

**Interview: Lucien Lessard (LL)**  
**Interviewer: Rod Mickleburgh (RM)**  
**Date: November 12, 2025**  
**Location: Langley, B.C.**  
**Transcription: Natasha Fairweather**

**[00:00:05.29] - RM**

Well, we're honored to have in our presence Mr. Lucien Lessard, who just not that long ago turned 97. He was on the Second Narrows Bridge when it collapsed, and we'll be talking about that. But there's far more to your life, Mr. Lessard, than just the Second Narrows Bridge. And so let's go right back to the beginning. Where were you born? What do you want to say about your parents and your early life?

**[00:00:35.20] - LL**

I am born in Jonquière, that's in the province of Québec, way up north. And I'm born in a very poor family. Most of them were farmers down there at that time. And I became an orphan when I was 11 years old. I never knew my father really. When I was 11, then I was put in an orphanage for a year, and I realized when you're there, you mostly learn religion with the nuns. And by the time you leave the school with the nuns, you go back to public school, you don't know nothing. They forget about the grammar, the math, the history, geography. And after, when I would get old enough, when I was 15 years old, I quit school and I went back to work as a mechanic apprentice. I worked there just for a little while, then I went to work on the smelter. For more money on the aluminum smelter in Arvida. From there—

**[00:01:55.20] - RM**

Arvida, that's where the aluminum smelter was?

**[00:01:58.04] - LL**

The big smelter. I worked there for a year or two. I was only 16, 17, 18. Then when I got old enough, I went— they were doing a building in the town where I was, a market. I went to ask the foreman for Dominion Bridge, can I have a job? He say, 'I have a full crew, but you see, you go to Montréal, you may have a chance.' So I packed my car and I went to Montréal, and when I get to Dominion Bridge, they say, 'We'll give you a job if you can join the union.' So I managed to join the union, they were wide open. And I started with Dominion Bridge, and I stayed with them for 45 years.

**[00:02:47.25] - RM**

Was this still in Québec, or is this out here?

**[00:02:50.16] - LL**

That was in Lachine, Québec. I worked there for a few years, and the big job comes in in Halifax to build a bridge the same as the Lion's Gate Bridge here. They call the Angus L. Macdonald Bridge. I worked there during the whole construction for two years. I learned an awful lot. Then I come back and I work in Québec for a little while. Sometime I was a foreman there at the end, but one job, superintendent from Montréal, he had no job and he come in, he bounced me off. I had to go back working on the gang.

**[00:03:39.22] - RM**

What did he do?

**[00:03:41.10] - LL**

I was working on the bridge as a connector.

**[00:03:45.12] - RM**

Right.

**[00:03:45.29] - LL**

Then I became a foreman there on the bridge.

**[00:03:48.09] - RM**

Right.

**[00:03:49.10] - LL**

Then an old superintendent from Montréal, he came and bumped me out.

**[00:03:55.20] - RM**

Oh, bumped you off. Yes.

**[00:03:56.26] - LL**

He took my job and I went back on the tools. There was an inspector for the Québec government inspecting the work. He said to me, 'If you want to go up on that trade, you don't have much chance here.' Because that was after the war and there were so many of the job superintendents.

**[00:04:17.17] - RM**

All people coming back also?

**[00:04:19.10] - LL**

Yeah.

**[00:04:19.22] - RM**

From the war.

**[00:04:20.16] - LL**

And some were working on the shipyard and they come back. They bump you out. So he said, 'Go to Vancouver, you may have a better chance.' So I packed my car with my family, my wife and my young baby.

**[00:04:35.11] - RM**

How old were you then?

**[00:04:38.06] - LL**

When I came here, I was 19, 18. I don't remember.

**[00:04:48.01] - CL**

What year did you come over, Dad?

**[00:04:50.18] - LL**

1957.

**[00:04:52.08] - RM**

So he would be—

**[00:04:56.19] - LL**

I was still young.

**[00:04:58.00] - RM**

That's the point I was making.

**[00:04:59.21] - LL**

Early 20s.

**[00:05:01.04] - RM**

Okay, I'm going to stop you there. You talked about the place you were born.

**[00:05:05.00] - CL**

He was 29.

**[00:05:06.12] - RM**

29, wow. The place you were born in Québec, could you spell that? It was hard to understand that place.

**[00:05:13.20] - LL**

Yes, I'm going to say Chicoutimi.

**[00:05:16.17] - RM**

Oh, Chicoutimi.

**[00:05:17.16] - LL**

Chicoutimi.

**[00:05:18.16] - LL**

Jonquière, just outside of Chicoutimi.

**[00:05:21.09] - RM**

Oh, I know Chicoutimi. Do you know Jean Chrétien?

**[00:05:24.02] - LL**

Oh yeah.

**[00:05:24.29] - RM**

The petit gars from Chicoutimi [ed: Shawinigan].

**[00:05:27.08] - LL**

He's my friend, I spent lots of time with him. Even here in BC.

**[00:05:32.08] - RM**

No. Really?

**[00:05:33.02] - LL**

Yeah, he come here.

**[00:05:33.20] - RM**

You know Jean Chrétien?

**[00:05:34.28] - LL**

Oh, Christ. I spent night in the same hotel as him and we drove together. We built a dam at Aishihik on the Yukon Territory. And when it was time for the opening, Chrétien coming for the opening ceremony, and I stayed with him the night before there. And after that, after the opening ceremony, there was an old boat in the Yukon, so he had the meeting there, a party.

**[00:06:09.17] - CL**

An old paddle boat.

**[00:06:10.27] - LL**

Huh?

**[00:06:11.12] - CL**

The old paddle boat.

**[00:06:12.15] - LL**

The old paddle boat, yeah. He was using that deck for big meeting, and I met him quite a few times after that.

**[00:06:21.25] - RM**

So you were friends?

**[00:06:23.29] - LL**

I was speaking French with him, yeah.

**[00:06:26.03] - RM**

And what, do you remember him from Chicoutimi?

**[00:06:29.11] - LL**

Not very much.

**[00:06:30.20] - RM**

But you both knew each other from Chicoutimi?

**[00:06:33.02] - LL**

From Chicoutimi. That's amazing. I know him, he was from La Tuque. Yeah. Chrétien was from La Tuque. Me from Jonquière-Chicoutimi, that's all together.

**[00:06:45.14] - RM**

Wow, that's amazing.

