

A preview of

Voices of the Bakken



THE DIGITAL PRESS
AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF NORTH DAKOTA

Edited by
Bret Weber

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Voices of the Bakken

The Interviews of the
North Dakota Man Camp Project

Edited by
Bret Weber



The Digital Press at the
The University of North Dakota
Grand Forks, ND

TRAILER PARK MANAGER

Date: August 11, 2012

Interviewer: Bret Weber (BW)

MS is the manager of MC 16 and is there from Minnesota with his wife (who works in Williston). They see their housing as more permanent than the dormitory-style mancamps. He takes an active role in the community of Alexander, attends City Council meetings, he and his wife attend the local Baptist church, etc. He offers a lot of insights into the different types of housing and what could be best for the different areas and for how long, as well as the impact of the boom on the communities (short and long-term). The interview was conducted on August 11, 2012

Length of Interview: 39m43s long

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BW: One thing I should probably mention on there. I have no interest in using your name but in the process of telling the story, it might be possible for someone to be able to identify who you were.

MS: Oh sure, that's fine.

BW: And I can't guarantee you that they wouldn't be able to do that. That's the only real issue on there. Otherwise some information about how to contact me or the university about me.

MS: It's no problem.

BW: That's Sorenson?

MS: S

BW: Hey MS! Nice to meet you. My name is Bret.

MS: Bret, nice to meet you.

BW: So we, I'm not sure how much they told you? My friends that you were talking to. We think we're out here researching

mancamps.

MS: Okay?

BW: I'm guessing, do you call this a mancamp?

MS: We don't, we call it a mobile home park.

BW: Yep

MS: Our definition of mancamp is, when we're thinking of a mancamp, we're thinking of a dormitory.

BW: So like Capital Lodge?

MS: Yeah or like, Target Logistics. They have some of that stuff too. Or you have a commons area and you have a common cafeteria eating area and then everybody goes back to, you know, basically sleeping quarters. So that's kind of how we have defined mancamps personally.

BW: Very little individuality, no alcohol, some restrictive rules and regs?

MS: Absolutely. Curfews. Yep you betcha.

BW: And you don't have those things here? There's no central unit here?

MS: No, each unit is its own unit. They have wash facilities in them, kitchen, directTV, internet, just like you'd have at home.

BW: And how long of a lease do they sign with you?

MS: It depends. Anywhere between, we've had month-to-month leases. We don't like month-to-month leases. Typically we do between an 8-month and a year lease. Some people want to sign for two years, and that's fine too

BW: And it is companies that come in and sign or just individuals?

MS: Typically it's companies

BW: how many units do you think you have? And how many companies right now?

MS: By fall, we're going to have over 200 units here. Companies, we might have at any given time, we might have 30 or 40 different companies.

BW: Yeah. Some of them just renting 2 or 3?

MS: Absolutely

BW: Some rent 50 or? What's your biggest?

MS: Some, we have companies that are renting, you know, 40

trailers.

BW: And uh who owns this company?

MS: Dakotaland Homes. We own all of the trailers. Then there's a company that owns the land that we lease from.

BW: Is that a local outfit out of North Dakota?

MS: They are, the company that owns the property, they're based out of, I want to say Illinois? But they've come out here and they've put down roots out here. They're a construction company. They built a pretty large shop up in Williston. So they've made some commitments to the area, which I was actually kind of surprised to be quite honest.

BW: Where are you from?

MS: I'm from Minnesota

BW: Okay. Where in Minnesota?

MS: I grew up in The Cities and I have a house in southeastern Minnesota.

BW: When you're out here do you live in one of these?

MS: I live in the park, yeah.

BW: What's the rhythm of your life? How long are you here and how often do you go back home?

MS: I've only been home once.

BW: How long have you been out here?

MS: I've been here about 6 months. I kind of, I unofficially signed on for 2 years, for lack of a better description. It's not like you sign anything. I mean I told myself, my wife and I, we'd do it for 2 years. At that point, we'll decide what we want to do.

BW: So 6 months, is your wife here as well?

MS: Yeah

BW: Oh okay. So this is home?

MS: Absolutely.

BW: And any possibility that, depending on how things go here, that you might sell your home back in Minnesota and move here and be permanent?

MS: It's quite possible. I mean I'm a ND resident. I intend on voting here this fall. You know what I mean?

BW: Yeah

MS: My Dad's from ND, so I have a kind of family history of ND.

I like ND. So I guess, that's up in the air.

BW: Yeah.

MS: You never know where the company's going to go, especially the oil boom thing here is very... people are a bit... some people feel very positive about it. They say, "oh we're going to have"

BW: 20, 30 years

MS: Right! I'm not that optimistic but you don't know, you don't know how long things are going to go, especially housing. I mean this housing stuff up here, it's a bubble. We know it. You know you can't have people in Williston or even here renting for what they do for 10 years. We know that's not going to happen, you know what I'm saying?

BW: Yes

MS: Logic dictates that.

BW: It's not sustainable.

MS: Exactly. Just like when the housing boom came, you're not making 10% on your house every year. That was foolish. People knew that that was going to go away. Same thing's going to happen here ultimately. But we, our company as you see, we develop our housing more as a mobile home park and less like we'd spoke of, like a mancamp. Because the mancamps, in my opinion, are going to be the first to go away. There's no doubt in my mind.

BW: That's their job, right?

MS: Yep

BW: Is to be temporary like that?

MS: They are. Not only that but you can't, and this is of course just my opinion, you can't bring in and expect really good labor if you have people who are willing to live in those situations. Do you know what I'm saying?

BW: I do. I've spoken with people who had lived in the man-camps and they couldn't wait to get into one of the trailers.

MS: Absolutely.

BW: At the trailer, nobody's feeding you, nobody's cleaning for you, it's in many ways not as nice but you get to be a human being.

MS: Absolutely.

BW: In the camps, you're just a part in the machine, yeah?

MS: Absolutely. Here guys can have their picnic table out here and they can fire up the grill in the evening and they can have a couple beers with their friends and they can feel like they're at home, in a weird way. It's your home away from home. Mancamp? It is every that that's not. Do you know what I'm saying?

BW: Absolutely.

MS: Then get up and do you know, 14 days straight, 12 hours? Not cool. So you attract a certain type of person who's okay with that and that person typically isn't exactly, I would say, once again my opinion, isn't the best for the community too.

BW: We've been out here, 4 or 5 days doing this, and you just articulated in an almost poetic way, exactly what I've been coming to understand about all of this.

MS: Yeah, yeah

BW: What do people pay for these?

MS: It depends on the length of the lease. It really does. We have 3-bedrooms and we have 2-bedrooms. It totally depends on the length of the lease, it really does.

BW: So range? Can you give me a range?

MS: On our 2-bedrooms, we'll say

BW: 2-bedroom, long term lease?

MS: Maybe \$1800 a month, maybe \$2000 a month

BW: uh-huh. 3-bedroom, if I wanted to just rent it month-to-month?

MS: At this point we probably wouldn't do month-to-month because we have a waiting list

BW: Okay

MS: But you know, say maybe \$3500? \$4000? Depending

BW: Do you have 100% occupancy? you've got a waiting list.

MS: Yep.

BW: How long has it been here? This park?

MS: Well the thing is, this place was originally an RV slash mobile home park.

BW: Right

MS: When it was initially purchased. So then what they did is they did infrastructure improvements and then they added, from the top of that hill, they added everything back this way, every-

thing up this way. So, as far as since the new owners have taken over? I want to say almost a year now. All these trailers over here? We parked those this summer.

BW: And is this in the Alexander sewage system? Does it trunk from that?

MS: It is. In fact that's one

BW: Sewage is a huge issue!

MS: It's a major issue! And it's very important too. You know? Everyone up in Williston is complaining, oh we've got to get rid of RVs. As of Sept 1, all RVs have to be out of the Williston city limits, except for you know, real tight rules like a family member, less than 5 days, that type of thing.

BW: Right

MS: And I don't blame them!

BW: And Williams County is probably going to follow with their own moratorium soon after that?

MS: They must because what are they doing with all this affluent? it's got to go somewhere. That's one of the big problems.

BW: We've been to some camps where they're not doing a very good job of managing that and it's awful.

MS: It's horrible. It's absolutely awful and that's a major health concern.

BW: Yep

MS: In my opinion anyway

BW: Yeah

MS: I was speaking with the McKenzie county inspector, we have all of our trailers are inspected by the county when we set them down. We permit them and everything. He's the same way - you pull up to a guy's farmhouse, the guy's got 20 RVs there, where's the sewage going? You know? That's a bad deal. So you mentioned, we are tied into Alexander. We were the last development here that the sewer had the capacity to tie into. That's it. Nobody else until the city figures out how they're going to deal with this expansion. This is a reoccurring scenario all over western ND.

BW: Right

MS: Arnegard, Watford, us, everybody has to deal with the sewage.

BW: Um now these are much nicer than living in an RV or the mancamps

MS: Yeah

BW: What you're calling the mancamps

MS: yep

BW: But this is still, one could argue, this is temporary housing

MS: They could say that, sure. I look at it...

BW: how long are these meant to last? are these? What's the lifespan? !0? !5 years?

MS: On a mobile home, typically about 10-15 years.

BW: So that's more than an RV but

MS: It is more than an RV. And I hear what you're saying, we have this argument from the post office. Their official take on it is that it's temporary housing so we can't get mailboxes up here.

BW: Ah!

MS: They're not going to deliver mail. We wanted to do a like a post office box kiosk, down here by the road?

BW: Right

MS: They wouldn't do it.

BW: They wouldn't even go that far?

MS: They still wouldn't do it. And mail's a big thing. Lots of these guys can't get mail. They're still getting mail. They're getting packages sent to them and it has mail in it because again, that's part of the infrastructure. The city, I mean the post office can't afford it. They're paying people \$9/hr. No one's working for \$9/hr out here. I mean no one except kids because they don't have to.

BW: Right

MS: So you have these government, a government job like that, the government's only said we're going to pay you \$9/hr, that's it and if you can't find anybody for that job, then you're not going to have that position filled. What do you do? You're kind of caught.

BW: Talking about that kind of thing, how are relations with the folks in Alexander? Do you go into town much?

MS: Absolutely. Yeah, I go to city council meetings.

BW: yes? Okay

MS: Yeah we have a great relationship with the city. You know, we

try to help them

BW: Do you do that as a resident of the park or as a manager, owner - you're not an owner, you're a manager of the park here?

MS: Yeah

BW: Are you doing it in your official capacity?

MS: No

BW: Or as a citizen resident of the community?

MS: No I'm doing it as a, I go, Mark - he's the general manager - we both go because, you know, I come from, Minnesota, I come from a place where I think it's important to know what's going on with your local government and just see what kind of problems they're facing. In a way I want to know what kind of decisions they're making and in a way, we want to be able to help if we can in our professional capacity, if we can. So like, class example, RTC had internet here. RTC is fine, but there was no choice.

BW: RTC is an internet provider?

MS: Was an internet provider, yeah. I think they're, for lack of a better description, a phone company. That's what I think they are, I don't know exactly.

BW: Okay

MS: So basically we brought internet to the town and we paid for the infrastructure on the water tower so the town, and us of course, we needed internet for our camp, we worked with the city in that in helping them help us. We try to have a good relationship with the city. If there's any partnering and stuff on some of the things we share, we like to do that.

BW: Looking for win-win collaboration?

MS: Yeah. Plus I like to go to the city council meetings, I like to know what's up. I think everybody should! Wherever they live!

BW: I just was elected to the city council in Grand Forks

MS: Well there you go! So I think that, everybody, wherever they live, at least once a year, should go to a city council meeting. if they don't they have no idea what's going on in their community. Then all of a sudden a stoplight goes up. Everybody's complaining all of a sudden. Why didn't you go to the city council meeting, man?

BW: We've been holding public forums on it, asking for input all

along and yeah.

MS: Classic example, Bismarck newspaper, was it Bismarck? Now it was, I want to say it was the Dickinson newspaper. Anyway, a company put in a salt well - a salt disposal well. They built it. They went to the city council, it was approved, it was built. Once the people saw trucks coming, oh they were up in arms because we don't have any oil money to take care of our roads to handle all this truck traffic. Where were you? It's all that reactionary type of politics that just doesn't work. Anyway, so we take a role here.

BW: I understand.

MS: You know what I'm talking about.

BW: I do.

MS: It's hard to explain to people when they're really angry about something, that, hey, where were you? (laughter)

BW: We all love democracy but don't always take the time to participate and it only works if you take the time to participate.

MS: That is a fact. How many city councils meetings have you had where by the end of the night, no one is there but you guys? It happens. You know here it's a classic example. It's nice that it's just Mark and I and the council's asked us, "are you guys here to?" We're like, no, we're just here to see what's going on, just watching business take place. It's strange.

BW: Do you know, are these folks, are they planning on voting? Do they feel like part of the community at all?

MS: I don't know. Personally speaking, I feel that a lot of them don't. They don't, no. Their head is back home. With a lot of them, I guess, I don't blame them, especially if you're on a rotating shift. If you're doing 14 days on and then you've got a week off, you're going back to Boise or you're going back to Council Bluffs or something like that? I guess a lot of guys aren't too concerned about it.

BW: And that's where their wife and kids maybe are?

MS: Absolutely. Home. Whatever it might be.

BW: How many families are living in here? Or is it mainly just single guys?

MS: We do have families here. Probably got about 3 or 4. There's kids here. School buses come through here, pick kids up, take

them to school.

BW: They do?

MS: Absolutely.

BW: I live on the eastern side of the state. We hear a lot about the “horrible crime” going on in Williston

MS: No

BW: Anything going on like that here?

MS: No, sensationalism completely.

BW: Yeah? Hysteria and sensationalism?

MS: Completely.

BW: Even there in Williston?

MS: Well

BW: Because it's portrayed as being all through the patch of course

MS: Well it's just like when I lived in Minneapolis. I lived in Minneapolis for many years. In Minneapolis if you want to go somewhere and get in a fight, you can find one, any time you want.

If you want to find drug and alcohol trouble, you can find it any time you want. Williston's the same way. If you want to go and go into some bar and think you're the toughest guy there, no problem. You can do it. But from what I've found, most of the guys, like in our park here, most of the guys that you encounter, hey these guys are coming out here from home because their economy's in the toilet. They want to pay their house off or they've got a kid in college or they've got all the right reasons why they're out here. I find that to be more prevailing than anything, to be quite honest. Last month there was an article in Men's Journal that I read, and I was like, “Do I live there?” It was completely unrecognizable. You know? It was like the guy got off the train, found the two stupidest people he could find, and let's go do what the two stupidest people, that didn't graduate from high school, let's go do what these guys want to do for the next 4 days. That's what I've been reading the most of. And it's, to me, it's not a good reflection of what's going on out here. It really isn't.

BW: The other guy who's doing the interviewing, we're doing different jobs on this, he mentioned this morning: it's come down to two different stories - those who are making money and think

this is fantastic and it's really great, and those who are pissed off about the broken promise and how horrible it is here.

MS: Sure, sure

BW: It's obviously way more complicated than that but there seems to be that continuum

MS: Absolutely

BW: With people tending to fall into one category or the other.

MS: Sure. What I've found too is that you'll meet people, and Prairie Public did a piece on the oil patch, it was like a 3 or 5 piece portion. That's how they did it. They did this, well it's not always good for some people and for some people, it's great.

What I've found is, if you come out here and you have skills to bring out here? You're not just getting off the train with a pair of tennis shoes over your shoulder thinking there's gold nuggets laying on the ground. If you have a work ethic and you have good skills in an industrial environment, you'll get a job and you'll make good money, but it's not going to be given to you. You're going to be working a lot for it. We've got guys that are rig workers. You can get a rig job, you don't even have to graduate from high school, you just got to pass a drug test. You can make \$100,000! But, you'll be working for every single penny of that. That's just how it is. Some people, once again just my opinion, they can't hold a job in the best of times. So they come out here, thinking that, oh there's all this easy money in western ND. Let's go find all this easy money. And that's not what's going on. The money's not easy.

BW: Two things - different directions. One, how is the boom going right now? It seems like it's going to, it's not going to be a boom and a bust but there's going to be a boom with different peaks and valleys along the boom and then level out at a maintenance level?

MS: Sure

BW: Because these pumps are going to be operating for 10, 15, 20 years

MS: Absolutely

BW: But the workers, the need for labor isn't going to last that long.

MS: No not the type of labor that the big call is for right now - drill and frack. Drill and frack are, of course, very dangerous and labor intensive. That's going to go away for sure.

BW: Right

MS: There's no doubt about it. Then yeah, it's going to just be pumping and hauling services

BW: And that frack requires a lot of transport

MS: Absolutely

BW: So that's going to level off as the pipelines are finished, the transport's going to level off

MS: Yeah

BW: But then there's maintenance work that will need to carry on for a long time, right?

MS: Yep it will be. Absolutely. You'll always have oil well service out here. Oil well service I always describe as kind of the catch-all of the petroleum business. They do everything - whether they're working on pump jacks, or replacing casings, or whatever. But yeah, absolutely, all that infrastructure stuff is going to be done. And then it's just going to be maintaining it. That's how it's going to happen.

BW: So, it seems one of the tricks that the state and counties need to try to pull off is it to figure out what level of infrastructure is needed for that maintenance level labor force?

MS: Absolutely

BW: and until we figure that out, mancamps are probably a really good temporary solution for this peak moment in needing a labor intensive period in the economy. Then these are the probably the next stop gap. Then hopefully we move to more permanent housing.

MS: Right, then you rent regular single-family dwellings.

BW: Right. So that makes sense?

