're not like a standard house. Ours sits right on the edge of the ravine; we look down about 60 feet and own all the property down to the bottom.

Q: Do any of your neighbours have a cistern as well?

NH: That's a good question, to which I don't know the answer. I could ask easily enough. My guess is that the house immediately next to us is probably built the same way. I don't think the City was there when it was built; I don't think the City had annexed at that point. [...]

Q: About the Country Club Road. The old airplane, was it still there?

NH: No, I've only heard about it, I never saw it. There were several people who've said, "Oh, did I ever see the old airplane." [...] One of the people claimed that he had had at some point a rough airstrip. I've only heard it. I don't know anything about [the strip] or why he had a plane there.

Q: And you weren't familiar with the Country Club Road through that ravine until you got to know the architect who later sold you the house?

NH: I didn't actually know about the Country Club until after we bought it. He didn't talk to me about that. He didn't really talk about the property a lot. I saw it on the lot plan, for one thing, and it was kind of interesting. There's a little bit of archeological evidence. You come down off 159th Street into the ravine. It's paved now all the way. Then you go down through the bottom of the ravine and then you climb all the way up to the other side to Westridge. At the top as you're heading up to turn into Westridge, on the curve there, if you look, there are some old, what I call bollards, pieces of wooden tree trunk cut and originally [half] buried. They have this heavy wire cable; you can still see stretches of that cable up there. I'm pretty sure that was to stop cars rolling off the edge and down into the ravine. [...]

Q: Back in the '70s those wires and bollards went all along that road, and it was obviously a paved country road cut off at the two ends. You could only get to it on foot at either end. If you were old enough, you realized that's what rural highways in Alberta used to be like.

NH: It's quite narrow. I don't know whether there are photographs in the Edmonton Golf and Country Club history. There's one maybe of the Patricia Ravine; there are one or two of the Wolf Willow Ravine, I think. But it gives you a good idea what driving through those ravines was like. At that point, [...] judging by the cars [shown], it wasn't paved. The paving must've occurred subsequently. You can see cars in ruts trying to get through the mud. It's all paved now. It's an off-leash area and we walk it a lot; you have to watch out for bicycles at speed.

Q: When did you buy your current house?

NH: I signed the documents and bought it in the fall of 2001.

Q: When did you first meet the architect and see that place?

NH: He and his wife were friends of my parents. His wife, in particular, was a friend of my mother's; they worked together. My wife and I met them at a friends-of-friends kind of situation, interestingly in a house of the same vintage that a partner of Roy's – long deceased – [had] designed; I'd been in it many times. But we met them there and Roy was talking about the house, which at the time we met them could only have been about [15 or 20] years old; we're talking back in the '80s [...].

Q: You said the house was built in the early '60s?

NH: Yes. My wife, Jeanne, was quite interested in it just from the description, so Roy and Mardi invited us to come and see it, and we did. So we've actually known this house for a long time; we fell in love with it. I give my wife all the credit; she kept after Roy and said, "Well, if you ever want to sell it, let us know." That's essentially what happened. We got a phone call in PEI from his lawyer saying, "I understand you're interested in the house. Roy has to leave it for health reasons; make an offer." We did, and it was accepted. It's a wonderful house, just great.

Q: You mentioned that you used to live around Ross Sheppard High School. Around what year did you move to that address?

NH: I moved there partway through Grade 9. What year did you and I meet? At the end of my Grade 10 and your Grade 11. That would've been 1957. It would've been two years earlier, '55.

Q: Living there, did you have any contact with the Town of Jasper Place?

NH: No. I knew it was there, but it was just another small town on the edge of Edmonton. I had no interest in it.

Q: Where did you shop?

NH: Westmount a lot. Westmount was already built just before we moved there. It was just down the block.

Q: Describe a bit more about the way your [current street looks].

NH: Well, you've got a combination of an old acreage development – old in the sense that it had been subdivided and bought decades before, but still sat there until a few years before annexation. The City and Jasper Place were both moving out in that direction, and somebody obviously saw it as an opportunity and bought. There must've been at least two, maybe as many as four of the lots, the big ones, two big ones, which had the biggest... ours is actually the second largest lot, but much of it is that 35-degree slope down to the bottom of the ravine. At the other end there are a couple of really big lots; you could probably fit four or five houses on one of them, the one that still has the original house. Richards & Berretti were a well-known architectural and engineering firm, which I knew about when I worked on the shopping centre. I had no idea about this connection, but one or the other of them married into the family that bought these lots. [I understand that] he and his wife got one of these two big lots, and I think the other big one went to another daughter. That's what [my informant], Bill, thought, anyway. The one that he owned, now gone, a very modern house was built on it about five or six years ago, designed by a Vancouver architect, and it's fairly spectacular. So his house is gone. I think it was one of the two daughters in the family. The other one is still there but it's probably not

going to be there too long. [...] Both of them were very much large, flat houses with walkout low levels. All the living space, including the master bedroom, were on one main floor. I think both of them may well have been designed by the same people, I don't know. But one of them, [I think], was occupied either by Richards or Berretti. I haven't been in it, but I walk past it every day and I know the owner. It's big. It has its own outdoor swimming pool, now no longer in use. I think those ravine-side swimming pools are all viewed as a risk, and I think it cracked. [I am told] that it's no longer functional. I think the owner thinks that's all got to come out. [...] We're talking about a 200-foot frontage and a big building area well clear of the edge of the ravine. So it's not long for this world, if somebody were interested in it. So that's two of them. At one far end, there's a brand new house, again designed by, I assume, an architect – custom built, totally covered in black metal; the whole thing is black corrugated shiny black metal; it stands out. And it overlooks the entrance to the road that goes down into the ravine and was owned by the partner of the architect who built my house. He owned it, or his family owned it, until quite recently. But then, they put it on the market and eventually it sold. The [new owners] basically rebuilt the lot and had a lot of trouble with the City. They got frozen at one point because the City felt, [apparently, that the contractor] hadn't done a sufficiently good job of stabilizing the bank. [...] So that's a modern 2020-ish house. A rebuilt one-storey is next, then the Vancouver architect house, then [a] house, which I think is the original one there. I don't know about the next two. [...]

Q: What's across the street from you?

NH: A park, a small park. Patricia Drive basically is on both sides of it. It's a small municipal park, doesn't have a name. It's been there right from the beginnings of the development of the subdivision. Our development forms one edge of the beginning of Patricia Drive from 159th Street down one side. [...] But the next house is actually part of the [subdivision] development [of Patricia Heights, not the acreages], and it was built in the '70s. It took quite a while for Patricia Heights to get fully occupied. If you talk to [the person I referred to you], she and her

husband have been in their house [a long time]; they are the second owners, but the first owners were not there very long. So they actually watched Patricia Heights being built. I don't know what else I can say about the houses. Ours is... I can imagine that [the architect / owner] was probably trained when Frank Lloyd Wright was the great god of North American architecture, and you can see that. Our bedrooms are all downstairs in the basement, because it's a glass wall down there. Then the living room and living space, kitchen and dining room, is one entire space. The living room and dining room is, with a cedar shed roof and backward sloping windows that looks out over the ravine. [...]. That was something that appealed to the architectural ambiance of the day.

Q: Like the control tower of an airport in those days.

NH: A little bit, yes. I was talking about that other house where we met [the original owner] and his wife. That house, also, the living room windows were like that, [...] although the house was sold recently. They're interesting houses. [...]

[....]

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

NH: I think we've covered the ground.

[END]