**[00:06:47.15] - LL**

But Chrétien is from La Tuque and we built a big pulp mill there in La Tuque, so he was in the city all the time, so I met him many times.

**[00:06:58.11] - RM**

Did you like him?

**[00:06:59.10] - LL**

Oh yeah.

**[00:07:00.19] - CL**

They got drunk in the bar together in Whitehorse at the old Taku [Inn] and Dad had me go find it when I was up there.

**[00:07:07.26] - RM**

You got drunk with Jean Chrétien?

**[00:07:10.02] - LL**

No. [laughter in background]

**[00:07:10.26] - RM**

Oh, okay.

**[00:07:12.01] - LL**

Not at all. I cannot say a bad word with him.

**[00:07:18.19] - RM**

Maybe people would enjoy that.

**[00:07:20.09] - LL**

He's a gentleman.

**[00:07:22.11] - RM**

Yeah, people love the guy.

**[00:07:25.15] - LL**

A politician.

**[00:07:26.06] - RM**

Yeah. So you loved working on bridges. That's what you did. So, you know, why, what attracted you to being on bridges. What did you like about bridge work?

**[00:07:39.00] - LL**

Well, when they were building the shopping center in my town there, I was watching the guy offloading truck with those big beam, big trusses, and the facility they had to walk on the beam up in the air. I even see some climbing the column by hand. They didn't bother putting a ladder there. We climbed the steel. They cannot do that here anymore. You have to get that lift and put a good ladder.

**[00:08:15.12] - RM**

So we were talking about why you like, you know, it seems dangerous now, but you know, you liked being in the open air?

**[00:08:23.25] - LL**

I like the open air, the camaraderie. The risk didn't bother me.

**[00:08:28.29] - RM**

Did you ever have any close calls?

**[00:08:32.05] - LL**

Yes, I did quite a few times.

**[00:08:34.05] - RM**

And? Can you tell me about one of them?

**[00:08:37.16] - LL**

One of them, I didn't cause the accident. The bridge fell off from underneath my feet. [laughter in background]

**[00:08:46.01] - RM**

No, it's not that one. We're going to talk about that one, but did you have any other?

**[00:08:50.22] - LL**

Not on— one time we were putting a tank, not a bridge or building, And the tank was on the hook of the crane and I was on the ladder. We were putting the second or third lift and the wind pushed the big plate right in my ladder and down the ladder backward. Instead of following the ladder down, I slipped down and I hurt my heel very badly. That was about the only time I got hurt on a bridge. But beside the bridge, I got hurt lots of time.

**[00:09:28.04] - RM**

Was it hard work?

**[00:09:30.23] - LL**

Well, you did muscle. Everything is heavy and hard and the hammer, the riveting gun in my days. Everything is hard work. You get tired at night.

**[00:09:45.02] - RM**

And you seemed to be very young and yet you were already a foreman. So, I mean, how did you become a foreman when you were so young? Were you that good, or what qualities made you a foreman?

**[00:09:58.20] - LL**

Well, I've been in quite a few different jobs. I've been in building, gas station, arena, lots of different bridge, and I like the job. And at the time when I start to be foreman back east. The superintendent, he was a French guy named Lucien Gagnon. Yeah. And we got along very good. So he make me foreman, and everywhere you go, I'm his foreman, and I'm his general foreman sometimes. And the guy, he had a bad habit, he was keeping drinking enough, then he passed out.

**[00:10:39.05] - RM**

Sorry, what happened?

**[00:10:40.16] - LL**

He was a heavy drinker. And he even come on the bridge on his car and he's there and he passed out. So I took over the job many times. One was a big job where we had [unclear]. Lots of responsibility. Putting a pink stop for a turbine and generator building. And he's passed out or he don't come. So that's why I was taking over him. I was covering for him. But I was learning all the time.

**[00:11:18.05] - RM**

And why did you like being a foreman? Because that's a lot of responsibility.

**[00:11:23.14] - LL**

I like responsibility. I always been a leader.

**[00:11:30.04] - RM**

That's something, not everybody is a leader.

**[00:11:33.03] - LL**

No.

**[00:11:33.18] - RM**

Some people just want to be a worker, but you liked that.

**[00:11:38.03] - LL**

I had some apprentices. I made them foremen here. They were doing so good, so I give them more pay and put them as a journeyman before their apprenticeship was over.

**[00:11:54.29] - RM**

And did you ever have— when you're the foreman, you're kind of the boss, right?

**[00:11:58.13] - LL**

Yeah.

**[00:11:59.19] - RM**

So not all the workers like the boss. Did you have trouble that way?

**[00:12:05.07] - LL**

Oh, especially when I was in Halifax, or especially here. You come in, you're French, you're from Québec, you don't speak very good English because I learned my English on the job. So you got some hard time.

**[00:12:26.08] - RM**

They would make fun of you?

**[00:12:28.13] - LL**

Yes.

**[00:12:29.21] - RM**

And did they challenge you?

**[00:12:32.02] - LL**

Yes.

**[00:12:32.17] - RM**

And how did you handle that?

**[00:12:34.28] - LL**

Physically, sometimes.

**[00:12:36.21] - RM**

Really? You'd get into a fight?

**[00:12:39.09] - LL**

Get off my back. As long as you show your strength, they keep coming at you. Like same as a bully. If a bully come and attack you, push you for any reason, so you've gotta fight him once, and after that he's gonna respect you and leave you alone and tell the other guy to leave you alone.

**[00:13:05.25] - RM**

Wow.

**[00:13:06.16] - LL**

You have to push away, don't back up, don't be—

**[00:13:11.09] - RM**

And you didn't think, this is too much for me, you wanted to keep being foreman.

**[00:13:15.20] - LL**

I want to keep the respect and I want to be the foreman and I want to go higher than that.

**[00:13:22.07] - RM**

And did you go higher than that?

**[00:13:24.09] - LL**

Yeah, I became a foreman long time ago. Then I became a few years after I became a general foreman. Then I became a superintendent. Then I became the overall superintendent for Dominion Bridge. All is still coming off the shop. I had about 20 crew all over the province and the Yukon to do the installation. Small building, arena, warehouse, school, fire station, hospital. Then after that, when we had some big project, I became project manager.

**[00:14:04.28] - RM**

So what kind of a talent did you have? To be able to do that. I mean, that's pretty unusual for it to be like that. So why were you so good at it?