MS: Oh absolutely, I agree.

BW: Do locals get that? Do county commissioners and the state government understand that?

MS: Some do. But then you have your typical politician type who gets on the bandwagon, the spend bandwagon? That politicians love? They can't have enough infrastructure as far as they're con-

cerned. Look at Watford. Watford is blowing up and that's fine. They've got a lot of great stuff there. They got some money from the oil and gas grant and it seems like they're

BW: I uh, Gene Veeder down the road here? He's the economic development director?

MS: Okay

BW: Or was a few years ago.

MS: Okay

BW: Dynamic guy. And they're doing a lot of building

MS: They're doing a lot. And how are your tax revenues going to be in 10 years to maintain that? That's what I look at. You're going to come to people, your citizens, with the typical thing and say, you know, we're having a budget shortfall. What do you mean budget shortfall? You can't meet the budget. You know what I'm saying?

BW: You overbuilt.

MS: Absolutely.

BW: Yeah

MS: That same thing happened to Minnesota during the housing boom. They did all this overbuilding in these outlying, bedroom communities. Now, there's nobody living there. So you're taxing people in town because you've got to keep the hydrants, snow-cleared, all that stuff. What are you going to do? So that is a balance. It's hard for people out here, I think, because they've been in a situation for many a couple generations where nothing's happening out here.

BW: Well they had that one boom

MS: In the 80s

BW: In the middle of the 80s, and they got burned on that boom, so they're really gun-shy about it. They're kind of fighting the last war and trying to look for solutions in this situation from the last situation

MS: Yep, I agree

BW: And I think they're completely, they're significantly different

MS: And they should be! My mom's from West Virginia

BW: Okay

MS: You want to see a state that has been completely put through

the ringer by petroleum companies, look at West Virginia. West Virginia is, all of its resources have been robbed by out of state companies, and they've just left them the place. It's just a mess. So it'd be a shame to see this area turn into something like that. That's many generations of companies but yeah. I would be cautious too. You don't know what's going to happen and the costs are still going to be there.

BW: It seems like this is a nice next step.

MS: Oh sure.

BW: More permanent, help to create a greater sense of community, without overbuilding the housing stock in town that they could get stuck with some overbuilt infrastructure there.

MS: Yeah. There's no doubt about it.

BW: So there's a lot of single guys here and single guys have desires, so whether it's prostitution or just a dating scene or something, what happens in terms of those issues around here?

MS: That I haven't had any experience with.

BW: You're here with your wife.

MS: I'm here with my wife. I don't have to go

BW: You're fortunate. The few of you who are here with your families.

MS: I'm very fortunate. And not only that, it keeps you from going a bit loopy. You know, guys go a little bit kooky when there aren't any women around.

BW: As a guy, I understand.

MS: With women around, with your wife and stuff, you kind of check yourself on some of the stupid stuff you might do, you know what I mean?

BW: It's a civilizing force.

MS: It is. I couldn't agree more with that. It is a civilizing force. That's exactly right! So as far as the dating scene and what these guys do as far as chasing girls? I don't know. There is a fair amount of prostitution in Williston.

BW: I hear about it though I've not seen it.

MS: Sure, sure.

BW: I'm not out here a lot but I've been out here a fair bit over the last few months and I don't believe I've ever seen a single

street walker.

MS: No, it's kind of funny... um grocery stores.

BW: Huh

MS: When you think about it, and this has just been recently,

BW: it gets you out of the weather

MS: Yeah and everybody goes to the grocery store

BW: huh

MS: you go to Wal-Mart, you go to Econo Food or Albertsons in Williston? It's full of single dudes with time off and wandering around. So I suppose if you're in that business, that would be a market.

BW: That is where part of it is happening?

MS: Absolutely.

BW: Um anything like that in Alexander here? is the grocery store a hotbed?

MS: No grocery store here.

BW: No grocery store?

MS: No grocery store. There's two bars here.

BW: okay

MS: you know my wife and I don't go to the bar but the place is filled every night. You drive by, it's filled every night. I guess I haven't heard of anything as far as prostitution here but you know? Maybe it's just discreet, you don't know.

BW: Right.

MS: I know that they had a um, they had a little bit of prostitution that was happening in Watford that got... and I only found out about this because it got broken up by the police.

BW: right

MS: So you know that's going on. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if these guys were getting on Craigslist and stuff like that and there's call-outs showing up here. That wouldn't surprise me. I mean, c'mon, my head's not in the sand. That happens all the time. If you were a prostitute, that'd be a convenient way to do it?

BW: Why would you walk the street when you've got the world-wide web?

MS: Yeah you've got the internet. No problem. Not only that, these guys have got a ton of loot. A lot of these guys, some of

them are sending it home, they're doing the right thing. A lot of them aren't. I'm going to go blow a \$500 tab at the bar and I'm going to buy porterhouses every night and there's lots of guys that do that.

BW: So to go from sex to church, did you and your wife attend church when you were in Minnesota?

MS: Oh yeah. We go to church in Watford.

BW: You go to church in Watford?

MS: Yeah

BW: And how's the congregation doing here? What church do you go to?

MS: I go to the First Baptist church in Watford

BW: Okay

MS: It's a fairly small church but once we chose it, we chose it because of that too because we like going to churches that are a bit smaller, a bit more intimate, you know people.

BW: uh-huh

MS: Back home, there was a couple churches that we went to that were quite large and you really kind of lose the community of it, if you know what I mean?

BW: Uh-huh. And here's the congregation, some of them folks that had been living there before, some newcomers. Is it a nice mix? How does that work?

MS: Oh the congregation that I go to, it's probably 80% people from out of state.

BW: Uh-huh

MS: Absolutely.

BW: One of the things that's crept up in a lot of the interviews is guest workers or newcomers kind of feel kind of alienated from or maybe even insulted by the locals. The locals have a lot of animosity towards the workers. how's that working out in town here? Is that here? That was certainly the case up in Tioga

MS: Oil's been in Tioga for a long time. That's where the first oil well came in. So they've been dealing with it

BW: Back in the 50s

MS: 51 yeah. Here? I feel that the council, from a city point of view

BW: Yeah?

MS: I feel the council is very anti-newcomer I guess. To put it simply, I think that that's the case. I really do. Now I talk to locals and stuff, and I'm friends with a couple locals here, a couple old-timers, great guys and not a bit of animosity at all. These are guys that have been here for 40 years so it's hard to get a feel on that. I don't spend a lot of time with the locals. But from the locals that I do know, um I get a fairly positive feeling because these guys didn't have jobs before. All of a sudden you've got a guy in town, has lived here for 20 year, all of a sudden he's putting a new roof on it, getting new siding, he's got a new motorcycle. He's digging it.

BW: Yeah

MS: And he's at home! Not like three-quarters of the workforce out here! This guy's at home. He comes home, he's got his wife and kids. He's got his boat and he's feeling good about it. I guess I haven't, from what I know in town, that's about the extent of it. But it seems like the city council, if the city council finds out, if you have a concern and the city council finds out that you're not local? Not interested.

BW: oh

MS: Not interested. Not interested in talking to you about it. Not interested in anything. Because they, for some reason, I don't know what it is, there's just this underlying thing, and the council's not very big, that people are coming in and trying to clue them in, I think that they feel. I'm sure that some people are but I'm from the school of thought of, you can at least listen to what the person has to say. You never know what they're going to say and there might be something you can take away from it and there might be nothing. But as an elected member,

BW: you kind of have a responsibility to listen

MS: I think that you should at least listen, yeah. You know? And I'm not saying everybody's got to run with whatever say I would say, but hey that's just a respectful part of government. You can think that the guy's a kook, but you still should listen!

BW: He has a right to be a kook!

MS: Absolutely! It's America!

BW: Yeah.

MS: There's quite a bit of kooks!

BW: You ever have to kick anybody out of here?

MS: Uh

BW: Or any kind of policing?

MS: No we haven't had to throw anybody out. ANd I will say that's one of the nice things about renting to companies because the company's the leaseholder. So if you have an issue with somebody,

BW: You call the company?

MS: I never have to go to the guys. I just call up their foreman or call the corporate office, say, "hey, we've got a problem with Billy Bob in 425." It's over, you never have to hear about it again.

BW: You moved straight from your home in Minnesota to work here?

MS: Yes

BW: You weren't involved in any other camps?

MS: No

BW: Do you have kids here?

MS: No

BW: no pets?

MS: I've got a dog.

BW: Dog an issue at all?

MS: No. Not typically. You know? We have just begun implementing camp rules I guess that people have to sign when they come in and one of them is, no pets unless they are approved by management. This is a totally new game for some companies.

They've never provided housing to workers before. All of a sudden they're providing housing and then pets, guys are showing up with dogs. It's something that never occurred to them. So we've had, I'm not going to say that they're issues but, pick up the dog's poop, that kind of thing but otherwise, no problems.

BW: Okay. What kind of unexpected costs or expenses do you incur in living here?

MS: Myself personally?

BW: Yeah, you and your wife.

MS: None. Just the commute for my wife. Fuel costs.

BW: Where does she work?

MS: She works in Williston.

BW: Ah,

MS: So she's got to commute back and forth to Williston

BW: So that's a cost both in gas and emotional cost, it's exhausting driving.

MS: I will say, yeah, and I stress out a little bit about it. I don't like her driving back and forth on 85. 85's an awful road.

BW: yeah

MS: But we both grew up in the city so it's not like driving on the 94 loop in Minneapolis! It's different! So, Rachel, she's sharp, she can handle it. But I do worry about her, especially you know weather and that kind of thing. You think about it.

BW: But you've very clearly chosen to come here, you are living here by choice? You're not feeling like you were forced out of Minnesota or that you're stuck here or anything?

MS: No, not at all. I will say that the economy in Minnesota forced me out. If I were to say that, I would prefer to work in Minnesota. I certainly would. But this is a great opportunity out here for a lot of people. You can put together finances that would take you 10 and 15 years to put together. You can put it together in 2 years. So, you know, that's great. Where else in the country is that happening right now? MS: Nowhere. It's not happening anywhere.

BW: Right.

MS: This is the only place that's growing the way this is. The only place. So a little bit of, you pay a little bit on the front end, being away from family and that, but well worth it in the long run, at least, my wife and I have agreed it's well worth it in the long run.

BW: So, yeah, a clear conscious choice that the two of you have made?

MS: Absolutely

BW: And you anticipate that this will absolutely benefit your life having gone through this experience here?

MS: Absolutely. Absolutely. And it's wacky sometimes you know, but for us it's been worth it. It really has so far. Now, we've only been here 6 months, but it's been good.

BW: Yeah?

MS: It's been good.

BW: So you've not been through, well you know winter though?

MS: Yeah from Minnesota, I mean it gets 30 below where I'm at and that's in the dead calm so I don't really get worried about.

The wind is hard to warm up to. Hard to warm up to the wind.

BW: And you miss trees I'm guessing?

MS: Oh my gosh! How about naturally occurring water?! Oh my word!

BW: To see water! You don't get to see water here!

MS: That's a huge thing! Never! We have a place that my wife and I go swim, we go swim over here at the Arnegard Dam and it's cool and fun. But not like Minnesota where there's lakes everywhere. I mean absolutely everywhere there's a lake.

BW: Right. I moved from the inner mountain west and so I miss the mountains and the trees.

MS: Exactly

BW: You're missing lakes and trees?

MS: Absolutely.

BW: I hadn't thought of the absence of lakes.

MS: Absolutely and like I tell my wife, c'mon, you know there's someone right now living in Oregon dying to get back to these prairies!

BW: They're feeling all claustrophic out there!

MS: Yeah! They want to see those rolling hills man!

BW: yeah

MS: So no matter where you are, somebody loves it where you are. So what do you do?

BW: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that I should have asked you? Or any other part of the story that I, you know I'm trying to collect these stories that people should know, that we haven't talked about yet?

MS: Sure, sure. No. The thing that always sticks in mind is the first thing I always mention to people is what aggravates me is the sensationalism when people quote unquote "document" what's happening out here. You know what I'm saying? I feel that they're, my wife Facebooks, I don't Facebook, but the impressions

that people have out here, all of it's media-fed. I mean where else are they getting it? It is just, it's not reality. Even that Prairie Public piece. It's just not reality. You know? It's not, it's not just a bunch of crazy guys, drinking and going to work on oil rigs and throwing hundred dollar bills at each other. That's not what's going on.

BW: But neither is it the hero worshipping story of everybody coming out here and automatically making six figures and their life is golden.

MS: Absolutely not!

BW: It's a complicated story.

MS: It very much is.

BW: We're going to be writing ours, we're hoping to do it justice but unfortunately we're probably going to be writing in places that will probably be read by other people like us.

MS: Sure

BW: People don't read newspapers, few people watch public TV. So probably my biggest hope for the work that we do is that we get some message to the policy makers, especially like the state legislature. What kinds of things should they know about what's going on here? What sort of decisions should they be making?

MS: It's that infrastructure balance, really.

BW: Infrastructure balance, yeah

MS: Not only that but you look at somebody like Schlumberger or some of these neighbors, some of these big, big petroleum outfits, and, don't get me wrong - I buy gas, I want cheap gas just like everybody else, I'm not naive or it's not lost on me that we currently need to have diesel fuel - diesel fuel runs the world

BW: Uh-huh

MS: But on the same note, the kind of profit that's being made is astronomical and it's at a cost to the communities out here. It really is. In dust, roads, fire protection

BW: Sewage, law enforcement

MS: All that kind of stuff. It takes a toll. More than it does in say, Dickinson or more than it does in say, the Fargo area. It's going to require more attention. I think the legislatures need to know and have a better idea on the volume of natural resources in rela-

tion to the money that they are going to make off of them. There needs to be some kind of balance there. I'm not a socialist by any means. I think that everyone who puts forth money, they should be able to make a fair profit, but at that the same note, if it's fracking trucks that are busting up the roads and there's vacuum tank trucks that are busting up the roads? Then that should be reflected on what they pay for state tabs or something like that. I mean that's the only fair way to do it, really. I would say that the state needs, and I think they are becoming a bit more aware of what's happening out here as far as that goes.

BW: Uh-huh

MS: I mean, you saw the roads. The roads are rutted! Where have you... I've only seen that one time in my life, on a coal road

BW: How long have they been rutted like that? Since you've moved here?

MS: That road? That side road? That road was new 2.5, 3 months ago. New!

BW: The one with the two tracks going through it?

MS: Yes. It's amazing isn't it?

BW: Is it just a temporary road?

MS: Well I'm assuming that that's going to be the shoulder of the new road, but when I got here the ruts in the center of the road were this thick. Going just right through main street, right where the duels run.

BW: yeah

MS: That's extreme. That's extreme.

BW: It is dramatic

MS: It's squishing the road out from underneath. It is absolutely dramatic. So I look at it from, the trucks that are on the roads out here? They should be paying for some of that. I think. I think that Haliburton or Schlumberger or some of these frack companies and pumping companies? They should be paying that. But see, they know that if they get in here, of course this is just, I'm not a conspiracist but, they can get in here quick, get the drilling done, get their stuff out, they won't pay. They won't have to. And they know it.

BW: The state legislature can do what it wants at that point,

they're already gone, they've made their money?

MS: It's done. At that point, Keystone pipeline is going to come down. They're going to tie into that with trucking and some rail and it's going to be over. You're never going to get a dime out of them. And these guys here, people in Alexander, Watford, Trenton? Everybody around here? They're going to be paying for it?

BW: They're left to pay for it.

MS: Yeah

BW: That's a great way to summarize. Thank you so much. I appreciate your time.

MS: Yeah absolutely, any time.

BW: Buh-bye now.

MS: Yep, good luck.

BW: hey do you have a business card by chance?

MS: I do.

BW: Yeah?

MS: Do you?

BW: I do.

MS: Let's trade cards.

BW: Here you go sir

MS: Very good

Well nice to meet you, Bret. Take care of yourself.

Thanks. Bye. Alright thanks for listening.

THE FISHERMAN

Date: August 11, 2012

Interviewer: Bret Weber (BW)

WN is a 65 year old male from Georgia who is living at MC 14. He is a “fisherman” – he retrieves things that get dropped in the oil wells. He has 45 years of experience in the oil industry. He discusses this boom and the community in his mancamp, among other parts of how he came to be there. The interview was conducted on August 11, 2012

Length of Interview: 29m25s long

Interview Audio File Number: WS116770.WMA

WN: You talk to her? You might get the other side of that. She's out here to visit

BW: yeah?

WN: But she's going home because she don't like this shit.

BW: She doesn't like it here, huh?

WN: No

BW: How long have you been here for?

Mrs. N: Ah just for about a month.

BW: Uh-huh

Mrs. N: I'm going to back to Georgia.

WN: I told her, if she'd come up here in the wintertime, I'd buy her a fur coat and fur boots.

BW: Yeah! It's a beautiful time up here in the wintertime.

Mrs. N: I don't think so...

BW: Alright

WN: being from Georgia, she ain't never seen a snowflake, so that has something to do with it.

BW: We have no mud or dust in the wintertime.

Mrs. N: Let me tell you something, it took me almost a week to clean that trailer out of dust.

BW: Yeah, we have three seasons - we have snow, mud, and dust! We're in dust season right now.

Mrs. N: I don't think I want any of them.

BW: no?

Mrs. N: Georgia's just fine.

BW: And a signature there and initial and initial. Thanks for being willing to do that.

WN: not a problem

BW: This is the university

Mrs. N: What is he doing?

BW: He's signing saying that

WN: it's a release saying it's okay to do.

BW: Yeah

WN: To tell you the honest truth

BW: Uh-huh?