**[00:14:15.11] - LL**

I didn't have the talent. I developed it as I went.

**[00:14:21.29] - RM**

You must be quite a person.

**[00:14:23.27] - LL**

I don't know.

**[00:14:26.02] - RM**

All right. Let's go back to the bridge that you helped build in Halifax. Were you a foreman on that job? No. You were just a worker.

**[00:14:35.18] - LL**

Just a worker.

**[00:14:36.24] - RM**

So that's a famous bridge from Dartmouth to Halifax. I think it was on one of the dollar bills or one of the— we had paper money. Anyway, it's a famous bridge. And what was it like working on that bridge? What was your job?

**[00:14:52.15] - LL**

I did about 2, 3 different jobs. When I went in there, I went on a riveting gang. But I didn't know enough to be the riveter, so I was the guy behind to pass the rivet from the heater to the sticker that pushed them in the hole and the other one backing them off. I was just taking a rivet from a box to the hole. But after that, I went— when we start later on to do different job, I moved to different position, and then at the end I became a connector. When we had those big trusses coming in with the winch coming from the boat on the water, from the barge, I get on that and I did about everything. And after we had the bridge pull up, I was involved in pulling the deck. There was a grillage-type deck And after that, we had to put the suspender that looked like a ladder. But we had the two cable suspenders. Then we're putting the rung that was just like a bunch of fingers. And with a brass hammer, we bend them tight in both ends. Then we climb putting them up. No safety, nothing.

**[00:16:21.20] - LL**

You have to get both ends working with the hammer and one end to hold yourself up. So we did that, and after that, when you got the clamp, when they wrap the cable, they just go with the machine. We wrapped that. Well, at the end, close to the clamp, you have to use a hand one to finish the cable right close to the clamp, and you have to put lots of lead. To make sure the water don't penetrate to the cable. I was involved in that gang, so I did part of most of the work on it.

**[00:17:00.10] - RM**

Boy. How did you feel when the bridge was finished?

**[00:17:03.25] - LL**

I wasn't there.

**[00:17:05.18] - RM**

Oh, you'd already left?

**[00:17:07.08] - LL**

No, I was there when we finished the main bridge, but then you have to put the blacktop painting, so the bridge wasn't finished.

**[00:17:15.28] - RM**

And you were a member of the union then?

**[00:17:19.04] - LL**

Yeah, first I would join the union in Montréal.

**[00:17:22.13] - RM**

That's the Ironworkers union?

**[00:17:23.24] - LL**

Ironworkers union. Then when we come to Halifax, they wouldn't accept us. We had to join the union in Halifax. So they collect the dues.

**[00:17:34.28] - RM**

Yes, of course.

**[00:17:35.25] - LL**

So I belong to the Halifax union. And when I came up in BC, I had to do the same thing again.

**[00:17:42.15] - RM**

Local 97.

**[00:17:44.06] - LL**

Local 97. Yeah.

**[00:17:46.08] - RM**

Okay, let's go back. Is there anything else you want to say about your time in Québec and all those other jobs?

**[00:17:51.18] - LL**

That's okay.

**[00:17:53.02] - RM**

Good, good hard work. And you got paid more as a foreman, did you not?

**[00:17:58.11] - LL**

Oh yeah, every time you go, you got a foreman, you got an extra 50 cents. You're general foreman, you get more. And you're superintendent, you get more. And when I became overall superintendent, then I got an office job. I became on a monthly with all the benefits. And I got a free car with all the expenses paid for. So I was making good money with them.

**[00:18:30.15] - RM**

You smoke a cigar?

**[00:18:33.12] - LL**

I was smoking heavy those days, but I quit a long time ago. I quit when the bridge collapsed.

**[00:18:40.22] - RM**

Really? Why did you quit then?

**[00:18:43.28] - LL**

I was in the hospital for 4 months and you could not smoke there in bed, so I was forced to, not voluntary.

**[00:18:53.03] - RM**

But that was good.

**[00:18:54.09] - LL**

That was good in one way.

**[00:18:56.21] - RM**

Was the Second Narrows Bridge your first project in BC?

**[00:19:00.14] - LL**

No.

**[00:19:01.18] - RM**

Okay, let's talk about what you did in BC, not just Second Narrows, but other things you did in BC.

**[00:19:06.28] - LL**

Before the bridge?

**[00:19:08.00] - RM**

Yes.

**[00:19:08.17] - LL**

When I come in as a regular worker, I went to do a bridge, the PGE Bridge in Taylor Flats.

**[00:19:16.20] - RM**

Where's that?

**[00:19:17.16] - LL**

Taylor Flats, that's by Fort St. John.

**[00:19:20.04] - RM**

Oh wow, up north.

**[00:19:21.20] - LL**

Fort McMurray between. So that's a railroad bridge going across the Pembina— no, what's the river there? I forgot though, anyway. So I work on the bridge there, then I work on a few buildings, and I went to work in Vancouver Island on the [unclear]. I did a few jobs before I go there.

**[00:19:55.03] - RM**

Okay, and again, just, I may have missed this, why did you decide to come to BC?

**[00:20:01.17] - LL**

Because that inspector for the BC government, he told me, 'Lou, you look ambitious, you're never gonna make up here, go to Vancouver, that's open.' And I took his advice, packed my kids, my wife, and moved up.

**[00:20:21.08] - RM**

Did you say you drove across?

**[00:20:23.14] - LL**

I drove across in the winter. And I drove bus at the time. And I went number two in the States.

**[00:20:30.19] - RM**

Through the States because the highway was not good in Canada. That's what most people did. You're quite right. You missed the Big Bend Highway and the Cascades, which were terrible roads. So they went through the States and then came back up. And you liked BC?

**[00:20:47.11] - LL**

I like BC. The weather is about the best weather in the whole Canada, but indeed the whole world. We don't have those big typhoons and big cyclones and this big snowfall like they just had in Montréal, back and forth.

**[00:21:05.01] - RM**

Now these are some jobs you may have done after Second Narrows, but I want to leave Second Narrows to one specific thing. But I gather you worked on building the gondola at Grouse Mountain?

**[00:21:17.03] - LL**

Yes, the first gondola. I was in charge to pull it up. But we had an inspector from Germany who came with it to install it. He was an expert on it. And we were green. We never had done that before.

**[00:21:38.01] - RM**

What was that like?

**[00:21:39.07] - LL**

It's nice.

**[00:21:40.23] - RM**

You get a nice view of the city.

**[00:21:42.19] - LL**

Tough job, but lots of hard walking. Like the Grouse Grind.

**[00:21:48.09] - RM**

Grouse Grind, yeah.

**[00:21:49.22] - LL**

Kind of. We had to do that by foot without all the sidewalk and the wood.

**[00:21:54.27] - RM**

You're kidding.

**[00:21:55.20] - LL**

And some place we could not even climb. We had to get a rope so we can help ourselves [gestures climbing a rope] to go up.

**[00:22:04.02] - RM**

And were you carrying anything?

**[00:22:05.20] - LL**

Oh, our belt, our tools, sometimes.

**[00:22:08.21] - RM**

How long would it take you to go up the mountain?

**[00:22:10.21] - LL**

I don't remember.

**[00:22:11.26] - RM**

Did you get paid for that time?

**[00:22:13.09] - LL**

Oh, yes. [laughter in background]

**[00:22:15.17] - RM**

That's amazing. So you, without— when no one was doing the Grouse Grind, and it wasn't called that, you guys were making that hike to build the gondola.

**[00:22:26.08] - CL**

There was a dirt trail.

**[00:22:26.16] - LL**

There was no way to go halfway. On top, they have the road. You can drive on the top station. But on the mid-station, there was no way.

**[00:22:39.15] - RM**

How long did that job take?

**[00:22:42.02] - LL**

Don't remember. That went pretty good.

**[00:22:45.10] - RM**

Yeah. That was a good job. And also you worked on the redevelopment of the Lions Gate Bridge?

**[00:22:53.08] - LL**

Yes, quite a few times.

**[00:22:54.22] - RM**

What was your job there? What were you doing?

**[00:22:56.04] - LL**

First when I came in, we were just replacing some rotten floor parts. Take one, put one, or put an extra plate, put an extra bolt. But when they did the big changeover, I wasn't there. That was after I was finished.

**[00:23:20.08] - RM**

And I've heard that there was no safety equipment on the Lions Gate Bridge.

**[00:23:23.29] - LL**

Nothing.

**[00:23:24.24] - RM**

So you were sort of high up.

**[00:23:28.17] - LL**

Underneath. Need to get down. And then when we put the light on the cable there, I was there doing it at nighttime. We were walking on that cable like this because we were putting a post on every clamp there. We had to loosen up the bolt. And put a post and a strut underneath so they can hang the light on that. And on those posts, we put a little cable all the way through up. So we made a catwalk on top of the main cable.

**[00:24:04.11] - RM**

Made a what?

**[00:24:05.12] - LL**

A catwalk.

**[00:24:06.23] - RM**

Oh, catwalk, yes.

**[00:24:07.22] - LL**

But with a handrail for the electrician to put their light and replace the light later on. So they can go, but they got a guardrail and a hand thing. But us, when we put that, there was nothing on the cable. We just walk 30, 40 feet to the next clamp.

**[00:24:27.29] - RM**

And are they right when they say don't look down?

**[00:24:30.22] - LL**

And that was at night.

**[00:24:32.20] - RM**

Oh my God. And you, that didn't bother you at all?

**[00:24:36.22] - LL**

With the traffic going underneath.

**[00:24:40.03] - RM**

It didn't bother you?

**[00:24:41.20] - LL**

Didn't bother us.

**[00:24:43.01] - RM**

Did anybody ever fall off?

**[00:24:44.15] - LL**

No.

**[00:24:45.13] - RM**

Wow, that's amazing.

**[00:24:47.09] - LL**

That was my job to make sure they don't fall off.

**[00:24:50.15] - RM**

And another thing I've heard about is that you— what's this, shooting a line across a canyon with a crossbow? What's that all about?

**[00:25:00.08] - LL**

We were putting a suspension bridge to carry pipe. To get the influent that was in Princeton. That's a rough river there. Similkameen. So we cannot cross a cable that was that big by hand across the canyon. So first with a bow, we sent a good solid line, nylon. From that we pulled a 3/8 steel cable. Then with the 3/8 we could put a 3/4 cable. So the puller can pull the inch-and-a-half cable across the canyon up in the air.

**[00:25:51.01] - RM**

I still can't— so, but what, you actually shot the cable across?

**[00:25:57.06] - LL**

Yeah, we put it at the end of the arrow, tight, solid, then with the bow and arrow, that little rope is coiled there ready to go, and we shoot that little rope across the canyon.

**[00:26:11.04] - RM**

Oh, and then it pulled.

**[00:26:12.20] - LL**

That pulled the rope across. Yeah. So when we get the end there, on this end we had a winch to pull on it, and the other end of the rope, we tied to 3/8 cable, then a bigger, then a bigger, until we pull those cable across.

**[00:26:29.00] - RM**

That's amazing.

**[00:26:30.04] - LL**

And those cable become up in the air like a suspension bridge. And we built another one where there was an 8-foot conveyor belt across the same river. They were carrying rock on the conveyor belt. We had to put big tower on that like a suspension bridge.

**[00:26:50.20] - RM**

This is amazing. Did it work the first time?

**[00:26:53.27] - LL**

Perfect, no problem.

**[00:26:55.25] - RM**

I guess people knew what they were doing.

**[00:26:57.24] - LL**

It was me.

**[00:26:59.08] - RM**

You knew what you were doing.

**[00:27:00.26] - LL**

That was my idea, that was not from the engineering.

**[00:27:05.19] - RM**

It must have given you amazing satisfaction. I mean, what you're talking to me, I don't understand half of it because I don't understand engineering, but all these complicated things and you were able to master them.

**[00:27:18.20] - LL**

You have to develop them as they go.

**[00:27:21.10] - RM**

Yeah, but it must have given you a lot of satisfaction.

**[00:27:24.23] - LL**

Yeah.

**[00:27:25.08] - RM**

I mean, you took pride in what you did.

**[00:27:26.20] - LL**

Satisfaction and prestige.

**[00:27:28.26] - RM**

Yeah, yeah. And it's been said people like you helped build BC. Do you think that's true? Do you feel that you helped build BC?

**[00:27:38.09] - LL**

That's what she said [pointing to framed photo].