WN: I thought you were peddling religion

BW: Uh we saw we were competing with the Jehovah's Witness yesterday at one of the camps.

Mrs. N: uh-oh

BW: They were handing out their material, you know.

WN: You can believe whatever you want, I just don't want to hear about it.

(laughter)

Mrs. N: What are you taking film of?

BW: We're just trying to document what's going on right now in the oil patch. It's a pretty big story, historically, and we want to make sure that people know what happened here and

WN: Right. If you want to know, there he is

BW: Yeah?

Mrs. N: I'm not saying it because he's my husband, but he's a smart man.

BW: Yes?

Mrs. N: Very smart. He's been in it 45 years.

BW: 45 years in the patch?

WN: Yeah

BC: You've lived in ND?

WN: Well I guess you might say that.. uh she lives in Georgia and when I need to go make a deposit, I need to go to Georgia, if you understand what I'm saying?

BW: Uh-huh. Banking's a problem here. Oh you're were talking about...

(laughter)

BW: Maybe I didn't understand!

(laughter)

Mrs. N: Oh my God!

WN: No I have a bank right down the road!

BW: Alright.

WN: We old guys...

BW: This is your third boom, you said?

WN: yeah, Billings, Mt. Elliott, I've been a few other places. I've been in this business 45 years.

BW: Uh-huh

WN: I've seen them come and go. Doesn't surprise me. It's not for everybody.

BW: No.

WN: But usually the ones that aren't going to make it, it only takes them about 2 weeks.

BW: Uh-huh

WN: And now for instance, I won't live in a mancamp owned by someone else. I did that.

BW: One of those where you can't drink at all?

WN: All that crap.

BW: Right, right

WN: Nuh-uh. I'm too old and independent for that kind of crap.

BW: Uh-huh

WN: I own that truck, in case I lose this company. I own that house. I own these clothes. Those cock-suckers don't own me. It's that simple.

BW: Yep yep. We stayed in Capital Lodge for a couple of days. Good place for a part in a machine, you know? They fed you well. It was clean. No chance to be yourself at all. Or even to sit down and even have a beer with somebody and say hello, you know?

WN: Yeah it's difficult to be there

BW: But this is kind of rough living here?

WN: I don't have to be here.

BW: Right?

WN: I'm here because I want to be. I enjoy this.

BW: But wouldn't it be nice to have a camp with water and sewage? This is a little bit rough.

WN: You know, we haul water. I haul.

BW: yeah. You pay a lot more for those camps too, right?

WN: Yeah that's true. It's fairly independent. I can do pretty much as I please now, until she came up here this summer, I had a dry camp. I didn't, you know, water

BW: Isn't this still dry?

WN: Well we have running water and everything now and I

BW: You have a water tank, you pull it in?

WN: Yeah, I've got a water tank there and I fill it. Then the sewer guy comes and pumps it off every week or whenever.

BW: Okay

WN: It's workable. We have electricity. Before she came, my philosophy on water pretty much was that that it rots wood, rusts iron and fish fuck in it. I don't use it for anything but mixing with whiskey, so...

(laughter)

WN: I didn't need a lot of water.

BW: When did they put the showers in?

WN: You're going to edit this aren't you?

BW: No. I'm loving it! I refuse to edit it!

(laughter)

BW: The showers? how long has that been there?

WN: Maybe a month.

BW: We came through in April and it wasn't there

WN: I have a shower in my office in Williston, things like that. I do have conveniences.

BW: What work do you do out here?

WN: I'm a consultant and my specialty is fishing. When they lose things in holes, I fish it out. It's not everybody's favorite but... people on rigs don't want to see me coming but when they need

me, then there it is.

BW: How deep can you go in fishing stuff out?

WN: I pulled a motor out there, by Fairview, about 21,000 feet last year

BW: Yeah

WN: We have fun with it. We just came in from a job in Montana last night. I'm going to their office to turn in my paperwork but other than that I don't have to go anywhere or do anything other than when my phone rings.

BW: That's a pretty unique specialty.

WN: It is, it's very unique

BW: Not a lot of folks out here fishing?

WN: There are a few. I've done it for a long time. I enjoy it. It's very independent. I don't have, I don't have really any employees and I really don't have a boss.

BW: uh-huh

WN: We've got a shop full of tools. They call me, there's a job, I call the company man and figure out what I need. I call up there and they send me the tools and I head out there.

BW: So your expenses are far less than your income and you're absolutely choosing to live here?

WN: Yes

BW: This isn't, you have no other choice? This is your choice to live here?

WN: This is my choice. I brought that thing all the way from Georgia.

BW: Are we in a lull in the boom or is the boom over? What's going on right now?

WN: No, the boom's not over.

BW: Will the boom go on for a while?

WN: Yes

BW: But it's going to go up and down?

WN: Some. According to, politics have got something to do with it, I think.

BW: We're waiting for the election?

WN: Yes

BW: So that a lot of companies have got stuff set up for work

after the election?

WN: Well there's a transition going on

BW: Yeah?

WN: and it will take 2 or 3 or 4 more years probably for this

BW: A transition here in the patch?

WN: In the boom

BW: Yes?

WN: Um eventually... right now we're drilling, like crazy, we're drilling 2,000 wells a year here.

BW: Okay?

WN: At some point they're all going to be drilled up but those wells will still be here and somebody's got to work on them

BW: Right, right.

WN: There will be that transition. That's kind of what I'm doing. I've been involved in the drilling side of it. That's why I came up here, to get involved in it. Now I'm transitioning slowly over to the production side of it. you know? I do both but trying to get over the production side. These wells will be here long after the drillings done.

BW: Right.

WN: The big rigs will all leave and go wherever they go to next, you know?

BW: And then they get the pipeline and that needs fewer truckers?

WN: Now there's another thing, we're going to have that Keystone

BW: Right

WN: But we won't have it until after the election because

Obama's trying to mollify the treehuggers

BW: Right, right

WN: Once he can't be run off again and he gets his second term, he

BW: He'll have no choice but to do that?

WN: He doesn't have any choice anyway but he won't give a shit. It's just a selfish thing. All politicians are selfish, and him more than most. (gives business card)

BW: Thank you man. Yankee fishing. Yankee Fishing and Rentals

- down hole fishing tools. Okay. Mr N?

WN: That's me

BW: Nice to meet you sir. And you've been here about 2 years, you said?

WN: Uh-huh

BW: How long you planning on staying?

WN: um I'm starting to reach middle age. If I look young, I'm 30

BW: Me too!

WN: I figure I can work actively in the field for another 10 years and I may spend it all here.

BW: So would you get a home or do you want to still be living in this?

WN: Either way I would like to build a house.

BW: Uh-huh

WN: I've been looking for some land. Land's hard to get.

BW: uh-huh

WN: I don't want to be in a subdivision. I'd like to be

BW: Out on a field somewhere?

WN: Yeah someplace where the only things I could see were the things God made, pretty much.

BW: And Mrs. N would move out?

WN: Oh yeah, well I don't know if I'd get her to move up here or not. Our oldest son is up here. He just came up to work. He lives in Kildeer and works out of Watford. He's loving it. He spent years as a cop. He got tired of being shot at and spit on for no money.

BW: Uh-huh

WN: Everybody that you run into up here has got a story.

BW: They sure do!

WN: Mine...

BW: I think I've got the funnest job of all, I get to get the stories

WN: I was, you know, I walk around and talk to everybody.

Because you get the story after a while. It's interesting you know?

Mine - I was in a business building oilfield equipment and stuff like that. Consulting worldwide and things like that. That was just a 1099 type job. At a certain time 10 years ago, my sweetie developed breast cancer and I had a choice between sending the

money to Washington or saving her life. Well this is a pretty easy choice. Then the cocksuckers in Washington decided I owed them \$200,000 and they're going to have it. Now I work with a W-2, they can't get it all. They can just get...

BW: 1099 is Individual Private Contractors

WN: Yes

BW: w-2 you're taking a paycheck?

WN: Yeah that's paying your own taxes so I had a piece of money I was sitting on to do that with.

BW: Right

WN: With no health insurance

BW: Right. So W-2, do you

WN: They take the taxes out

BW: Do you just work for one company then?

WN: Well yeah but Yankee... I work for Yankee

BW: Oh I see

WN: It says Yankee but I work for every oil company in the patch.

Yankee works for all the other companies?

WN: yes

BW: You work for Yankee?

WN: Yes.

BW: Who happens to be the president of Yankee?

WN: His name is Dan Walter but to transition, since Yankee's been bought by MBI, which is a large corporation, based in Bellfield. I very honestly don't know what they've got as far as a company but we're making them money and they're leaving us alone. I don't even know how to explain it. The owner agreed to hang around for 6 months but he spends 3 weeks a month in Arizona. I see him about 1 day a month.

BW: My main interest here is in the housing stuff and the community. Is there a sense of community here in this park?

WN: Yes there is

BW: Do you know these folks?

WN: Yes I do

BW: Do you get together and cook or have beers in the evenings? Things like that?

WN: Not so much that. People have pretty much, because we're so close in here, packed together, people have a strong sense of privacy of other people. It's just too tight packed in. If you were hearing the stories at someone else's camper or something like that, you'd wear out your welcome pretty quickly. So we leave each other alone. We know each other and when we come outside, it's open season to talk and do whatever like that. And yes, there is, not amongst everybody, but there is a strong sense of community. A guy up there, you see that little green trailer right there? That water tank?

BW: Yeah

WN: He hauls water for everybody that needs it, for free. He goes up there and fills up and goes around. Now, I have my own rig to do that with but he does that, just as a part of

BW: Helping out your neighbors

WN: Just a part of the community.

BW: Uh-huh

WN: We had some people, a young couple, living in a tent down there and there's no electricity or anything down there.

BW: Right,

WN: that's the cheap seats!

BW: You call that the what?

WN: That's the cheap seats.

BW: Cheap seats?

WN: Yeah.

BW: (laughter)

WN: They were in a tent and the weather's going to turn bad sooner or later. A guy had to leave

BW: (interrupting) do most of these folks have work?

WN: yeah

BW: Okay

WN: The ones that don't have just got here and in a week or so, they will.

BW: Okay, good

WN: It's good. But the people that were down there, a young couple, he's trying to get... well he's at Wal-mart now but he's a computer genius and he'll be able to do whatever he wants but it

just take a little time to get into the program. Well the weather's going to get bad soon and we were a little bit concerned about them, there was a guy that had to leave camp and had that motor-home right there. He couldn't sell it because he didn't have a title. He finally told the camp, look, you can have it. My sweetie engineered to move those people up here. Now they're paying rent. BW: And they're having a better life than they were having in the tent?

WN: Of course.

BW: Yeah yeah.

WN: That is the sense of community that we have here.

BW: Yes

WN: We didn't need to send our money to Washington and have them send a little bit of it back to do something. We just took it upon ourselves.

BW: Yeah yeah

WN: It's the same if we have trouble here at night.

BW: Is there any trouble or crime?

WN: Very, very, very rarely. And it's gone by sun-up. There have been a few people who've been told, you're gone by sun-up.

BW: It's a self-policing campus?

WN: Yes it is.

BW: You interact much with the folks in town?

WN: Yeah some.

BW: How do you get treated?

WN: Don't like Williston

BW: Why don't you like Williston?

WN: Ah, traffic jams all the time.

BW: Right.

WN: A hassle

BW: It's a headache to go in there.

WN: It is a hassle, you know? I like the little towns. I like Alexander and Watford and Fairview and things like that. I'm a rural kind of guy anyhow. I like it out here. I had not intended to winter in this trailer.

BW: But you did winter it? You wintered in this trailer here?

WN: Well I brought it in February and it was pretty cold. I did

the skirting and stuff like that. It was doing pretty good to get it up above freezing in there but when you fish, you're outside all the time, you know?

BW: Right right

WN: It didn't really bother me. I spent a lot of my working life in hot areas, being from Texas and I've worked in Africa and South-east Asia and Central America, that kind of thing?

BW: Uh-huh

WN: A few years ago I had a heat stroke on a rig.

BW: Yeah?

WN: It made it where heat bothers me.

BW: Once you have that...

WN: Yeah

BW: Cold? Cold is good?

WN: Cold doesn't bother me too much.

BW: How often do you go back to Georgia?

WN: Well it's been, there is no... when I came up here, the hitch was supposed to be 21 and 9 but

BW: Work for 21 days, go back home for 9?

WN: yeah

BW: And how long of a drive is it back home to Georgia?

WN: Oh I'll fly.

BW: Oh

WN: It's 2600 miles. That's not something we're doing. I did drive one time. Took the company truck all the way to Georgia and brought that shed back. Walter had a shit fit about it too!

(laughter)

WN: But you said I can take the truck on my days off?! They didn't realize it was a 5000 mile round trip.

(laughter)

WN: oh well! They made the rules! But now we fly, out of Minot. That's one of the worst problems. Here in Williston? This sorry-ass airport service sucks. Great Lake Airlines is incompetent son of a bitches that would be out of business in any market except this one.

BW: Here they can get away with any mistakes they want to make? Because they're the only game in town?

WN: Yeah. We go to Minot.

BW: Nice little airport there, huh?

WN: Yeah. It's a long ways to drive over there but ...

BW: yeah

WN: That old boy right there, he's going to lose that dog. That dog's got kind of a bad temper and somebody's going to shoot him. He's been told. It's going to happen. I hate to see it happen. The guy's a friend of mine but the rules on dogs... it's like a chicken-killing dog? you catch a dog killing chickens, you got a right to kill him?

BW: Ah

WN: There's no questions. There's no argument about that. And that dog's getting to where, somebody's going to shoot him. But, that's the way it goes.

BW: So your wife's been here for a month?

WN: Yeah, well, let's see, when did we come? 2nd of June didn't we?

Mrs N: May 6th we left

WN: Well I forget, I'm 80 or 90 days into this 21 day hitch. In the winter I'll go home a little more often probably. I want to make hay while the sun shines, so to speak.

BW: Right right. So you talk on the phone? How do you keep the relationship?

WN: Oh several times, several times a day.

BW: yeah

WN: We both have iPhones and Skype and all those conveniences

BW: Where do you go for internet?

WN: Oh it depends. The office or you can go into Alexander or you can go down the road to the Bakken Buffet's got a wifi hot spot. Some people in the park have got those portable hot spots. Catch as catch can.

BW: Ah

WN: And that's on my list. I'm going to figure out some way

BW: To get that?

WN: Yeah I do a lot of other things. I have interests all over the world. I've got an office in Warsaw, Poland that I've got to keep

up with and other crap like that. So my communication is less than I wish it was.

BW: Uh-huh. Hard on the relationship but you've kind of lived this kind of life for a long time?

WN: 25 years we've ran together

BW: The two of you know how to do this?

WN: yeah. She will, she has never, with one exception, refused me to go anywhere. I say, Honey, I'm going to wherever. This year, she refused me, earlier, I had an offer to build a contract in Afghanistan and she had a shit fit about it. I'm not a stranger to gunfire but um she just doesn't think she wants to bury me yet so... and some of my other friends said, don't go there, even some of your other friends are trying to shoot you.

BW: Huh

WN: So, I've been to Russia and eastern Europe and Africa and different places like that. I'm a Vietnam vet and worked for Nordesia when it was Nordesia and other places.

BW: yeah

WN: I'm not a stranger to that stuff.

BW: You keep a gun here?

WN: Ha! Everybody in this camp is armed to the teeth!

BW: uh-huh

WN: And they uh

BW: Is there drugs?

WN: No

BW: I mean you said no crime, drugs, prostitution or anything here?

WN: No. There's no drugs and unfortunately I ain't seen any hookers either! No!

BW: We hear about it in town but I have not seen it at all.

WN: I have not seen it, not once in this camp. There are a lot of people in this camp that don't lock their doors.

BW: uh-huh

WN: Because the penalty for theft is severe and everybody here knows it. It's operate pretty much by The Golden Rule and you won't have any problems at all, you know? That's kind of, I mean I lock up when we get ready to go but a lot of people don't. It's

pretty much self-policing. We had a few people who decided they might be able to dump their sewer in the dirt? Nuh-huh

BW: Oh. You can't live in a camp like that.

WN: No

BW: I've been to a couple camps where that's happening. It gets bad fast.

WN: I've been in places where cholera and other things have happened in the world

BW: yeah

WN: And I know, that's a no. We put a stop to that immediately. No way. If they don't like it, go away.

BW: It's not the first thing that people think of but when you don't have sewage, it's the number one thing you worry about.

WN: Pay the money and get it hauled off!

BW: You said the guy comes by once a week?

WN: yeah and it's kind of cool. It cost \$40... well they don't come here once a week. When I'm by myself, they only haul every 3 weeks or so. When Loddie's here, a little more often, but women have got to have enough water to wash an elephant all the time anyhow! (laughter) Close your mouth Loddie! (laughter) There's a mailbox on that pole up there. Put \$40 in it, describe your camper and they'll pump it.

BW: Huh

WN: Nobody steals the money.

BW: uh-huh

WN: The guy, he claims to come on Saturday or Sunday, usually it's about Monday or Tuesday but as long as it gets done, it's reasonable.

BW: That doesn't sound like price gouging?

WN: No it's not.

BW: There's a lot of price gouging going on out here but

WN: There's some, not much

BW: Pretty inevitable, huh?

WN: There's some

BW: How does this boom compare to the others that you've been involved with? Is it just the same as all of them?

WN: Well, let's see, in Australia we lived in a camp at the rig so

that was okay. In Giddings, TX, I rented an easy chair for 8 hours a day in a rooming house

BW: Uh-huh

WN: Somebody else had it for the other 2 8-hour sections

BW: Uh-huh

WN: While the widowed lady cooked meals. That kind of thing.