**[00:27:39.29] - RM**

Christy Clark. We're looking at a picture of Christy Clark at the Port Mann Bridge, and she's got a picture dedicated to Lou, and it says, 'Thanks for building BC, Christy Clark.' That's a pretty good picture.

**[00:27:54.19] - LL**

I got quite a few awards.

**[00:27:57.26] - RM**

One more. Flying under a burnt-out bridge in a helicopter. Does that ring a bell?

**[00:28:04.29] - LL**

Oh, that was the Cisco Bridge.

**[00:28:08.08] - RM**

Which bridge?

**[00:28:09.07] - LL**

That one there [pointing to photo on wall]. The close one, the high one. They had a fire on top. And all the crews were tied. Make a big fire and the steel on top was all damaged, cooked, and there was a bunch of, you know, some cars left on top of the bridge. So I was on the list with the— with CNN and CPR. If they got a disaster, they called me for bridge inspection. And the inspector for the bridge, the engineer, the top engineer, I get in an helicopter. So we go underneath to inspect the bridge, so both of us we can decide what to replace, what we're going to be doing.

**[00:29:03.05] - RM**

So you were just above the water in the helicopter?

**[00:29:06.16] - LL**

Oh yeah, underneath, up and down. We come quite close to touch it, almost. You can't because you've got the blade.

**[00:29:16.22] - RM**

You've done so many different things.

**[00:29:18.22] - LL**

Oh, lots more than that.

**[00:29:20.03] - RM**

It's crazy. When did you retire?

**[00:29:22.21] - LL**

I retired at 65, and I did another job after that. There was a Swedish company, they were bidding on the job at to put a new type of recovery boiler. And Dominion Bridge was meeting with CanRon and some other international company, and they say Dominion Bridge wants to send me there to learn how to pull it up, that new type of building, new equipment. And we got the job because of that. Then I came out of retirement to put that building, but I only go half, and after I fully retired.

**[00:30:11.15] - RM**

And that reminds me of something. I mean, the technique, the way bridges are built, kept changing.

**[00:30:17.13] - LL**

Yeah.

**[00:30:18.05] - RM**

And you had to keep up with all that.

**[00:30:20.24] - LL**

We start from riveting to bolt, now there's lots more welding, different cranes. A 10-ton crane was a big crane. And the first time I worked with the crane, there was steam locomotive crane with a boiler. They were all steam crane. Then they come to start gas and diesel.

**[00:30:44.23] - RM**

Boy, you go right back.

**[00:30:46.18] - LL**

Up to 400-ton crane we were using.

**[00:30:50.05] - RM**

Boy. One last thing. I also told you were involved in the Apprenticeship Board.

**[00:30:59.06] - LL**

Yes.

**[00:31:00.06] - RM**

And did you enjoy that? What was your job there?

**[00:31:04.19] - LL**

Well, first I was on the Apprenticeship Committee with the union, so I'm right in the front line. I know what's going to be built next. I got— we're bidding on it. The school don't know that. So I was transferring to the instructor what new coming in, and they would— and sometimes I was helping them out from instruction and giving them some scraps still from the job so they can practice welding and cutting and everything like this. And once a month we meet with a group, the union, to see this, the progress the apprenticeship are doing. And I go to the school, visit them once a while.

**[00:31:57.09] - RM**

And you would have your eye on who you might want to put on the next project, the best apprenticeship apprentices?

**[00:32:03.19] - LL**

I help a little bit, I would say that.

**[00:32:08.23] - RM**

But both sides, I mean, both the union and then the company, they appreciated the job you did.

**[00:32:13.26] - LL**

Yes.

**[00:32:14.24] - RM**

Because you were probably fair.

**[00:32:17.24] - LL**

You have to be fair, otherwise you pay for it later.

**[00:32:21.10] - RM**

Yeah, that's a good point. All right, we're gonna— do you want to take a drink of water? You okay?

**[00:32:26.16] - LL**

I'm okay, yeah.

**[00:32:27.16] - RM**

Okay, so talk about Second Narrows.

**[00:32:29.29] - LL**

Okay, I take a drink, then we go back there.

**[00:32:32.11] - RM**

Yeah, exactly. Boy, this is fascinating.

**[00:32:43.12] - LL**

Okay, Second Narrows.

**[00:32:45.19] - CL**

Does that mean you're coming back?

**[00:32:47.28] - RM**

The old days, man. You've seen it all.

**[00:32:51.29] - LL**

Yes, Second Narrows. I was up another job, and when they were starting with a crane to do the approach, not on the water, They flipped a crane, the crane rolled over, so the worker safety board, they close the job until they have somebody with more experience to carry on. So John Prescott and Roy Carpenter, they were in charge of Inbridge, they took me from the other job and they moved me there. And I stayed there for the whole construction of the bridge.

**[00:33:32.07] - RM**

Which bridge was that?

**[00:33:33.23] - LL**

The Second Narrows Bridge.

**[00:33:34.29] - RM**

Oh, so we're talking Second Narrows. Yeah. Oh, you got transferred from another project to the Second Narrows Bridge because there had been a crane—

**[00:33:43.13] - LL**

They closed the bridge. And with my reputation, it was enough. They reopened the construction.

**[00:33:52.02] - RM**

Were you involved? From the very start of the Second Narrows Bridge, or had they already built part of it?

**[00:33:59.00] - LL**

They already start on the ground, but very little bit. And underneath, that's muddy, so the crane rolled. Like me, I ordered to make some pad 12 by 12, 24 feet long, 6 together. Then we put a crane on top. So I've been using that technique before.

**[00:34:20.17] - RM**

And so what was your impression when you first joined that project? Do you remember your first day on the job?

**[00:34:27.04] - LL**

Well, I had quite a few bridges before.

**[00:34:29.06] - RM**

Yeah, I know.

**[00:34:29.28] - LL**

The first day I had to put that crane back on the track.

**[00:34:33.23] - RM**

Yeah.

**[00:34:34.22] - LL**

Then I carry on with another crane on the ground.

**[00:34:39.19] - RM**

Yeah.

**[00:34:40.13] - LL**

Then when I came to the main span, they decided to let me do the same thing. So I was a front-end foreman. I was not in charge. I was a general foreman, superintendent engineer. So I get to the main span and I stay there for the whole bridge. I was the front-end foreman. Like, the steel was offloaded in the backyard of the bridge, put on the train, locomotive with a pushcar. To the front of the rig, and from there, that was my job to offload it and install every member ahead. There's nothing underneath us. That's the most dangerous job of them all.

**[00:35:25.19] - RM**

And how large was your work crew?

**[00:35:28.17] - LL**

Ten men.

**[00:35:29.17] - RM**

Ten men. Good men?

**[00:35:31.14] - LL**

All selected.

**[00:35:32.27] - RM**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**[00:35:34.15] - LL**

And there was that many more after that bolting up after us. We were just putting on a bolt to hold it in place secure.

**[00:35:43.11] - RM**

And was this the biggest bridge you'd worked on?

**[00:35:46.03] - LL**

Yes.

**[00:35:46.23] - RM**

And you were conscious of that?

**[00:35:49.01] - LL**

Well, I worked on a bigger bridge but we didn't build it. I worked on the Québec Bridge to replace some of the top parts of the girder because they were rotting. So we had to bust the rivet and replace the top plate only.

**[00:36:07.28] - RM**

And before it collapsed, were people— were they just confident? No one thought that there could be a problem?

**[00:36:14.11] - LL**

No, they thought it was so secure, so—

**[00:36:19.05] - RM**

All right, do you want to talk about the day, like, when the bridge collapsed? Just talk about it in your own words.

**[00:36:26.29] - LL**

Well, when the bridge collapsed, I happened to be— The rig is here, the front of the bridge is there. I was behind the pushcart and the locomotive ready to pick up a 55-ton piece. So I was

right at the edge of the bridge, to line up the line, because when you pick something heavy, you don't want it to go like this, then broke all the boom. So as soon as we pick it up, we can hear two click, click, click, like a gunshot. And the bridge on the west side went down a split second first. So that threw me right off the bridge clear. I didn't fall through the structure.

**[00:37:11.12] - RM**

Because you were out a certain distance, so you didn't fall into where all the—

**[00:37:17.06] - LL**

To the steel. I went clear overboard. I fell 150 feet to the water. Then I fell another 35 feet to the bottom of the ocean. First thing I know, I'm laid down on the bottom of the ocean, face down, and there was no air to breathe, and the water wasn't tasting too good, and there was a bunch of crab looking at me there. I was going to be dead next minute. Then I said, 'Better get out of there. I tried to go up and I couldn't because my leg was broken, shattered, not only sharp. Then I was hard to go up because your leg became an anchor. You could not help swimming. Then managed to get up to the surface. When I got to the surface, there was some planks from the deck floating. So I took my arm, my right arm to pick one, But I couldn't do it because my arm was broke. So I spin around and grab those planks and put that arm on top. And I was on top of that. And it was right at the end of the Seymour River. There's current there coming from the river. So that was pushing me up to the middle of the ocean.

**[00:38:37.10] - LL**

There a boat fished me out and put me on the platform on the secure place.

**[00:38:43.18] - RM**

How long were you in the water before you were rescued?

**[00:38:51.27] - LL**

I don't know. Excuse me, I have to put my mind to it. I was not very long in the water, maybe 10 minutes. That was about it. I was at the surface for 10 minutes floating, then a boat picked me up and put me in a secure location.

**[00:39:09.04] - RM**

Do you remember the water being cold?

**[00:39:12.05] - LL**

That was good in one way because if the water is cold, you don't feel your pain as much. And I was laid on the floating platform, half on the water and half on top, for 45 minutes watching this, what's happening.

**[00:39:31.00] - RM**

And how much pain were you in?

**[00:39:33.15] - LL**

A lot.

**[00:39:34.29] - RM**

Were you screaming?

**[00:39:37.07] - LL**

No, I was cold. I was helping them on the salvage.

**[00:39:41.07] - RM**

How could you help them?

**[00:39:42.23] - LL**

Pardon me?

**[00:39:43.14] - RM**

You said you were helping them?

**[00:39:44.26] - LL**

Yeah, not manually because I was a foreman. The crew from the backyard, they were not hurt and no one is— they work on the span that didn't fall down. So I was telling them where to find the [unclear] on my crane. Where to find this, where to find that. And I could see some of the men, they had their head coming out, some of them caught, and they could not get their body. And the wave was getting to their face. So I was telling them, go after that guy, go after that guy first. There was two of them. One was the apprentice after we got him off, not me, but then they got

him off. He come out with no leg and the tourniquet around his leg. He took his own belt and put a tourniquet and come out. He survived. I stayed there for 45 minutes.

**[00:40:40.08] - RM**

And even though you were in pain and your legs and arm was bad, you were still helping with the rescue?

**[00:40:46.23] - LL**

That was my job. That was my men.

**[00:40:48.11] - RM**

Lucien, that's amazing.

**[00:40:49.15] - LL**

That was my men there.

**[00:40:50.26] - RM**

Wow.

**[00:40:53.03] - LL**

Firemen off duty, when they radioed, they heard the bridge collapsed. So they put some gear on a pickup truck and they come and pick me up. And they took me to the Columbia Hospital on the back of a pickup truck. Not even the luxury of an ambulance.

**[00:41:12.24] - RM**

What were your thoughts when you were in that truck? What were you thinking?

**[00:41:16.26] - LL**

I'm safe. I'm going home.

**[00:41:20.24] - RM**

In spite of the pain?

**[00:41:22.13] - LL**

My home was four months in the hospital.

**[00:41:25.15] - RM**

Could you swim?

**[00:41:28.00] - LL**

Yes, I could. I was a good swimmer.

**[00:41:30.08] - RM**

So if worse came to the worst— and were you wearing a life jacket?

**[00:41:34.09] - LL**

The minute you hit the water, the life jacket, the strap broke.

**[00:41:41.03] - RM**

Do you remember as you went down, could— Do you remember what you were thinking?

**[00:41:46.29] - LL**

I guess your eyes closed from the wind. I never remembered nothing from the time I left the deck until I got my face on the bottom of the ocean.

**[00:42:00.06] - RM**

And I gather up top, I mean, it was close to closing time and you said, let's put this one last girder in place. Is that what was happening?

**[00:42:12.16] - LL**

Yeah, that was not me. Like, that was getting late on the afternoon, and to put a 55-ton piece of steel, that takes a while. I was gonna quit, but the chief and the engineer, they wanted to balance the bridge, to put the same thing on one side and other side, because overnight they know what's happened, a big wind.

**[00:42:37.00] - RM**

So to balance it out.