BW: This seems pretty cushy huh?

WN: Well yeah, out of a 30 day month, I'm subject to live in that truck 20 days. This is a luxury.

BW: When you get to come home?

WN: Yeah

BW: This is home?

WN: Pretty much.

BW: Yeah

WN: pretty much

BW: Yeah

WN: I make an effort now that Loddie's here

BW: Yes?

WN: But when I'm by myself, I might go to Kildeer to talk to somebody and just spend the night down there. I know whether every daggone shower and portage on in ND is.

BW: Right.

Mrs N: (From another room) That's true!

(laughter)

WN: You know? You can kick the seat back and it's kind of like, with the work, if you're conscious and awake, you need to be working. You can't stay awake anymore? Click back and take a nap. It's like that

BW: Because you're not out here for fun. you're out here to work?

WN: I didn't come out here to look at the tree. Singular. (laughter) Well they tell me that, when I got here, that there was a pretty girl behind every tree.

BW: Yep!

WN: I can't find the damn trees!

(laughter)

WN: It is what it is. This looks like the Ukraine. I spent a lot of

time in the Ukraine.

BW: In the steps in Ukraine?

WN: Yep, it's rolling plains like this, grain, wheat, things of that nature. Not so many cattle but lots of grain crops.

BW: Are there any questions about the oil boom, the patch, or living here that I haven't asked you that I should've asked you? If I'm out collecting stories about those things, what should people know?

WN: Ain't no country for old men. I'm lucky

BW: That's a great point. I guessing you're the oldest in the camp here?

WN: I'm about the oldest in the camp if not you?

BW: I'd be the oldest in the camp if not you weren't here?

WN: How old are you?

BW: I'm 52

WN: Oh shit, I'm 65.

BW: Uh-huh

WN: But I don't sell them this, I sell them this

BW: Not the muscle but the brains?

WN: That's it.

BW: Uh-huh

WN: I don't have to uh, we just formed a new corporation.

There's enough demand for tools and things like that. I invented a tool and an engineer and I formed a corporation to market the tool

BW: A fishing tool?

WN: No, well yes, sort of. It's a general purpose tool that will have wide application. I have no plans to ever retire, ever. As long as I'm able to get up and go, I will.

BW: Most of the people here though are pretty much younger?

WN: Yeah, everybody is. I know one guy in my business that's older than I am but other than that I'm it.

BW: uh-huh

WN: But I'm just lucky. In spite of all the abuse I've put my body through, I'm still getting by with it so I can't complain about that. But I'm glad you came by and talked to me

BW: I sure appreciate you taking the time. (to Mrs N) Thanks for

letting me chat with him here for a little bit!

Mrs N: No problem

WN: There's so many facets to this that, another thing that is an interesting phenomenon in this area is, in the wintertime, people can't associate outside a lot

BW: Right

WN: It makes it where the bars and saloons are a popular gathering place. A lot of people come from other places and don't know how to handle that very well. You've got to pace yourself. If you're going to spend time, you have to pace yourself. I've seen some rows saloons down here in Alexander and the police response time is about 2 hours.

BW: There's that busy? It's not that big a town?

WN: No, it's not that big a town, it's just quite a ways from the county seat. They don't go up here very much.

BW: They're using county sheriffs, they don't have their own police department?

WN: Well he's up here once in a while. I know everybody, he's a good ole boy but he ain't up here very often. It's one of those things that, if you really get into a serious bar fight, by the time the law gets there, you'd be bled out. So people know this, manners are better, you know? That's just like in this camp. The fact that everybody here is armed to the teeth makes for better manners, by a long shot.

BW: The penalty for having bad manners is just too hard?

WN: Yeah. You'll never get a Washington liberal to admit that. That's too bad. They're a long ways away and they'll come out here and freeze their tushie and they'll go home. I worked in Pennsylvania where every environmentalist in the world hung around continuously.

BW: There's no, the fraking's real limited there but not limited here, huh?

WN: Well yeah pretty much

BW: Limited only by the market?

WN: Fraking's been done safely and successfully for 60 years. All of a sudden the unwashed masses discovered it, learned a new word, and decided on the same basis as other things, they don't

like what they don't understand. Why do you think we don't have nuclear power in this country? People don't like what they don't understand and the amount that they don't understand about fraking would fill a dictionary so they naturally don't like it. Well you know? It's just ignorance. I hear those people... that idiot that made Gasland? That movie? Have you seen that one?

BW: I haven't.

WN: Oh it's a...

BW: That's the movie about fraking in Pennsylvania?

WN: Yeah. Well you know, the one where the guy lights the drinking water?

BW: The drinking water, yeah.

WN: Well I drilled lots and lots of water wells in Texas. There wasn't any fraking, there wasn't any oil field or anything. But the wells had methane in them and you could light the faucet. It's propaganda and it's a bullshit lie and unfortunately the people that elected our present government believe this shit!

BW: So the lighting the drinking water can be done anywhere there's drinking water?

WN: Anywhere there's methane

BW: and oil activity?

WN: No, just methane.

BW: Just anywhere there's methane in the water?

WN: yes and that's independent. Because that oil's so fucking deep, so isolated

BW: The aquifer's up here, the oil's down here?

WN: Yeah. In this place, there's two sources of water - there's one at 180 feet and there's another one at 720. And the oil's at 21,000. Now if that oil was going to leak into the drinking water, it would've all leaked out of that formation 50 million years ago. That formation is completely sealed and isolated. That's why we have to drill a hole in it. It doesn't just perk to the surface, you know?

Mrs. N: Let me show you what these winds do around here.

BW: Yeah?

Mrs. N: See that toilet right there?

BW: Yes I do. The wind knocked it right over. Wouldn't want to

be sitting in there at the time!

Mrs. N: Him and Jimmy went running after that toilet!

WN: That's the first time it went rolling down the hill though!

Mrs. N: That's twice!

WN: They have staked it down now though

Mrs. N: I come out here and I said, do you guys know that that toilet blew away twice? They said, yeah, we'll fix it. So they tied it down. Now, we're going to see if it blows away again.

WN: You don't like the weather in ND, just wait a few minutes

BW: It'll change, yeah

Mrs. N: Just like that! I was sitting out here one day and it was so nice and all of a sudden, I'm going, brr oh my god!

BW: it can go 40 degrees one way or another in an hour or two.

WN: Easily, easily.

BW: Yep.

Mrs. N: The first night I stayed in here, this camper was going...

WN: 40 mile an hour winds blowing the house around

Mrs. N: It scared me!

WN: It was alright, I got more companionship out of the deal!

Mrs. N: You sure did!

(laughter)

Mrs. N: yes, yes, yes

BW: Well thank you Mr. N. I appreciate it. Thank you again (to Mrs. N)

Mrs N: Take care

BW: Goodbye now. Good luck to you. so that was Mr & Mrs. N I just finished chatting with. His unit is the last one on the north edge. He's the north row on the far east end. Thanks for listening.

MAN CAMP WIDOW

Date: August 9, 2012

Interviewer: Bret Weber (BW)

SC is the 39 y/o wife of a construction contractor. She (& her son) live at MC-6 visiting her husband. She discusses the life of a contractor's wife and how this job impacts her family back home, particularly the hard job of raising an "out of control" 13 y/o son. She feels "life is hell" out there. She also mentions that they aren't getting paid.

Length of Interview: 30m46s long

Interview Audio File Number: WS116753.WMA

BW: Well they told me that...well there we go. It's August 9, Thursday. I'm meeting with SC from Idaho Falls, right?

SC: Yeah.

BW: The kids told me, so I've just finished interviewing SC's son, J__, and his friend, K__. I understand that you're all here for just a week or two?

SC: Yeah

BW: How long are you here?

SC: I'm here for maybe 2 weeks, because I'm going to have to send my kid back home probably and help put on door stuff. These guys are finish carpenters.

BW: Right.

SC: So, I don't know. I was only going to stay until Sunday but now I'm going to stay another week probably.

BW: So are you working here as well?

SC: I'm helping my husband.

BW: Yep. And J__ was telling me, your husband, I don't need your husband's name, he's been here since last June?

SC: Yeah

BW: How's it all working out?

SC: Not very well. We're not getting paid very well.

BW: You're not getting paid very well? The only reason to do this is for the money, right?

SC: Right.

BW: Because it's kind of hell?

SC: Right, it is hell.

BW: That's as good a word as any to use?

SC: Yeah. Like the living conditions are terrible here. Like people are shitting behind, in the trees, past the trees right there. There's flies everywhere.

BW: Yeah?

SC: It's fricking terrible living conditions.

BW: One of the things that I've noticed that is the biggest division between camps - those that have sewage and those that don't

SC: Right.

BW: So you've got people just shitting in the woods, right?

SC: Yeah. And the port-a-potties just fricking nasty. You can't even go in there.

BW: Who's cleaning it?

SC: Well they had someone come out the other day I guess.

BW: Yeah?

SC: I don't know what exactly they did but I don't care. I'm staying away from the port-a-potties.

BW: Yeah.

SC: (laughter)

BW: So you're certainly not doing this as your first choice?

SC: No, we're doing it to make money because the economy sucks ass.

BW: Uh-huh. Back in Idaho?

SC: Yeah

BW: And how long do you think you're going to have to do this for? If there was a job that opened up next week, your husband would quit doing this right now and go back home?

SC: Probably not

BW: how come?

SC: Um....

BW: Is he on contract here?

SC: We're like brothers, like a family, brothers and sisters out here, like a family. We're close, tight-knit family. Like all my men, like I owned, I own a construction company called Crystal Construction so we were working, we were all contracted in Idaho but a bunch of us got together. My husband and his boss decided to uh come up here by themselves in the winter last year. It was terrible in the winter too. Terrible fricking conditions.

BW: They lived in that trailer and this trailer?

SC: They lived in that one, I think.

BW: Um that doesn't look like it's an arctic trailer.

SC: We had to go under it and put freaking extra insulation and like, you know, fit it out for the conditions.

BW: Right, right. And then they put that stuff away for the summer so you get some air flow underneath there?

SC: I don't know what they did. I'm sure they did. They're construction workers.

BW: Yeah they know how to do that, that's their job.

SC: Right.

BW: Did you come up during the winter at all?

SC: I didn't, no. I couldn't. It's like freaking a month at a time that I can't see my husband. So I drive up here to see him.

BW: How many kids do you have back home?

SC: Just one, just the one.

BW: Uh J__ and K__, were they named at the same time?

SC: No, no

BW: it just worked out that way?

SC: Yeah it just worked out that way.

BW: But they told me, your husband and K__'s father had known each other for a long time?

SC: Oh yeah.

BW: So when you say it's a tight-knit group, they've all kind of, not all at the exact same time, but all kind of come out here together?

SC: yeah

BW: And they'll stay and go home together?

SC: Yeah

BW: How's the work? Is the work holding up?

SC: yeah the work's like no problemo. Just getting paid seems to be the problem. But we should get paid as of Friday.

BW: When you get paid is it just an automatic deposit? Do you get a paycheck? How does pay work? Because banking's kind of weird out here, isn't it?

SC: Yeah it's tough man, I don't know what we're going to do. Our bank is in Idaho Falls and freaking, hopefully we get a check, and it's just, hard times up here.

BW: So you're saying there's lots of work and there's lots of money coming out of the ground?

SC: Yeah

BW: But getting paid is hard?

SC: Yeah

BW: This is the second time I've heard this from somebody, where he felt like he got ripped off a bunch on his check and there's really nothing for him to do about it.

SC: Yeah

What company is your husband building for?

Black Butte Builders

Black Butte Builders? Where are they out of?

Driggs.

Driggs, Idaho? So just up the road from here?

Yeah

Do you know the builders?

The owner? Yeah. That's the owner.

Yeah

This is Black Butte Builders.

So this whole camp here?

Most of us. There's a bunch of us back there and they're in worse conditions than we are.

I saw, the people behind the trees here?

Yeah, there's people living in a tent right there.

I saw that, they got food out on a table. It looks real rough there.

Yeah

And this is already "hell" so that's kind of unimaginable?

Yeah I can't imagine, they're in shitty conditions.
And they're not going to be able to do that through the winter. I can imagine when it rains, it's horrible.
Yeah. That's why we've been, we've been trying to buy a trailer any time we can, to put our Buttes in it because we don't know from day to day if we're going to have somewhere to live.
BW: So do you pay any rent to be here?
SC: Well \$2000 a month
BW: For the trailer and the space?
SC: I don't know what the space is...
BW: ah-ha. \$2000? a month? to live in this?
SC: Yeah
BW: how many people are living in here?
SC: Two guys. It's the owner and my husband.
BW: The owner of the trailer?
SC: The owner of Black Butte Builders.
BW: Oh. Is it a two-bedroom?
SC: No
BW: So he sleeps on a couch or something?
SC: My husband, yeah he slept on a couch. For a good most of the summer though he slept in a tent because we came up here and hard-cored it, you know?
BW: Yeah
SC: Until their freaking tent blew away in a windstorm
BW: ah-ha. Because one thing we have here in North Dakota is we have wind.
SC: Yeah we have wind.
BW: I've heard...
SC: Yeah and the construction's terrible man. To get here, it's just, out of freaking proportion.
BW: What?
SC: From Idaho
BW: oh to get here
SC: Yeah
BW: That's a long drive...
SC: Yeah and then you get here and it's just construction, I don't know. It's kind of freaky to have those oil truckers up on your ass

wherever you go.

BW: Yeah.

SC: They're ready to run you over, they don't give a shit.

BW: They need to get going, yeah

SC: Yeah

BW: One of the things I've heard is "life's cheap up here" because there's always new workers who are willing to come in.

SC: I'm not sure I'd say "cheap" because we've been struggling...

BW: Well not to you... when I say "life is cheap," like if somebody gets killed on the road or something, "oh well another one got killed." There doesn't seem to be a lot of grief over that kind of loss?

SC: Yeah. Or the other day somebody got shot over

BW: At the camp up the road here?

SC: Yeah.

BW: So do you feel

SC: (interrupting) That's scary

BW: (continuing) Crime? Is it scary to be here?

SC: Yeah I think so, personally.

BW: For your husband less so for you?

SC: My husband, no, we have weapons and such so we're safe.

BW: Does he like carry a gun to work?

SC: No. Hell no.

BW: But he keeps a gun here?

SC: Yeah

BW: So it's not that dangerous, but?

SC: You have to be aware, you know?

BW: As a woman, what's it like here?

SC: Oh man, I haven't had a bath for 3 days and finally this morning, I got one. I was so freaking happy.

BW: Yeah, that is a wonderful thing.

SC: After driving freaking 12 hours, yeah. We have no like running water right at this second but there's water tankers there so we should be set.

BW: So if there was an option, if there was another option for living, you'd be looking at it but this is kind of your only choice right now?

SC: yeah like housing's like way too expensive. even to stay...

BW: Well \$2000 for a trailer?

SC: We have 2 motel rooms where we like trade off and go show-er

BW: Uh-huh

SC: But we don't get the best of doing it because the locals are assholes.

BW: Yeah?

SC: Yeah.

BW: Okay, let's talk about the local assholes.

SC: Well I don't know, I just know what the guys say

BW: How much do you, do you know any of the locals? Does your husband know any locals?

SC: No. No. They don't talk to us.

BW: The "outsiders" huh?

SC: Yeah.

BW: The boys said that in the evenings though, people get together and you have beers and maybe dinner together?

SC: Yeah

BW: So there's kind of a sense of community here in the park?

SC: Yeah

BW: But it's not connected to the local community?

SC: No, not at all.

BW: Not at all

SC: Except for Kum&Go

BW: Yeah?

SC: It's the only gas station in town

BW: Right. And where do you go for groceries? The boys mentioned the...

SC: There's a variety mart just down the road

BW: There's the Kum&Go, is that what you mean by the variety mart?

SC: No.

BW: It's a place called the variety mart?

SC: yeah it's a separate variety mart.

BW: How are prices on groceries?

SC: Out-freaking-rageous, man. You can pick out the one cheap

thing and usually get a pretty good deal but I don't know, it's rough. Like you have to buy the orange juice that's on super sale. They do keep everything cold there and they have a good meat department.

BW: I eat a little meat in my diet. Mainly I eat vegetables.

SC: Do you?

BW: Not here, I'm eating meat. That's what you get fed here.

SC: Yeah, protein.

BW: It's a protein diet.

SC: Keep yourselves going.

BW: How's your husband's health been?

SC: Pretty good. He's strong.

BW: Yeah?

SC: A brute.

BW: Yeah?

SC: Yeah

BW: How old are you?

SC: I'm almost 40, 39.

BW: Your husband about the same age?

SC: He's 35-36

BW: Uh-huh. But construction's dangerous work, you get hurt once in a while. Is there any kind of a doctor or healthcare or anything like that here?

SC: There's a clinic in town, that I noticed.

BW: Uh-huh

SC: I'm a nurse, so I, there's a clinic in town but it's only for like the local people who kind of know, or like emergencies that happen. And I seen the Life Flight flying through from the airport in Williston so there's got to be Life Flight knocking around.

BW: Yeah

SC: yeah

BW: Not ideal healthcare?

SC: No. They are like hiring people who are like freaking half-drunk I heard, to man the clinic.

BW: Yeah?

SC: Because there's no one up here to do it. There's no trained staff, you know what I'm saying?

BW: Right, right.

SC: So that's bad.

BW: So there's people looking for work, they hire whoever they can get?

SC: Yeah

BW: To do professional work like that?

SC: Yeah

BW: There's no professionals for the professional work?

SC: Right. Because it's freaking over-populated by oil riggers and building people, people who are building shit.