**[00:42:38.23] - LL**

Balance the load.

**[00:42:40.09] - RM**

But that had nothing to do with the bridge collapse.

**[00:42:43.10] - LL**

No. We were going to pull her up. That had something to do because that was the warmest day during the month of June we'd work. And the derrick happened to be on that side of the bridge. And the locomotive and the car and that 55-ton steel is all on that one side. And when they saw the steel get lazy, so there was lots in one corner, that's where that went first.

**[00:43:12.11] - RM**

Sorry, I didn't understand that. Say it again. What happened? Something you said, something got lazy?

**[00:43:19.07] - LL**

Yeah. The steel, when it's cold, that's stronger than when it's warm. When it's warm, wood across a beam is better than a beam. A beam, when it's warm, it expands and they get lazy. Wood is better to carry a load when it's hot.

**[00:43:41.22] - RM**

And because it was hot that day.

**[00:43:43.11] - LL**

That was the hottest day so far.

**[00:43:45.19] - RM**

Right. Well, that's interesting. I didn't know that. And it said that no one fell further than you. You had the record for falling the farthest because you were out there on the end?

**[00:43:58.24] - LL**

No, I'm not that far.

**[00:44:00.08] - RM**

I just read that.

**[00:44:01.18] - LL**

No, that wasn't true. Because I was here at the bridge and some were over there already bolting it. So they were further ahead of the bridge and they got it more than me because when they came down, they fell through the structure, bones on the beam, bones on the bracket, bones on the concrete below. And they got killed there or very badly injured. Some went right through that steel to the water and they drowned because they lost their life jacket and they were wearing a belt with their tool, who could weigh 50 pounds. Me, I was a foreman, I had no belt, no weight on it, I had better chance to swim. Those had no chance at all.

**[00:44:48.01] - RM**

Yeah, I know, it's terrible to think of them down there and they couldn't do anything.

**[00:44:54.18] - LL**

They even see one, he managed to fell down too without hitting the steel and he was dead, but he had his life jacket back on. He was floating on the old railroad bridge and the boat picked him up there, but he was dead.

**[00:45:11.22] - RM**

Could you ever have imagined this happening?

**[00:45:16.03] - LL**

That's only happened once, and that's enough. I had no experience on that.

**[00:45:23.29] - RM**

Well, and all around you were people that you knew that were in pain.

**[00:45:30.15] - LL**

Screaming for their life. Help me, help me, help me.

**[00:45:34.26] - RM**

Yeah, yeah. And you couldn't do anything.

**[00:45:39.08] - LL**

I'm laying down on that floating ram there, looking at them [mimics shivering].

**[00:45:47.07] - RM**

Yeah. But you're thinking, I'm alive.

**[00:45:50.20] - LL**

Yeah.

**[00:45:51.17] - RM**

I'm going to live.

**[00:45:53.02] - LL**

I see one cut in half.

**[00:45:55.04] - RM**

Yeah.

**[00:45:57.12] - LL**

Can't say any more than that.

**[00:46:00.08] - RM**

No. And when you hit the bottom, though, you knew you hit the bottom. You know, and were speaking to the crabs.

**[00:46:07.11] - LL**

I know I was on the bottom, yeah.

**[00:46:09.02] - RM**

And you knew you had to make it up to the top.

**[00:46:10.29] - LL**

Yeah.

**[00:46:11.14] - RM**

And you could— can you remember coming up to the top?

**[00:46:14.06] - LL**

Oh, very well. That took a long time and lots of struggle. Got broken arm and broken leg, so I only had one arm and one leg. Lucky they were on different sides, but I only had to go about 35 feet. Took a while.

**[00:46:30.24] - RM**

But you had the will to live.

**[00:46:33.10] - LL**

Had the will to live. I didn't want to become a crab meal [laughter].

**[00:46:41.05] - RM**

And then you were in hospital for quite a long time.

**[00:46:44.01] - LL**

Four months.

**[00:46:45.06] - RM**

What was that like?

**[00:46:47.07] - LL**

Tough. Because I get there, the leg is broken, it was shattered. And the doctor really didn't know what to do. So they didn't put a cast, they didn't do nothing. But they had to drill a hole on my knee and put some weight, a pulley at the end of the bed and some weight, because I was young and healthy and the muscle would make the leg shorter. So they took measurements from that leg here to that bone here to the hip bone and they keep measuring it.

**[00:47:23.19] - RM**

Wow.

**[00:47:24.02] - LL**

So what they did, they drilled a hole at the end of the bone in the leg, and they cut my leg, and they put a steel pin inside. That steel pin, that was not really a pin, that was a pipe, deformed. So they drove that to the marrow well in your leg and put that piece of bone where they belong. And just never put a cast, just put a rubber band, rubber elastic thing, and they have to keep changing the weight. And that was dragging me to the bottom of the bed. I had to hold myself once a while, grab the bed and move back up.

**[00:48:09.19] - RM**

That's amazing. This is 1957. Now they know exactly what to do. But that's pretty good for 1957.

**[00:48:19.03] - LL**

The doctor come from the States, he was a army doctor, and he during the war they were practicing that. An American doctor came up with that technique to do that. They never did that here before. They do it now, they learn.

**[00:48:37.28] - RM**

And did you have a limp after that?

**[00:48:41.14] - LL**

Yes, I had lots of physiotherapy. And that pin, after that, months after that, they removed it.

**[00:48:50.23] - RM**

And your leg was basically okay?

**[00:48:53.05] - LL**

Just took it off.

**[00:48:54.11] - RM**

That's amazing.

**[00:48:55.08] - LL**

I went back building bridge and building.

**[00:48:58.28] - RM**

So is there anything else you want to say about that day, I mean, that we haven't mentioned, or do you think I think you pretty well covered it. I just can't imagine it happening.

**[00:49:10.03] - LL**

That's something I don't want to see again anyway.

**[00:49:12.17] - RM**

Yeah, that's right. And I mean, it had an impact on you, right? I mean, that's not something you forget.

**[00:49:20.18] - LL**

That make me checking the engineer a little bit better. Like when they put the falsework, the part that collapse, the engineer make sure and they questioned me, too, about it. Like usually when we put the falsework, there's piling, wood piling, a small bridge. Those were steel piling filled with concrete. Then they put some grillage beam. But on those grillage beam, they put angle iron on the web to reinforce it.