BW: Right. So your connection to the oil is just indirect? You're just here with the structures that support the oil workers?

SC: Yeah

BW: I don't know how personal you're willing to get, but, just relations, you're living apart?

SC: Yeah, yeah

BW: And then when you come here, not a lot of privacy here?

SC: Yeah no privacy at all, I have to pee in between the dumpsters (laughter)

BW: Yeah?

SC: Because I don't know, there's like one other girl that's here, well actually 2. I don't know what they do. Apparently shit in the woods because I've walked back there and about died.

BW: That's the reality of life here right now?

SC: Right.

BW: And the community isn't doing any outreach?

SC: What's your shirt say?

BW: Um,

SC: North Dakota Adventure Race?

BW: Yeah Adventure Racing. It's something I do back there, I live on the east side of the state.

SC: Oh do ya?

BW: Yeah. We're, I'm from, I moved here from Ogden, just down the road from you.

SC: Oh really?

BW: Yeah. But I've been out here about 7 years. It's been pretty good for us because we ended up in, we came out almost 8 years

ago and we ended up coming to one of the few states in the country where the economy's pretty good, you know?

SC: Yeah

BW: So we're far enough away from all of this that we don't have too much of the bad stuff, but we get some of the money.

SC: Yeah

BW: Universities around the country are laying people off, here we're hiring.

SC: The University of North Dakota?

BW: Yeah, the economy's pretty good over there.

SC: Where's that located?

BW: Uh we're in Grand Forks

SC: Grand Forks?

BW: Just north of Fargo

SC: Oh

BW: We're right on the Minnesota border, so about as far away from here as you can get and still be in ND.

SC: You guys are just doing the study?

BW: Yeah, I uh, I'm in the social work department, in the college of nursing. The other guy that I'm, he and I are heading up this research team?

SC: Yeah

BW: He's an archaeologist, so we're, it's kind of unusual to work together.

SC: That's cool.

BW: Yeah, it's kind of cool. We feel real lucky to get to come out here and do this kind of work.

SC: Yeah

BW: But then, some of the stories we get, things are going great for people. They're making money. They miss their family but it's working out.

SC: We're going to be making money.

BW: Yeah? Going to be but not yet?

SC: Yeah.

BW: Are you better off than you were two years ago?

SC: No, I'm behind in bills a couple months. I know, some of my friends are behind like 3 months, like their credit cards and shit

are stacking up.

BW: Uh-huh

SC: Because he was going to school and fricking got student loans you know?

BW: uh-huh. This camp especially, you know the book, Grapes of Wrath?

SC: yeah

BW: It feels kind of like Grapes of Wrath, doesn't it? Both in terms of crummy living conditions but also, Grapes of Wrath, that story?

SC: Right

BW: They would get promises, about a job or something, and then it didn't turn out to be quite the same or didn't get paid what they were promised.

SC: Yeah. Right.

BW: It feels kind of like that too?

SC: Yeah. We did the bank in town here. Or where was it? Dickinson or something? We were like waiting on two jobs to get paid, out of a federal fricking bank, so I'm hoping it'll come through.

BW: And the bank can't pay you your check?

SC: I guess not.

BW: What's going wrong there?

SC: I don't know. But that's stuff that hopefully...

BW: Uh-huh. So one of the, I was expecting to hear some happy stories and some hard stories. I wasn't expecting to hear about some people getting screwed. It almost seems like white collar crime.

SC: yeah

BW: Is that what it feels like?

SC: Yeah right now it does. Just depends. I mean these guys are good guys and they'll pay us but the money's just not falling from the upper folks, somehow weirdly. I mean like Black Butte Builders, the relations we have now are good people, it's just the people above them that aren't freaking handing out the money. Or the people above them, or above them, or whatever.

BW: huh

SC: They want, everyone wants to work together out here, man.

It's hard. You know? No one wants to see people like this.

BW: No, no. The state's making lots of money right now. It doesn't seem right that people should have to be living like this

SC: No

BW: Because we're, when I say we as someone who lives in North Dakota, we're making money.

SC: Yeah

BW: Off of the oil and all the people who are supporting oil, but then we're allowing people, allowing or even forcing people to live like this, because you don't have any other choice

SC: No.

BW: Huh. Um... I'm kind of willing to just get any story that you want to tell me, but....

SC: (laughter) I pretty much am, aren't I?

BW: You sure are, you're doing great. It's been really helpful.

SC: I don't know a lot. I'm just the contractor's wife.

BW: Well you're affected by all of this, in a huge way.

SC: Yeah

BW: What's it doing to your family back home?

SC: Oh man, my kid, freaking is 13, so he's like, out of control, you know? Just that young age.

BW: Uh-huh. I was enough trouble when I was 13 and my dad was home all the time.

SC: Yeah

BW: Yeah

SC: So we have two black labs back home

BW: I was just going to ask about pets.

SC: Yeah, and a cat. So I have someone watching them right now that I'm having to pay money to.

BW: Uh-huh

SC: And watch my house.

BW: So all kinds of unexpected costs that come along with this?

SC: Yeah, oh yeah.

BW: How often does your husband come home?

SC: Like once a monthly, maybe.

BW: Does he do like 3 weeks on, one week off? or is it more like 4 weeks and then 3 days?

SC: This one was 4 weeks and then 3 days.

BW: Yeah

SC: And half of that's driving. I only get to see him like

BW: Yeah! Half of it's driving!

SC: It takes several days to drive back and forth.

BW: Uh-huh. I've got family still in the Salt Lake area and from the east side of the state over to here, that's pretty two hard days driving. You've got one really really super hard day to drive and that's if the roads are clear!

SC: Oh man, and the construction's just terrible.. in Montana?

Holy shit! They're tearing the hell out of freaking Boseman.

BW: Huh? I haven't been through Boseman for, I guess it's been about a year. So in the summer, you've got construction. In the winter you've got snow?

SC: Yeah.

BW: Are you from Idaho Falls?

SC: I'm from, it depends on what you mean "from"?

BW: What places are you from?

SC: Like Phoenix, I lived in Tempe, Arizona.

BW: Uh-huh

SC: I graduated high school from there.

BW: uh-huh

SC: I went to nursing school in Idaho Falls but my parents were kind of nomads, sort of people

BW: Uh-huh

SC: They lived in Colorado, California. That's my earlier childhood.

BW: Uh-huh. So the inner-mountain west?

SC: Yeah

BW: This is the further east you've ever?

SC: Yeah, it is actually

BW: Uh-huh

SC: And it's not fun! (laughter) It's not a good time.

BW: What should be done to make things better out here?

SC: Shit, I don't know. They need to build stuff and let people live in it.

BW: Part of what's going on is there was a boom in the 80s

SC: yeah

BW: They built some housing back then. And then there was a bust. And they had a bunch of houses here that they didn't need. That kind of hurt the community.

SC: Yeah? Well we're here to work as long as it keeps going, you know?

BW: Would you ever, like in 5 years from now, if there's a house to live in and the work keeps going, would you move here?

SC: I don't know. My husband wouldn't but I would consider it. Maybe. I could work at the nursing clinic because they need help in there bad.

BW: Yes. Have you considered coming out? If there was a house?

SC: I have, because my husband's out here but my son's 13 so he's in school so I can't. He's going to be in school anyway. I can't just up and leave him.

BW: Right. But there's school here. He could go to school here, couldn't he?

SC: Yeah, but I don't know how well they educate here, you know? I don't know their educational system

BW: Yeah. And your friends and family are all back in Idaho Falls?

SC: Yeah. Well Adam's is from Orem. Adam's family is from Orem, Utah.

BW: Yep.

SC: We lived in Utah for a little bit too.

BW: Is there any chance that you could live in another camp?

SC: Well we

BW: There's camps that have sewage.

SC: Where we're working is right here so, we try to camp where we're working so we can be near the job site. There's, I don't know, worse conditions if you try to look outside... we're lucky we got this spot.

BW: So the whole time your husband's been out here, he's been in this spot?

SC: yeah. Well no, since he's been in Tioga. We've built in Henderson and like, where else? Shit. My husband could tell you all the places.

BW: So he's moved around with the work?

SC: Yeah

BW: The trailer or whatever he's staying has always been close to the work and the work's moved around?

SC: Yeah

BW: He's been here since last summer?

SC: No, not in this particular spot.

BW: He's been out in ND working since last summer?

SC: Yeah. Tioga...

BW: How many times has he moved in that time? Do you know?

SC: I couldn't tell you how many times.

BW: Oh my? That many times?

SC: Yeah

BW: Like at least 3 or 4 times?

SC: Oh even more than that.

BW: More than that.

SC: This is like a good spot, for Tioga. (chuckles)

BW: This is a good spot for Tioga?

SC: Yeah.

BW: hmm

SC: All of the freaking people here are like tweaked.

BW: There's a lot of tweakers here?

SC: Yeah, like the locals are all like spun out.

BW: Because they're working so many hours and it's a way to keep on your feet, or?

SC: I don't know. Hell if I know. That's just what I've heard so I don't know from personal experience. I try to stay away from that shit.

BW: My understanding is that we'd actually, like 7 or 8 years ago there was a meth problem here in this state. They outlawed, well they controlled, Sudafed. you know, buying that over the counter?

SC: Yeah

BW: They'd really cleaned up the meth problem. But with the oil boom there seems to be some indication that it's coming back on again.

SC: It's just, people are trying to stay awake.

BW: Right?

SC: They need to work man.

BW: You drive truck 12 hours a day

SC: More like 14!

BW: Mind-numbing, 14 hours a day, driving the same road, up and down, up and down, hard to stay awake.

SC: Yeah. There's Heat!

BW: Is that K__'s dad?

SC: Yeah

BW: K__ told me everybody likes his dad.

SC: yeah

BW: Yeah?

SC: He's cool

BW: So we talked about the health clinic. Are there any other services here? Like food pantry or anything like that?

SC: I don't know. These are the guys to ask. Heat!

BW: Hello.

(K__'s dad) Hi S__! having a good evening?

I guess other than a boring work meeting.

BW: I'm from the University of North Dakota

Heat: Okay

BW: We're just trying to go around

SC: They're doing a study about work camps.

Heat: Sociology?

BW: Yeah

SC: Yeah

BW: Trying to find out what life's like

Heat: That's my field

BW: Yeah?

Heat: Yeah.

BW: That's what you were studying too?

Heat: yeah

BW: I'm actually in the Social Work department and I'm with a group of archaeologists.

Heat: Oh alright

BW: So we're coming out to study temporary shelters like this.

Heat: yeah

BW: She's kind of, she thinks that it's hell here.

SC: (laughter)

Heat: Compared to living in a home, yeah

BW: yeah

Heat: At least in this situation we have power and water and toilets. We've been in worse places!

BW: You've been in worse than this?

Heat: Yeah. For sure.

Guy 1: In the back of the suburban for the first week

BW: Uh-huh.

Other guy: Or the Walmart parking lot

BW: Back in Williston, the Walmart there?

Heat: Yeah, before they booted everyone out

BW: Yeah, yeah

Heat: Definitely worse places

BW: And then it's turning out that there's lots of work but not always pay?

Heat: Yeah that's kind of construction though, I think. You do the work and then you fight for your money. That's how construction goes.

BW: Oh huh? But the oil, they're supposed to be making all kinds of money here. I hear there's all kinds of money. It's just getting some of it huh?

Heat: Just getting people to release it. They like it. I think a big part of it is people like to hold it in their accounts for that 30 days, as long as they can. \$150,000 in their account before they release it, that's a pretty big chunk of interest.

BW: That's money for ya.

Guy 1: But I've seen that ever since I've been in construction

Heat: That's a

Guy 1: they're always a little reluctant about letting it loose

BW: Wherever it's at, huh?

SC: I finally took a shower today. I feel better.

Heat: Do you?

SC: Like 100%!

BW: Now, \$2000 a month to live here? You ever think about living in the camps up the road?

Heat: We got... we got availability at Capital over there. We could

all go stay there if we wanted. I think a lot of guys prefer the more private living out here. You can have a beer out here.

BW: You can have a beer! You can't have a beer in there. That's a difference, right?

Heat: Yeah

BW: And here, you get together at the end of the day and have a beer and talk?

Guy 1: We play football, well not play football but we throw a football around.

Guy 2: They've got a horseshoe pit over there

BW: And a horse shit pit it sounds like?

SC: yeah. A horse shit in it!

(laughter)

BW: I'm sure it's rough even right now, but in the winter?

Heat: Winter, yeah, a lot of these guys don't even know what they're in for. Winter's just incredible around here. I mean you know the winters?

BW: I've been out here about 8 years. I was from the Salt Lake area

Heat: Just living in campers through the winter is tough

Guy 1: I'm from Murray.

BW: You're from Murray?

Guy 1: Well no, I lived in Murray for 10 years. I'm from Idaho now. From Cryer

BW: I don't know where Cryer is?

Guy 1: Just outside of Idaho Falls

Heat: Last winter was a good winter.

BW: Yeah! Last winter was a good winter here.

Heat: It still hit 60 below with the windchill a couple times but

SC: They were working outside

BW: Oh man!

SC: Yeah

BW: Everything changes at that temperature too, doesn't it?

Heat: yeah it does

BW: Nails just break, wrenches break

Heat: Fingers break!

(laughter)

BW: Yeah! Skin breaks.

Heat: it's hard work too, just the clothes you're dressed in. You've gotta dress for it and if you're in 50 lbs of clothes, at the end of the day, it gets pretty heavy.

SC: Yeah I bet. You guys have, they have their wardrobes up here. Like I thought my old man was going to leave me! (laughter) He brought everything up here. Everything! I'm not kidding!
(guys laugh)

BW: And there were days when you wore it all too huh?

Heat: Yeah

Guy 1: When I got home to leave, Nicole had packed me three suitcases and I said, what? Are you going to be here when I get back?

Heat: Well in the spring you never know what to pack. Do you pack your warm clothes? do you pack your cold clothes? It can go from 70 degrees to 40 degrees real quick in the springtime

BW: Like within a few hours, yeah

Heat: Like what do you wear?

BW: And then uh, I've heard you go from snow to mud, right?

Heat: Yeah the mud... I'd rather deal with the snow honestly.

(folks start making plans to leave)

BW: Well thanks for visiting with me, SC

SC: Yeah no problem

BW: I appreciate it.

SC: Yep

BW: Anything else I should know?

SC: Nope

BW: Is the experience of living here, is it going to overall make your life better for having done this?

SC: Yeah

BW: Making this sacrifice?

SC: Yeah. I hope so.

BW: Yeah, otherwise what was it all for?

SC: yeah

BW: Okay thanks

SC: uh-huh

THE BOSS MAN

Date: August 9, 2012

Interviewer: Bret Weber (BW)

EL is a contractor from Idaho and owner of BBB. He is living in MC 6 and working on the finished trades in several multi-unit apartments being built. He and his workers are in the middle of a pay dispute: their pay is delinquent. He discusses prostitution in camps, the economics of the patch, and housing from a comprehensive perspective. The interview was conducted on August 9, 2012

Length of Interview: 43m12s long

Interview Audio File Number: WS116754.WMA

BW: I'm meeting with EL, is that right?

EL: That's correct.

BW: It's August 9, Thursday. We're meeting in your trailer. Well it's the trailer that your foreman lives in?

EL: That's correct

BW: Where are you from originally?

EL: I'm from Teton County, Idaho

BW: How long have you been out here?

EL: I've been here since December 9

BW: Of what year?

EL: This, uh, 2011.

BW: 2011

EL: Uh-huh

BW: So about 9 months you've been here?

EL: Yep

BW: Not quite yet, eh? What's the name of the company that you own?

EL: BBB

BW: You're staying at Black Diamond Suites down the road?

EL: Black Gold Suites, yes.

BW: Black Gold Suites.

EL: yeah

BW: What are you building? These apartments out back here?

EL: I am, I'm doing the finished trades in these 42-unit complex

BW: How's the whole oil patch working out for you?

EL: Lots and lots of work. Fair prices. Delinquent pay. Pretty much trend for any large builder out here is to hold money back for indefinite amounts of time.

BW: Delinquent pay? Not white-collar crime? Not fraud or anything? Just delinquent pay?

EL: yep, making you stretch out 6 weeks - 2 months on hundreds of thousands of dollars.

BW: Yeah?

EL: Right now I'm currently out a \$140,000 from this company over here and today was payday and I will not receive my check.

BW: And your workers will not receive their checks?

EL: They will not receive their checks and very well may walk tomorrow. And if they walk tomorrow, then they will replace me with another contractor. Whether it's illegal and it's across the contract or not, that's up for litigation later.

BW: Right?

EL: Right now I'm threatening to pull my people off unless I receive payment. And actually, I'm not threatening, they are going to pull themselves off. They don't have enough money to feed themselves while they are here, so that's kind of how it runs down the line.

BW: Alright. So, this is a major crisis in the time that you've been here or is this happened before while you were here?

EL: It's happened with this company before, we got over it. We agreed to do these next 4 units. They agreed to pay more frequently and again, here we are. yeah it's happened with K-Dak up the road. It's happened with Bundle Builder Solution north of town. It's happened with Black Gold Suites, where I'm staying now, I've done that job and it was delinquent as well. It pretty

much means that you should be able to carry your company for 6 months, wages and all, if you're going to deal with these delayed payments.

BW: You're a contractor?

EL: I am.

BW: Are there other contractors who will step in and take the work?

EL: Oh absolutely, there is. Whether or not...

BW: (interrupting) and they won't get paid either

EL: Right. Whether or not they're qualified to do it. That's a big deal - qualification. Do you have skilled tradesman or do you have a man to fill the hole?

BW: Yeah

EL: Right here, 50% is okay, 50% is useless and claims to be okay. So you have to screen, most of my paying is on piece prices so I don't have to afford to pay someone that's useless. They have an agreed amount for what they do - that's how much they get paid.

BW: So for yourself, filling your crews, you need to screen your people but you don't have any problem finding enough people? Or do you?

EL: Um, finding qualified help is a problem.

BW: Uh-huh

EL: Finding help in general, not a problem.

BW: Right. It seems like a lot of the folks are from Idaho?

EL: My whole crew anyways, yeah

BW: And you all know each other? You've worked on different jobs together?

EL: Correct. Most of them I've known up to 10 years.

BW: Yeah. So why the oil patch? If there's this problem of getting paid, is there anywhere else for you to go to do the work?

EL: Not in America. I could go to Dubai. I hear it's pretty lucrative there.

BW: Uh-huh. It's an even longer drive home though, huh?

(chuckle)

EL: It is! It's a little different commute! But ultimately, in most of the communities, especially recreational, vacation type communi-

ties, like in our home, the economy botched it. It's done. We will not be putting any new homes or putting people like myself, who has built Harrison Ford's house and Heather Thomas's house and Dick Cheney's house - we now get offered a \$17/hr job to come out and frame or do finish, instead of making the \$35-40/hr plus overtime for our 20 years+ of service in the trades and honing our skills. I had enough. I gathered my group and I said I want a coalition of contractors/carpenters to come together, and achieve the wages they are used to making when the economy is good and in need. North Dakota is the problem. We're going to have some tough living conditions. We're going to get paid inconsistently. However, we will be making the wages. So in my crew, I can pay \$22-25/hr for a skilled carpenter. That's a pretty good wage. That's \$40,000-50,000 per year, depending on how many hours they are working. I choose to pay my guys \$32-42/hr by giving them that amount of piece price for that amount of hours required, because they are good at what they do. I bid it to make 15% on top of that and that's the end of the show. I found I can bid it 30% or even higher and there will be takers, but that's not the way I do business. The way I do business is what's it going to cost for me to make what I think I want to make and

BW: (interrupting) to pay your people

EL: and to get my guys up there. So instead of just taking \$25/hr and just getting by, I say, I've got a piece price for you but you're going to have to move for it. And it screens out the ones that say they're qualified and aren't, they just can't make the hours work, and it encourages the ones that are on that piece price that can do it. They get better and better because it's repetitious. Instantly they've gone up from \$32 to \$42 an hour because they've made things very streamlined in their jobs, in their scopes.

BW: Any chance I could?

EL: It got a little loud didn't it?

BW: Yeah thanks

EL: I didn't even realize until we were...

BW: And that's, that sounds like a great deal for your worker, [if and] when they get paid, [if and] when you get paid? But the living conditions are pretty damn tough.

EL: They are. They um

BW: Does it make up for it?

EL: You'd have to go through my guys. Some are leaving when they are done with this building. Their wives will not tolerate it anymore, whether they are making good money or not.

BW: Uh-huh

EL: At \$5 for a gallon of milk and expenses are \$4 and upwards for a loaf of bread

BW: Right

EL: It gets very tough but we have a group of people that have come together and created large meals, so it really brings down the cost. I mean if you did pay \$20 for that amount of hamburger, you fed 14 people with it. So soups and big goulash and stuff like that are how we get by without having to pay the \$12 for a hamburger. Our trailers are how we get by, our tents are how we get by, instead of paying \$110 a night at the Capitol or \$250 up at Gold Suites per night, per person. So that's how we get around it.

BW: Uh-huh

EL: But it is worth it to some and it's not worth it to others. It just depends on how it pans out. Usually when the money comes in quicker, they are ready to do another tour. As long as they can get home, visit their wife and kids for 7 to 10 days, they are ready to do another tour. When the money gets held out...

BW: That's the worst?

EL: I just lose them. Yep. I do. I get phone calls from wives. I get phone calls all the way around the board. So not only do I get 14 phone calls about disgruntled workers that aren't getting paid, but their wives often call me too. So I don't know how long it can last without being paid out. I really don't know when my crew will disintegrate at any given time, which makes it incredibly difficult to bid, let alone commit to a job, when you've got that inconsistent workforce behind you. You can find yourself in court very fast because you've committed to complete \$80,000 worth of work in 21 days and now you can't.

BW: But they've committed to pay you, like you say, but that's a matter of litigation?

EL: Right.

BW: yeah. The reality is you don't have the money.

EL: The reality is, it's very thin.

BW: Yeah. Where is home for you?

EL: I live in Driggs, Idaho.

BW: Uh-huh. So do you have any sense of this being home?

EL: Not at all.

BW: Not at all? This isn't even home away from home? This is nothing but work?

EL: This is nothing but work. We have taken a couple days off on this tour because materials didn't land. Other than that, we work consecutive days. My last tour I built two banks - one in Beach, one in Dickinson - along with building a 42-unit apartment complex. I worked for 82 days consecutively at well over 16 hours a day. So, yeah, I'm absorbed in it. It's all I can do to just know that I guess now, investing in the coalition of contractors and carpenters. Um knowing that I'm also investing quite a bit of myself into that. And the money that I should be sending home and nest egg-ing? It's going into making more and more happen here. I've got a real vision that's not just specifically economically based. It is, for a whole, for people who are in my trade. If I was in a different trade, I'd feel the same about that trade. These are my brethren. They are out there, literally selling their bodies, both in instant risk because it is a very dangerous job to go out and do the rough structural part of this, along with the wear and tear it puts on a man's back to be a carpenter. And they can't get a decent wage. So I'm trying to get their wages up, and I guess in a nutshell, if I can go to sleep at night knowing that I helped that many of them, and it was a win-win for me too? It wasn't totally sacrificial and if it was, it was for a period of time? That's what I would do.

BW: Now, the money to do that, is in part, is almost entirely from the oil boom, right?

EL: It is.

BW: And this community is benefitting from the oil boom and is needing the services of you and your coalition?

EL: That's correct.

BW: And yet the pay isn't coming to you. That's not necessarily the community's fault, is it?

EL: No, it's not and in fact the community has bent over backwards to allow these large structures to go in without doing any forethought in regards to what's the economical impact, what's the environmental impact, what is the social impact, of this kind of density in such a time. All they need is houses. That's all they're thinking about, is how many can we stack on top of each other and how can we get these oil workers to pull oil out of the ground for us?

BW: Uh-huh. Last time they did this, in the 80s, there was a bust.

EL: Yes.

BW: And the housing that they built, all of a sudden it, because there was an oversupply of housing, it hit everybody's property values. It hurt the community bad when they built housing back in the 80s. So to hear you say that they are kind of stepping up and allowing this without much discussion, that says something positive about the community?

EL: I think that there's discussion, I think that there's pros and cons. I think that the first con is that these communities have never been wealthy. They're grain communities, that's what they've always - dry farms, that's how they've survived out here. They were fine before we found out that there was so much oil. They like the commerce...

BW: (interruption) Marginally fine, right? They were losing population. They were looking for economic development. They were looking for ways to improve their lives out here.

EL: They were.

BW: And all of a sudden this came along

EL: And they got their answer. They requested a little better lifestyle and now they've got gross money coming in to the county based on... for example, each one of us has to pay a one-time \$65 county fee to work in this county.

BW: Oh? And who has to pay that?

EL: It's \$25 fine whenever you get caught. One of my guys got caught. He got pulled over by the cops and he said, "Have you paid your county worker's fee?" And the worker said, "No. What's that?" And they said. "Here's a \$25 ticket. You better go get it taken care of." At Capital Lodge when we checked in, they of course

know me since I built their lodge and many of their employees are still friends of mine, they charge a \$65 one-time fee for you to come work in their county. There's probably....

BW: We paid that fee to stay here and I didn't even know what it was.

EL: Yeah, so you're not working here, you're not required to pay the fee. So..

BW: Uh-huh

EL: Of course, that's not very governed. It's just like, hey let's figure out what we can skim out of the top because what we're getting is not enough. Granted, if they're making deals based on this amount of acreage and this amount of density, population of density that's getting put in here? What's the financial trade for that? You know, did the county own part of that land and decide to expand it, develop it, and allow this kind of density to come in? And, if so, for what cost? That's all the cons. I think the fact that the county's not going to stop and say, "no, we've got to put some things in line first." The oil companies have won the financial armwrestle. What do you do when something doesn't work and you need it to work no matter what? You throw a temper tantrum and you throw money at it. Well they've done that and they've won all the hearts to all the commissioners. Therefore, the commissioners do regulate but they regulate like this: "You need to clean up this campsite. We can't have any non-resident campers piled up in lengths, so that people can come and just move into the camper, even though they're not working for the person." Even the police will come and ask for them to clean this up and if they don't get it cleaned up and make it look at least somewhat presentable, they'll remove the trailer. They'll remove the people that are in the trailer.

BW: Have the police been through this camp?

EL: No, but they have been through Bundle Builders on the other end of town. They have, they are at a lull right now because they're doing a swap. Bundle Builders is no longer the rep, they're no longer the general contractor, even though their sign is still up. Bundle just went and said, in fact we were the first ones on the site and we said, "where do we park?" They said go as far

as you can to the end of the subdivision and that's where you get to park. We have generators and pumped water. We bring in water in 55-gallon jugs. We have no amenities out there. We built a number of structures out there doing that.

BW: Where do you get electrical from?

EL: We get electrical here from that box.

BW: okay

EL: But as you can see, it all runs on the ground, through extension cords?

BW: Yeah

EL: So when it gets wet, we don't get electric. So often if we don't have nice propane fridges, we lose our food, things like that. I lost \$350 worth of food last week, rotted, in a trailer that got unplugged.

BW: Because of the rain storm?

EL: Because the GFI broke on the breaker panel and nobody got over here to click it back in time. That's what happened - a huge mess and lots of food gone, expensive food.

BW: So at any time the cops could come through here? The police could come through here?

EL: They do, they drive through. We had one drive through the other day - I don't know what they were doing but they were definitely coming in and looking at the overall feeling of what's going on with the mancamps. Are they out of control? What kind of people are in them? The first thing they look for is what class of trailers are being parked there? If they are 1970s Ford Prowler that are delaminated and there's 8 of them lined up? They'll be focusing on that, much like down here. In the north end, that subdivision? You see much nicer trailers going in, they just don't raise that kind of problem.

BW: Uh-huh

EL: What they're looking for is, I guess, vagrancy, alcohol-related issues, social issues, fighting. There's a big drug environment here in regards to methamphetamines, because of the hours that the people are working. I'm sure they're relying on that. There's a number of aspects that this community's not prepared to take on. There's prostitution in a community that's got 700 people that

live in it, that reside in it, when there's 2500 to 5000 people that actually do reside here.

BW: Right

EL: They're just temporarily here. Well they're bringing in prostitutes. They're bringing in strippers from Williston to make private deals with them. They're bringing in drugs from Minot and Williston.

BW: I haven't seen any evidence of prostitution. I hear about it. Um so, tell me more about that. These aren't street walkers? They're?

EL: No, they're

BW: Arrangements are made?

EL: They came up here specifically to do this.

BW: Right

EL: Just like I did to do what I do.

BW: Right. Right.

EL: So the way to approach it on, let's say, the secondary market would be that they would go to these 12-plex trailers. They call them a "work and play." They've got 6 units on each side; they go up and over each other and there's 12 doors with a little sink and a little bed. No showers. Very little storage space. Just a bed. They will knock until they get somebody to answer the door and if whoever answers the door thinks they're cute, they may go in. On one case, on New's Year Eve of 2011, I watched a girl go in 3 times to one of these trailers. Twice on my side and once on the other. Very obvious what was happening in the trailer. Very obvious to the rest of the people trying to sleep in there what they were doing.

BW: Because she's knocking on all the doors?

EL: Because she will knock on all the doors but the activities that are happening inside the trailer are moving the trailer around. Not a lot of privacy. I was quite amazed to see... when she was done, when she was done with everything... in about an hour and a half and she had moved on to the next trailer. The way that she did that was, she just kept using these trailers as coverage so she didn't get spotted by security and eventually made it into the mancamp. She'll go until she gets detected and then out she

goes. And according to some people who have developed Capital Lodging that I know personally, as I developed Capital Lodging, they'll come back upon request, right? Or maybe the higher end guys, primary market, will actually make dates with these girls, out of Williston, generally pulled out of the strip clubs.

BW: So you're talking about they're coming into Capital? Working girls can get into Capital?

EL: Of course they can! Capital Lodge is not sealed. There's a small entry gate in the front that you can't get through

BW: Right

EL: But what happens if you drive back to that crop field and up the other way and then back through those dirt roads? You're in. So those girls will get dropped off close to the fence and just kind of make a move at night and I'm talking... this was New Year's Eve, this was New Year's Day at 1:30am that I saw this girl do that, while I was operating equipment and building a laundry hut. She was doing that.

BW: uh-huh

EL: So yeah it's for real. And yeah, it's here.

BW: One of the differences - we're staying at Capital Lodge

EL: Uh-huh

BW: One of the differences I've seen between there and here is, the alcohol but more importantly than the alcohol, my understanding is, at night you get together for meals? People have a few beers, play a little touch football or something?

EL: Yeah

BW: There's a sense, seems to me a real sense, of community here. That does not exist in something like Capital Lodge

EL: Well Capital Lodge has John Doe from Georgia that came up to work for Superior. He could be housed from another guy from Florida who works for Superior and they're in the same place. They're just not brothers, you know? They are two guys working for them. They've each got a bed and they've got to share their bathroom. In our case, at least the majority of people that work for me, know each other and have known each other for a number of years.

BW: Have worked together

EL: So to come out and try to learn a lifestyle that's beyond work, and trust me, it's been a learning curve. On the first project, when we were learning how to do one of these? It took us 16 hrs/day times 21 days... 20 hrs/day for the foreman and the lead guys - they'd put in that kind of time. We've really streamlined it now. We've got quite a bit better at what we're doing. So now the guys are finding themselves playing a game of pool, going out in the evenings, playing some hackey sack, enjoying some beers, and doing a large community-type dinner. We usually do two large community-type dinners. One over there, in that camp, which is isolated, and then there's kind of this camp over here. Or we'll all get together. A lot of that is just that they've worked their butts off and it's nice to laugh and joke with the guys and keep it light.

BW: Uh-huh

EL: But equally, the social impact in removing yourself from your family and your home and your loved ones takes its toll. It only takes but a moment for your neighbor to get on the wrong side of you before you're ready to tear his head off. And that happens within my crew. We've had a fist fight that almost broke out a couple days ago. I, being the owner, had to step in between these two full grown men that would've kicked my butt pretty good and tell them that I will not have it on my site. It was just a matter of, you know, I didn't get a shower today and I haven't showered for 4 days and I've heard that you took the hotel key and gave it to somebody else and now I can't go take a shower because we can't locate it. So, it would cause him to tear off his head. Or one person eats another person's stuff. One person drinks more beer than others, drinks more of his share or his soda or whatever, drinks more of his share. So as much camaraderie as there is, there's an equal amount of um

SC: survival of the fittest? (laughter)

EL: Of just negativity in general that encompasses this around us. It's depressing a bit. I had a talk with the guys and I said, you know, the reason you guys get so mad at each other, why it's so quick to be so mad, is because you've done a lot for each other out here and one doesn't return that, it irritates you so bad that your feelings are hurt so bad. You'd rather a stranger burned you

than your brother.

BW: uh-huh

EL: And you overreact because tomorrow you guys will be hugging. Sure enough, they do. They come back together, "ah man I'm sorry it got heavy." But meanwhile this guy's got it coming at 14 different directions and it's usually housing. It's housing-based, it's financially-based. Those are the two biggest deals. If I had a \$100,000 loan, I could pay my guys and absorb this buffer, this situation. I would keep my guys, they'd be loyal, they'd be happy to be here. But that's not the case.

BW: Now some of the people in the camp here are not, I'm guessing, are not with your crew, right?

EL: Absolutely. They are different contractors.

BW: Some of them don't even have work, right?

EL: They're generally not allowed to stay here and not work for Power Fuels or an associated company. So since Power Fuels hired Meridian to run the general contract on this job and I'm a sub and everybody is subsequently a sub or employed by me, they're allowed to be here. But you'll find castaways along everywhere you go. John next door has this little trailer that's a construction trailer?

BW: Uh-huh

EL: It's not. That's a house trailer. That's why there's an air conditioner stuck in the side of it. So he blends in really well. Nobody really stopped to ask why his camp trailer is there. Everybody takes advantage of it all around. Where can they stay? Myself included. Even a warehouse with pipes or something, that I can just stay for the night, keep the truck hitched up. If somebody gives me a problem, all I can do is leave, you know? We have to do that, in order to get by. We have to break the law in order to get by, until our contract starts and they develop housing for us. Housing consists of a 20x20 lot that you can put a trailer on - no power, no water. This is just a place to put, in some case, tents. My guys are living in tents. So, it's...

BW: I'm getting stories... the continuum is people who come out and they're making real good money and it's working out great for them to people who came out and can't find a job and it's

disastrous for them, and then there's lots of stories in between. I'd put your story somewhere in between. You're somewhere on the end of it working out. You've got this current speedbump with the pay issue but if that gets resolved, then this is mainly working out for you and your people, right?

EL: Absolutely. We've gone from 2 people in December. We parked at the Wal-Mart in Williston

BW: Uh-huh

EL: We got a phone call saying, "we've got something for you to do. Can you do some plumbing?"

BW: So you came out here without work yet?

EL: Absolutely.

BW: You knew that there was going to be work out here?

EL: I borrowed \$10.000, I bought that trailer - that's across the way?

BW: Uh-huh

EL: I put \$1400 worth of tires on my 1987 Chevy pick-up truck and me and the best guy I know that built

BW: (interrupting) Went to the Wal-Mart in Williston

EL: Went to the Wal-Mart in Williston. Did an interview with BBC, ironically enough that day, it was pretty interesting. Within 2 hours, we had landed at Capital Lodge to a lot that was very bi-level in tundra and ice, we literally got up the second we landed and went to work. We laid down, by the end of the job, had laid down 5 miles of hydronic pipe underneath that dome and continued to do any trade we could do until they needed carpenters. Once they needed carpenters, we were there and we built their office building for them, along with their cafeteria and everything else that's in there. When they ran out of work, we were dropped like a bad habit. No notice or anything. In fact, when we came up to resume our job, they just looked at us like, "well you're not working here anymore." But they never did tell us to move our trailer. So we left our trailer there for 2-3 weeks. Came over to Black Gold Suites, asked them if we could do some doors for them, got on with them, moved our trailer to there, and eventually just kind of moved around. Well we went from 2 people to 4 people, from 4 people to 6 people, and almost overnight went

to 12 to 14 people. Today we have 14 people. So the amount of work that we're completing is much greater than the amount we did in the beginning, under Black Butte Builders Organization. Which is great, that's my vision coming to life. However, it's, the quality of the people who are willing to migrate. If they're destitute, then they may show up with nothing but be a great worker. And if they're a guy that's a substantial contractor with a nice truck and a pretty good trailer, they may be in for a little bit of a surprise, you know? That their housing is so botched.

BW: uh-huh

EL: The wages are no more industry-standard here, with an average of \$6 a foot to frame houses, \$2 a foot to frame something like this, that's not very much money but there's an abundance.

BW: The work doesn't pay that much more, but there's work here?

EL: There's a ton of work

BW: Other parts of the country, there's no work or the work doesn't pay what it should. Is that a fair way of saying that?

EL: If you can't find work in Tioga, as a walk-up applicant, you can't find work. You're missing the skills required to find work in an everyday environment, let alone Williston to Minot to Dickinson to Beach to Watford.

BW: Any age discrimination?

EL: I believe there is, in the older groups.

BW: I've talked to two older guys in the last couple days who couldn't get work, who seemed to have skill sets, reasonable skill sets and they couldn't get work. So I'm wondering what's wrong?

EL: I work my guys 14-16 hrs/day.

BW: hard to do when you're 63?

EL: hard to do when you're 63. I will give them a chance because I pay piece price. If that old man wants to break it down to \$20/hr for himself and take his time to do it, I'm glad to give him a job as long as he's not holding me up. My biggest deal, more than the older generation coming out and not finding the work, is the younger generation coming out and not being able to fill the hole that's required. So they say they're skilled, they get on, but then soon they're off. Two or three of those, you're frustrated and you

go home. The truth of the matter is, you just need to walk up and say, "I'm a skilled laborer and this is what I expect to be paid" and achieve that. At \$10-12/hr for labor positions, when Haliburton and Superior are paying \$37/hr for a position that requires quite a bit less skill, it just goes to show what the difference is between the building industry and the oil industry. We're here to balance it out a little bit. We're here to say, we'll do this and we'll do a great job, but slowly but surely, we'll learn to bid more because of the living expenses, because of the living situations, because of the lack of payments, because of the high risks. Yes, you can get into big trouble out here by doing a whole bunch of work and not getting paid, and I'm waiting for that first hatchet to drop on me and my guard is to find as much work as I can out here so I can roll over to this one while that one's having a hard time. That's kind of my philosophy, if I can keep my guys... But I will lose them very soon, within a couple days from now, because they are so late on being paid on our last job and Meridian did not agree to pay on this job, or did not live up to their agreement on this job. My guys will leave. They will just fold up and leave.

Meanwhile there's this painful irony that you're building housing right now and living here, with no sewage, water that you have to bring in by a hose, and electricity that goes down if there's rain? young voice (Jaden?): is Kaydan in here?

SC: No

BW: Any plans of ever like making this your home? staying here?
EL: No. I won't move to this state.

BW: No, take your time, think about it (chuckle)

EL: I'm a little bit uh.. I love where I live. When I was superintending in Bakersfield, California and if somebody had given me a superintendent's position to move out to North Dakota, I would have very well considered something like that.

BW: Uh-huh?

EL: Very oily down in Bakersfield, very oily around here, same kind of atmosphere. However, I'm botched because I live in a vacation wonderland. I'll never move my home from that land.

BW: Uh-huh

EL: Will I buy a second home here? Hmm?

BW: You're basically on the western slopes of the Tetons there, aren't you?

EL: I am.

BW: You can see them from your yard?

EL: I have a very clear view of them.

BW: Yeah.

EL: They're right in my face.

BW: Uh-huh

EL: So yeah I can't, for one, I won't bring my kids here.

BW: Oh you've got family back home?

EL: I've got a 3 and a 7 year old and I've got a wife that I've had for 15 years.

BW: When was the last time you were home?

EL: I guess it's been about 3 weeks now since I was home.

BW: What's your general rhythm? How long are you out here?

How often do you get to go home?

EL: There is no rhythm for me. There's more of a rhythm for my guys, where it's about 21 days on, 7-10 days off, with the exception of getting behind or a change happening. They'll go 32 days, take 7-10 off, come back again. My foreman and myself have refused to let go, so we stay because there is people that are living here that work for us. We can't just all go home. So we split the crew up a little bit. He'll go home, I'll stay; I'll go home, he'll stay. We're going to do that more, where we don't lose people on the ground. We can't afford to leave. It all goes bad when we leave so, it's a difficult toss. Although this is temporary.

BW: You know this firsthand, don't you S__?

SC: What's up?

BW: Your husband's the foreman we're talking about?

SC: Yep.

EL: Yeah but dedication's everything. It really is. If you're not dedicated to be here and you've told me you want a job and I find myself talking you into it, eventually you will wear thin and leave. If you are dedicated to making your life better and you don't have a lot of other stuff that's going on, this is a great place for you. It's one of those things where... overcommitment is probably my biggest hang-up. Oh it sounds great, thank you so much for hiring

me, I appreciate the opportunities, looking forward to serving and getting this North Dakota thing going, and 25% of them, regardless of the pay issue, just can't handle the environment. They just don't, it's just not worth it to them to make a lifestyle swap, regardless of the pay, you know? Consequently it brings blue-collar workers to the atmosphere. These guys that are drug addicts, alcoholics, socially dysfunctional people, that come out to find work because their lives haven't worked where they are at and at least they can get into the position. And they do, they get into a position...

BW: Is this helping some of them turn their lives around, do you think?

EL: Hmm

BW: Or is it probably making it even harder for them? because of the unsettled social aspect of life here?

EL: I would say, there's a real mix

BW: uh-huh

EL: It's a real mix, a real salad.. I've watched people come with nothing and turn around with a significant amount of thousands of dollars that can allow them to buy a car or step up and buy a better trailer or maybe take money home and just stay there. Say, I improved my life. Then I've seen people come out here and they don't have a wife, they don't have children, they may have a broken family somewhere. Their favorite place is the bar and so as soon as they get paid, they head to the bar and there is quite the handful of those people. And there's a mix of people... there's people who say, "I won't go to the bar. I won't waste my money away." So that's the thing about North Dakota, it's drawing everybody. It's not just drawing a destitute crowd. It's drawing everybody.

SC: It's a melting pot

EL: A lot of trades, not specifically oil-related, although everything is oil-related, I think, we're talking about transport being a huge factor. More people are trucking than are actually driving.

BW: Right

EL: So it's really not an oil trade that's pushing the market here, it's the trucking.

BW: Right. Transport trade.

EL: But, when the, is it the Summit Crest pipeline? Conjunctions with the Bakken pipeline next year... you'll see this line getting cut through every field no matter what, that changes the line

BW: That changes the transport trade

EL: That changes transport.

BW: So it's all ephemeral out here right now, isn't it?

EL: uh-huh

BW: You almost went all Marxist on me very early when you were talking about these men are selling their labor, that's what they're doing. Has life here, has this experience changed your politics in any way? one way or the other? Whatever that would even mean?

EL: Um business politics, absolutely, tightening contracts, trying to get in with these people while you know they're desperate so that you can lever the appropriate agreement out of them.

BW: uh-huh

EL: With not crossing the fine line of getting one over on them because you're the only guy who's got the only service station for miles, it doesn't mean you can ask what somebody's got in their pocket when you agree to fix their car.

BW: uh-huh

EL: It means you've got to give them a fair handshake for the services provided, no matter where you're located, in the comparable market of your environment. That's not the case. What's happening is Meridian's overcharging Power Fuels because Power Fuels can not find another person to fill the hole. Consequently Meridian's not sharing that overage out in any way shape or form, they are not sharing that overage. They are doing the opposite. They're collecting money off of that loan, turned interest and waiting until the last minute to pay their people out and waiting until the next guy comes in.

BW: That's what you're caught in right now?

EL: That's what I'm caught in, absolutely. So it's my time as probably the lead advocate for my company, and I'm kind of a bigmouth by nature, to stand up and say, it's enough of this. If you don't want a building that's built 3 inches out of level and that's structurally not sound, subsequently, structurally, to house

people in safely, we are the people to do it correctly but this is what it's going to cost you, without bending you over and giving it an overage price in any way. I still have yet to see if that's an appropriate view. Ask me in a year and I may have a different view about my business politics.

BW: uh-huh?

EL: But right now I still give a very fair, good price to them in order to create a bond with them that says, he's a workable sub, he works well, he's an integral part in getting this building built. He's making money, we're making money, it's a win-win situation. That's kind of my goal. I don't know if it's going to work out. I really don't know if I'll be tainted in the future because of how many people took advantage of me financially and how many people they can replace to put us in. But it's my feeling right now that in this tier only will we be able to go in and lever them this way, because by next year there'll be quite a bit more people here who've gotten the memo. They will be looking for that lowest and lowest and lowest again, versus bid it high, they'll take it, they have to. There's a real contrast here. I'm trying to land in the middle now so that when I'm working for them next year, they'll remember that I was here at this price

BW: You're building your reputation?

EL: Absolutely, that's my goal.

BW: And yet this is an environment where you're kind of taking a risk investing in your reputation because everything is so short-term and ephemeral. So you're hoping that it keeps going and building your reputation pays off, right?

EL: Yeah and the truth of the matter is, I like to sleep at night, so

BW: There's a lot of people just doing the "grab it as fast as you can" kind of approach in all this, right?

EL: There is, and I've been advised by business owners, financial advisers, strike now, strike hard, and strike fast.

BW: Uh-huh

EL: And there's a real personal part of me that says, no way

BW: You can't do that?

EL: No way, I can't do that. I will charge more if I'm starting to incur these risks, financial risks

BW: Right

EL: If I have to borrow money at 12%, I'm going to have to put prices up, but not because it's my goal to knock down America in the form where you take advantage of anybody at any time. And it's a matter of time before you knock down the builders of America because you did that as a normal practice, vs. saying look, I'm a builder, I've always done...

BW: (interrupting) You've hurt yourself

EL: You've hurt yourself

BW: You've hurt everybody.

EL: Uh-huh. You're really lopping off the proverbial hand that feeds you.

BW: Yes, yes

EL: But unfortunately that hand is 5 years out or 3 years out and I hope what I'm doing makes a difference for both the contractors and carpenters that work below me... but the people that are recognizing that we spend more in overages and fixing things, just to get it where it needed to be, versus hiring a fair-price, full-service contractor to get us through the job.

BW: Um is there anything else? You've given me a whole bunch of great stuff here.

EL: You've got a lot.

BW: Yeah. Anything else you want to add that I haven't asked you about?

EL: Um, no, I think we've covered the bases pretty good. I usually get around pretty good that way.

BW: Yeah you did

EL: I'm excited about the whole thing. I'm excited about the adventure in North Dakota because it's a big burst, a big economical burst that can help everybody around the nation in its short time. I'm excited to be a part of that and I'm excited to bring that back to my state.

BW: And it's an exciting time here, isn't it?

EL: It is.

BW: It's kind of an adventure?

EL: Yeah

BW: You expecting, I asked S__ the same question, you expecting

that this experience will lead to a better life for you longterm?

EL: It has already done so.

BW: Okay

EL: After the last economical collapse, I totally

BW: (interrupting) Regardless of what happens tomorrow?

EL: Regardless

BW: Okay, well, for all of you, I hope things go really well tomorrow. When do you find out?

EL: I'll find out at the end of today whether or not I'm going to pull people off of this building and whether or not they'll replace us. But at the same time, they've gone out of their way, on the whim, spur of the moment, to put \$38,000 worth of housing forward for us because they dropped the ball when they agreed to house us and they couldn't. Then we moved in and had to cut a channel in the forest to put our campers and we really threw a gripe about it. Instantly they've got all this extra money in a different fund but yet they knock us down in our prices for fair jobs done? And that's specifically for my crew only. Can you imagine the cost of what it's taking for them to put up the drywall crew, the carpet crew, the framing crew? We're talking \$30,000 for one month's worth of work for my crew and they're only housing 4 rooms, 8 beds. We've got 14 people. We didn't even ding them on the whole amount of our crew. So it's another whole aspect that we didn't even mention of how much they're willing to forfeit immediately on housing costs. Gotta think about that.

BW: uh-huh. I've got to head out.

EL: Thanks much.

BW: Thank you very much! Thank you too S__!

S__: No problem.

BW: And you're Mr. C__? Hey Mr. C__. I'm Bret.

Mr. C__: Bret? How you doing?

BW: I'm good. Nice to meet you. Good luck with it all folks.

EL: Thanks! We're going to need it

BW: Bye.

EL: See you Bret

BW: See you now.

HARD LUCK MIKE

Date: August 9, 2012

Interviewer: Bret Weber (BW)

Mike came from Tennessee and has been at MC 8 for about a month. He was promised 60 hrs a week but has only worked one full week since arrival. He is going broke and is thinking of leaving to Texas. The interview was conducted on August 9, 2012

Length of Interview: 13m24s long

Interview Audio File Number: WS116757.WMA

BW: Alright so, what is your name? What do you want me to call you?

Mike: Mike

BW: Mike? Good enough. You know what Mike? The signature's great and then I'll just call you Mike.

Mike: Okay

BW: That's enough for me. So how long have you been here?

Mike: one month

BW: One month? Where did you come from?

Mike: Tennessee

BW: Did you come here because things were bad in Tennessee or because this just looked so exciting?

Mike: Both

BW: Both? How'd you hear about it?

Mike: Over the news.

BW: We've been getting a lot of news lately.

Mike: Yeah, we didn't know anything was going on up here until about January.

BW: You started thinking about it?

Mike: yeah because I've been unemployed for 2 years. I had to do

something.

BW: Did you have the job when you came here? Did you have the job before moving here?

Mike: Yes

BW: You did?

Mike: Yes.

BW: Well huh... I don't want to be a smartass about it at all but what'd they promise you?

Mike: They guaranteed 60 hours a week and holiday pay. They offered that information. I didn't ask. They said that the work was plentiful.

BW: Yep

Mike: So I believed them because

BW: Why wouldn't you?

Mike: Seeing everything going on in the news, so...

BW: You've been here a month, have you ever worked 60 hours a week?

Mike: No. I've only worked 1 week so far. One full week.

BW: My understanding is \$1000 a month [for rent], split between 2 of you.

Mike: Yep

BW: \$500 a month?

Mike: That's right

BW: Two week lease?

Mike: Yes.

BW: You have family back in Tennessee?

Mike: Yes

BW: How are they doing?

Mike: Doing alright, you know. We miss each other.

BW: Yeah, yeah

Mike: My wife understands that we had to do something so this was it.

BW: If it would've worked out and you were getting 60 hours a week?

Mike: I'd be happy as all

BW: yeah? Would she have maybe moved up here?

Mike: No.

BW: if you'd have gotten the job?

Mike: No

BW: No?

Mike: She's right where she wants to be.

BW: Yeah. And you've got family and everything down there

Mike: Yeah.

BW: So this was kind of a temporary thing? You were hoping to come up for a year or two?

Mike: I had planned on 3 years. I wanted to pay off everything but....

BW: From what I hear, that could still happen for you, right?

Mike: Well, yeah if I can find another job.

BW: Certainly there are those stories

Mike: Right, right

BW: Where people come here and, let's see, this is my 12th interview in the last 2 days and one lady seems like she and her husband have pulled that off.

Mike: Yeah

BW: The other 11 have not.

Mike: It's hard to do. I mean there's a lot of competition up here. With me and only one month experience on the job, that I'm new in, and you've got all these other people leaving Key that have more experience and they're just filling everybody with applications. I assume that's what it is.

BW: Is Key kind of entry level then? into this market?

Mike: Ah

BW: Sounds like you said people are using it as a jumping board to other things?

Mike: exactly. The saying is around here that Key is just a stepping stone. From what I've seen, I believe every bit of it.

BW: I drove taxi at one time when I was a kid and it was the dispatcher who decided whether I got fares or not. Is that the way it works here? Or is there just, somedays there's work and somedays there's no work?

Mike: That's about it.

BW: It's not that somebody likes you or doesn't like you?

Mike: No, because I've not been up here long enough to

BW: Piss anybody off?

Mike: I have no clue who's, what the names in the offices are

BW: Uh-huh

Mike: But I'm mean, there's only, they've only got just a little bit of work when they do have it. Then there's drivers that have been here longer than I have, that's understandable that they get the work before I do.

BW: Oh there is a seniority to it?

Mike: Yeah.

BW: They don't feed you here?

Mike: No.

BW: We're staying at capital lodge while we're up here. They feed us.

Mike: Right.

BW: That's real expensive too.

Mike: There's a lot of companies up here that provide you free housing, free food, you know?

BW: Right.

Mike: They pay you to go home, fly you home, fly you back up here. But that's one of those cases where your experience comes in.

BW: How long do you think you'll stick it out to see what happens?

Mike: I can't stay much longer because I'm going broke. When I show up every morning, they give me 2 hours

BW: For showing up?

Mike: For showing up. And this week, so far, I have 6 hours. So I can't make it. I'm buying my own food and paying rent and trying to pay bills at home. That ain't getting me there. I'm looking into Texas now. I just found out that I've got a plan down there. It's hauling oil. I'm getting the hell out of North Dakota.

BW: Get out before winter at least!

Mike: Yeah! I mean I don't have nothing against the state.

BW: Right

Mike: It's just that Key has put a bad taste in my mouth real quick.

BW: The other people I've talked to

Mike: Yeah?

BW: You're not alone.

Mike: Yeah there's a lot. There's everyday there's people that just quit, every day. They just can't make it. Key expects you to show up every morning, come up there

BW: So they can give you your two hours?

Mike: Yeah. Then they turn you right around and send you home.

BW: I'm guessing, even as many people quit, there's just somebody waiting to take your?

Mike: Because they've got their classes coming in at least every 2 weeks, you know?

BW: A class?

Mike: Yeah

BW: So you had to take an orientation class?

Mike: Yeah it was a week.

BW: Did you have to pay for that class?

Mike: No. I paid nothing.

BW: Okay

Mike: If I would've had to do that, I wouldn't have come.

BW: No. What was the class? Was it worthwhile at all?

Mike: Not really because most of the stuff that they went over pertained to oil well, oil riggers that work on the site.

BW: uh-huh?

Mike: What the rest of it was, I already

BW: It didn't have much to do with the job that you were going to be doing?

Mike: The only good thing that it did was it got me, which Hess is a big old, they got me a card to get on their site, an H2S card. That's what everybody's said. Key is just a stepping stone.

BW: H2S?

Mike: That's the uh

BW: That's the gas that poisons?

Mike: Yes

BW: You drove up here?

Mike: Yes.

BW: Do you know anybody in town?

Mike: No

BW: Do you ever interact with anybody in town or anything?

Mike: No I don't get up there much.

BW: Where would you go anyway?

Mike: yeah really? I don't know nobody and I don't need to be spending money so I just stay out here and go crazy. Look at the walls!

BW: Do you go to church? Do you do anything like that?

Mike: No

BW: No? Crime? Do you feel like you're ever?

Mike: Oh no.

BW: No?

Mike: I haven't seen one thing since I've been here.

BW: Nothing that would give any indication?

Mike: No

BW: It's a funny thing, the people who've come in from the outside, they say, "Nah this place is safe. There's nothing." The locals I talk to? They say, "oh it's really dangerous! There's lots of crime."

Mike: yeah. I haven't seen one thing since I've been here.

BW: I haven't seen anything either. Another thing I hear is prostitution

Mike: Yeah?

BW: You haven't seen girls working here?

Mike: No. I haven't seen it.

BW: I certainly haven't seen any street walkers anywhere throughout the patch and there's only so many towns that they'd be working. You'd be able to see them if they were here.

Mike: yeah

BW: And I haven't seen anything else about that. Though I read it in the paper.

Mike: Yeah I hear that the strippers are collecting very good money in Williston.

BW: If you just had the body, Mike! (chuckle)

M: Ain't that the truth!

(laughter)

M: No, as far as little towns go, I feel just the way I do at home, you know? We have low crime.

BW: Did this experience change your politics or anything? One way or the other? Whatever that question even means?

M: Nah, no not really

BW: Nothing there?

M: No, although I do feel if Obama gets in the house again, he's going to put an end to this up here.

BW: Ah-ha

Mike: That's just my opinion

BW: You're not the only one, again, there's a lot of people that feel that the EPA

Mike: Yeah the EPA is...

BW: Come in and shut things down?

Mike: Yeah they're bad enough already, which I can see their point in one way. In another, I can't. I think they're overstepping their bounds really.

BW: I'd imagine if I were out of work and looking for work each day, I wouldn't be a big fan of anything that would threaten that.

Mike: No.

BW: So I'm guessing you're staying in this one here?

Mike: No, mine's the next row over.

BW: Oh the next row over?

Mike: Watch the trains go by.

BW: Do you have anything that makes it like home? Do you bring pictures of family or anything?

Mike: Yeah I've got pictures. I've got a just turned one year old grandchild. I never had any kids before but my wife's stepson had one...

BW: Uh-huh, my grandson is almost 2.

Mike: Really?

BW: My first grandson. He lives in Salt Lake.

Mike: Oh yeah?

BW: It's too far away but it's pretty great when I do get to see him.

Mike: That was one of the tough things about coming up here because we only got to see him like 3 days out of every 2 weeks and it was really tough. I done got attached to what little time I'd been around him.

BW: I talked to my little guy on the phone this morning. He'll be 2 in September so he's starting to talk a bunch.

Mike: Yeah?

BW: Calls me papa bear, that's a pretty wonderful thing.

Mike: Yeah it is. I've never experienced anything like that and I'm almost 50 years old.

BW: Well Mike I hope if something doesn't turn her for you really quick, I hope Texas works out for you.

Mike: Yeah I do too.

BW: I've lived in this state about 8 years. It's been a really good place, best place I've ever lived.

Mike: Yeah

BW: We hear all the happy stories

Mike: Yeah

BW: It's been kind of painful the last two days to hear how many people are not, how many people are having a hell of a time

Mike: Yeah, yeah

BW: Living here. Because the state's making money off of all the people who are coming here

Mike: Sure they are.

BW: Anything else I should know?

Mike: No, I think we've covered about everything.

BW: Thank you sir.

Mike: Yes, sir. Thank you.

THE BOYS IN THE MAN CAMP

Date: August 9, 2012

Interviewer: Bret Weber (BW)

JC & KS are teenage boys from Idaho Falls. They are both at MC-6 visiting their dads who are working on building apartments. The interview was conducted on August 9, 2012

Length of Interview: 14m13s long

Interview Audio File Number: WS116752.WMA

BW: Alright so it's August 9 and I'm meeting with... what's your names?

JC: JC

BW: JC. And?

KS: KS.

BW: KS. And K, you're here visiting your dad?

KS: Yeah

BW: And you're just along for the fun? You're just buddies?

JC: Yeah. Both of our dads work

BW: Oh both of your dads work here?

JC: yeah over there and we've been helping them out at work.

BW: Uh-huh. So did you all know each other before this happened?

JC: yeah

BW: Where do you normally live? I mean where do you live when you're not here?

JC: Idaho Falls.

BW: Okay, sure sure. I lived in Ogden, Utah for a while so I'd come up through, when I go back to visit, I drive through Idaho Falls, right?

JC: yeah

BW: Just north of Poc-ee (Pocatello)?

JC: yeah

BW: Yeah. How old are you guys?

JC: I'm 14.

KS: I'm 13

BW: And is this your first time out here?

KS: I've been here before but he hasn't

JC: This is my first time.

BW: I'm just going to sit on the floor here if that's alright.

JC: Alright.

BW: Can I have my pen back? So how long have your dads been working out here?

KS: Since I think November

BW: Okay, so they're just coming up on their first year?

KS: Uh-huh

BW: Has it been a good thing? Has it been a bad thing? How would you overall describe it?

KS: It's been good and bad, kind of.

BW: What are the good things? What are the bad things?

KS: Well the money's pretty good but at the same time, they're gone for months at a time so you never get to see them. Yeah

BW: Yeah. And so this is your first time in this trailer? How long have you been here this time?

KS: Uh... almost

BW: Been here a few days?

KS: Yeah a few days, like 4 days or something.

BW: And you came up together?

KS: Yeah

BW: What do you think of it?

KS: It's pretty fun. I think it's been nice being able to learn what my dad actually does and help him out.

BW: And you've been out to your dad's, where they work?

KS: Uh-huh

BW: What do they do?

KS: Uh they're building apartments right now. Those three big apartment buildings back there.

BW: Those ones right over there?

KS: No, the ones that are behind there

JC: Farther ones

KS: Huge 3-story buildings, apartments. They're on their second building right now, almost the third.

BW: And do you know, do like most of the people who are living here, are they working on that?

KS: No, all the people that live over here to the right work on that or somewhere around here.

BW: Yeah

KS: But there's two campers right here, people are staying at a hotel, and people are also staying at capitol

BW: Capitol Lodge?

KS: yeah

BW: That's where I'm staying is Capitol Lodge.

KS: Oh okay.

BW: So you say they're gone months at a time?

KS: At least a month.

BW: And then they come home for a week or something like that?

KS: Uh-huh. My dad is usually home 3 or 4 days.

BW: Wow. Not very long.

KS: yeah

BW: you know, I don't want to get too personal but, what's the effect on the family?

KS: Um when my dad leaves?

BW: Uh-huh

KS: Him being gone, usually everyone, I don't know... it's usually just the same except without my dad being home. Well my mom works too so me and my brother have to watch our little brother and sister all the time.

BW: Right

KS: So a lot more responsibility

BW: Do you know, do your dads own this trailer?

KS: Yeah my dad owns this camper. His dad doesn't own that one but they stay in it.

BW: Okay so your dad is renting the one next door? (to JC) And

your dad owns this one? (to KS)

KS: yeah

BW: Um do you have any idea what he pays for rent, to rent the space here?

KS: I don't think they pay... or they might

BW: Oh? You don't know?

KS: No

BW: Um one of the things I've noticed at some of the, we're calling them all man camps, but at these trailer park camps like this?

KS: yeah?

BW: Some have got sewage, some don't. Right? There's a pipe running to a sewage line?

KS: Uh-huh

BW: Does this have sewage?

KS: I don't think so

BW: No? So I don't want to get too weird but it's an important fact of life, you know we, people gotta poop, right?

KS: Uh-huh

BW: So how does that work? What do they do?

KS: They have port-a-potties

BW: You just go use the port-a-potties?

KS: Uh-huh

BW: There isn't a bathroom in here?

KS: There is but we don't use it because it fills everything fast

BW: Right, right. Do you take showers in here?

KS: Yeah, sometimes.

BW: So you've got a hose coming in?

KS: No, what we do is we fill it with water and we turn on the water, get wet, and then we turn it off and put shampoo and conditioner and stuff in and then wash, rinse it off and get out of the shower.

BW: And you get hot water?

KS: yeah

BW: But I mean is there a hose coming across the lawn from one of these tanks or something that you get your water from or do you have to go fill up your water tank once a month?

KS: We have to fill up the water tank.

BW: Oh? So does this, this is on wheels and you haul it somewhere to fill up the water?

KS: Uh there's, you know these big crates out here?

BW: Yeah the big green boxes?

KS: Those are full of water.

BW: Those are full of water?

KS: Yeah.

BW: And so you get to pump straight from there into a tank on the trailer here?

KS: Yeah

BW: Oh, wow. When you've come out to meet your dad, well this is the first time you've both been out here?

KS: He's been out here once before.

JC: I've been once before.

BW: When were you out here before?

JC: Um kind of like, June? Around June?

BW: So your dad's been out here longer?

JC: Yeah

BW: And you guys knew each other back in Idaho Falls?

KS: Yeah our dads have been friends since like they were like 20.

BW: And so you guys have kind of grown up knowing each other a little bit?

KS: yeah

BW: You're about the same age?

KS: Yeah

BW: 14 and ?

JC: 13

BW: 14 and 13. When you come out here, do you know anybody else?

JC: yeah we know a lot of people up here.

BW: You do?

KS: Even if we don't know them, like my uncle's here, his dad, my dad, and then once you get here, I've met a lot of people. Like I'm friends with most of them now.

BW: ah-ha. And is your dad, did you get to meet them through your dad or did you just go out and meet people on your own? how does that work?

KS: Well everyone likes my dad, so

BW: uh-huh

KS: So I just talk to them and they talk back I guess. We get to know each other.

BW: So mostly men, right?

KS: yeah

BW: There's a lot of men out here.

KS: Yeah

BW: Not a lot of women.

KS: No

BW: But they get together and have a beer in the evenings? Stuff like that?

KS: Yeah. Then we all sit out there and cook on that grill and talk.

BW: So you get social time?

KS: yeah

BW: Pretty much every day at the end of the work day, folks get together?

KS: Yeah. And even sometimes after, we'll get off, eat dinner, and then go work until 1 in the morning or something, if we have to get something done.

BW: So you guys have been, when you've been here, it's not just sitting around talking to some guy from the university, you're out working as well?

KS: Yeah

BW: What kind of work are you doing?

KS: Yesterday me and my dad put up, in one of the rooms we were doing cabinets. We put up cabinets and did stuff and put on trim around the walls

BW: So some finishing carpentry work?

KS: yeah

BW: And what's your dad do?

JC: He was putting on doorknobs and locks

KS: And he was managing everyone

JC: And he manages everyone

BW: I should have done this at the very beginning but, I've got your papers, but could you, while the tape recorder's rolling, could you tell me your name and your age so that I can hear your

voice and connect it with your name?

KS: I'm KS and I'm 14 years old.

BW: Did you have to read that?

(laughter)

KS: No

BW: So K. And your name is?

JC: JC and I'm 13.

BW: K and J. And you're 13.

JC: Yeah

BW: And you both live in Idaho Falls?

Both: Yeah

BW: And how long are you going to be out here this time?

JC: Until Sunday.

KS: Well I don't know, depends on when my dad leaves. I'm leaving when my dad leaves.

BW: And that would be for one of his short stays back home?

When he comes home?

KS: yeah

BW: So you're out here for a while? And, J, you're leaving on Sunday?

JC: Yeah

BW: Because your dad is headed back for a little break?

JC: No, I'm with my mom. She's in the other camper.

BW: So your mom's next door there right now?

JC: yeah

BW: Okay. Do you think she might be willing? I'd just need to go ask her? Would she maybe be willing to talk to me?

JC: yeah, she would

BW: Great. So one of the things we're interested in... clearly Idaho Falls is home? You call that home?

Both: Yeah

BW: Do your dads have any sense that oh, this is a really great place and instead of Idaho Falls, we should move the family to North Dakota?

KS: No they don't like it here.

BW: They don't like it here? Just flat out huh?

KS: yeah

BW: And what are some of the things they don't like out here?

KS: Well the humidity and I don't know, I'd have to actually talk to him about it.

BW: ah-ha

KS: Maybe he doesn't like it here because he can't see his family and it's dangerous for family to be here.

BW: What's dangerous about a family being here?

KS: Well my little brother and sister, they're only 5 & 8

BW: Right?

KS: They come here and they see all of these big tractors and stuff... they could run in front of one of them and get ran over and killed.

BW: Yeah there's a lot of big trucks around. So your little brother and little sister, they've been here?

KS: Nope.

BW: No. But the family has no intention of moving out here?

KS: No.

BW: No. Most of the people that your dads hang out with, are they, do your dads know any of the people who are from Tioga and are from North Dakota? Or do they mainly know other workers who have just come here to do the work?

KS: Other workers.

JC: Yeah

BW: And where are the other workers from? You've mentioned a lot of people from Idaho Falls?

JC: Wyoming and Montana.

BW: The people that you know are mainly from those?

JC: Yeah

KS: And South Carolina and stuff?

BW: Ah-ha. There are people from all over the country.

KS: Yeah Minnesota, everywhere.

BW: Um so if I'm out collecting stories about this and I'm trying to tell people about what life is like out here, for the workers, what do you think are the most important things I should know?

KS: Um I don't know.

BW: You told me they don't like it here?

KS: Yeah

BW: That's a pretty important part of the story right there, actually.

KS: Yeah. There's a lot of work here.

BW: Ah-ha. There's not so much work in Idaho Falls?

KS: No, with the economy and everything, even if there is work, it's still minimum wage, not very much money.

BW: So clearly the main reason here is for money?

[00:12:14.05] KS: Yeah and because my dad likes to work. This is what he loves to do.

BW: yeah, yeah. And he might be able to get some of this work back in Idaho Falls but not as much as he can get here?

KS: Yeah. He says he does this because it's better for our family.

BW: Any idea how long he thinks he's going to be here?

KS: Five years.

BW: He's got a five-year plan?

KS: Five year contract.

BW: He's on a five year contract?

KS: Yeah

BW: And what's the company that it's with? Do you know?

KS: No.

BW: Um, does your family go to church back in Idaho Falls?

KS: Sometimes.

BW: Does your dad go to church here at all?

KS: No

BW: Would you even know where to go to church here?

KS: Nope.

BW: Do you ever go into town?

KS: Yeah to go to Food Price and Kum-&-Go

BW: Yeah, Food Price for groceries and Kum-&-Go for like pop or something?

KS: Yeah

BW: Um let me see what other kinds of questions I've got. Does your dad ever talk about crime? Or, you mentioned it's not a safe place for your little brother and little sister, but you're out here. Does it feel dangerous in any way?

KS: Well my dad said there's been close calls with fights and stuff.

BW: Ah. Thanks. Thanks. Anything you think I should know

about, J?

JC: Nah.

BW: No? (laughter) Alright. Well guys, thanks, thanks for your time, thanks for visiting with me. If you think it's alright, I'm going to go knock on the trailer next door. It's your mom? (to KS) No, it's your mom? (to JC)

JC: It's my mom.

BW: Alright. Well, thanks for visiting with me. Buh-bye.