**[00:49:56.22] - RM**

Sorry, I don't understand that. Say that again.

**[00:49:59.20] - LL**

Those grillage beams, they made of—

**[00:50:02.04] - RM**

Those what beams?

**[00:50:03.06] - LL**

Beams.

**[00:50:03.29] - RM**

Yeah, no, what was the word you used?

**[00:50:05.07] - LL**

14-inch grillage beam, we call it.

**[00:50:08.24] - CL**

Grillage beams.

**[00:50:09.21] - RM**

Oh, grillage beams. I don't know that phrase. Okay, keep going.

**[00:50:13.09] - LL**

So they reinforced the web with angle iron and they put a diaphragm between, that's like a channel to keep them both together. That engineer that day, We just put a 4x4 between instead of putting a steel diaphragm. And to hold the beam from coming out, he just put some rod with a turnbuckle. And because some of those beams, a rolled beam, like there was a 36-inch beam the next level, a 36-inch beam could be plus an 1/8 of an inch or minus an 1/8 of an inch. So all those beams were not taking the load. The highest one take the load first until they fail, the next one, next one, like an accordion. The second time we make sure they were plain, exactly the same thing, and there was diaphragm, angle iron reinforced, and they all tied up well in place. Same beam I use, same thing. Different technique.

**[00:51:22.03] - RM**

So it really had an impact on bridge safety after that?

**[00:51:24.25] - LL**

Oh, for lots.

**[00:51:26.07] - RM**

Because that's why the bridge collapsed, the falsework was not well designed.

**[00:51:32.03] - LL**

That was not the leg. The leg, that was part of the bridge that we were going to be reusing later. That was from the pile to those big legs, the transfer beam.

**[00:51:47.04] - RM**

And as you know, the engineers, they were on the bridge when it came down.

**[00:51:53.08] - LL**

And they got killed.

**[00:51:54.06] - RM**

Yeah, because the thought is they thought something might be wrong and they were checking it.

**[00:51:59.23] - LL**

Well, one of the engineers, there was a very experienced top engineer at the site and in the office, but there was a young engineer coming from Australia, green. He was given the job to design those beams like this underneath. And he used the calculation from the strength of the beam. He used the calculation for the thickness of the steel on the top. But when the weakest part of the beam is the long web and the higher— because the beam's weakest is the web. The lower bridge is not as much chance for collapsing.

**[00:52:48.00] - RM**

When you think about it, do you blame that young engineer?

**[00:52:51.05] - LL**

No, that's all he knew about. He was given a job. He did his best.

**[00:52:56.02] - RM**

But he should have been supervised better.

**[00:52:59.07] - LL**

The engineer was at the site. He trusted that young engineer so much. He just put his John Henry without checking the calculation.

**[00:53:09.11] - RM**

So they were both at fault.

**[00:53:10.29] - LL**

Both at fault. Not only both, 20 more. Because the chief— supposed to go to the chief engineer of Dominion Bridge and the consulting engineer, the guy who designed the bridge, that was his job to calculate that too. And there was lots of responsibility spread around.

**[00:53:36.14] - RM**

Did you attend the inquiry that they held?

**[00:53:39.01] - LL**

No, I was in the hospital.

**[00:53:40.22] - RM**

Still in the hospital. But it was a pretty good inquiry.

**[00:53:43.15] - LL**

Very good one, very precise. They come to the exact trouble. Underneath those big legs, the falsework.

**[00:53:53.29] - RM**

So Lucien, there you are. You finally get out of hospital. They start building the bridge again, and you wanted to be part of it. You were part of the rebuilding of the bridge, were you not?

**[00:54:07.26] - LL**

So what happened while I was in the hospital, another superintendent for Dominion Bridge removed the steel from the bottom of the ocean with a barge and a crane on it. By that time, They were stopping fabricate the north part of the bridge and start to fabricate the south side of the bridge when I was in hospital and convalescing. And when they have enough parts made, just enough to start, I was enough, good enough to go back and, and I start that. But then I start right from the falsework design and everything, and I was testing the pile at nighttime. After that, when they had enough steel, I went back up, put the rig, start from scratch, did the Vancouver side, and when I finished the Vancouver side, I went to North Vancouver to put the same steel second time until I complete the job.

**[00:55:09.28] - RM**

What was it like going back to the bridge?

**[00:55:11.24] - LL**

No problem at all.

**[00:55:13.12] - RM**

But you must have been thinking about what happened?

**[00:55:16.07] - LL**

I knew exactly what happened, and I knew they did the right thing on the second checking and the design.

**[00:55:23.06] - RM**

So you didn't think it was cursed or any— you wanted to go back?

**[00:55:26.25] - LL**

No.

**[00:55:27.05] - RM**

You didn't give it a second thought?

**[00:55:28.09] - LL**

I want to go back, and I didn't feel any— sign.

**[00:55:36.07] - RM**

And you weren't the only one that went back. Some of your crew went back also.

**[00:55:41.24] - LL**

Yeah. Most of them get dead.

**[00:55:44.08] - RM**

Most of them what?

**[00:55:45.00] - LL**

Most of them died that day who were right in front, the highest. But two or three came back.

**[00:55:54.02] - RM**

And would you talk about it?

**[00:55:56.15] - LL**

We tried not to.

**[00:55:59.24] - RM**

Was there a different mood among the workers when they started to rebuild? Were they, you know, or is it just, did it just become like another project?

**[00:56:11.18] - LL**

We kind of gave them confidence. The engineering give me confidence and the superintendent. At that time I was just a foreman on that bridge.

**[00:56:26.26] - RM**

Boy. And I don't know what you— Were you in the union then?

**[00:56:33.21] - LL**

Oh yeah.

**[00:56:34.21] - RM**

Even as a foreman?

**[00:56:36.15] - LL**

Yes.

**[00:56:36.29] - RM**

You were still a member of the union?

**[00:56:38.21] - LL**

As a foreman, I was.

**[00:56:40.08] - RM**

Yeah, and this is something people don't know is that afterwards there was a strike by the Ironworkers that stopped the construction. Were you part of that strike? Were you on strike too?

**[00:56:52.08] - LL**

No, during that period I went to get the pin pulled out. And Dominion Bridge, the fact that they had to pay me, they didn't want to lose me, they sent me to Alberta on the coal mine, their work there.

**[00:57:09.02] - RM**

Wow. So you had work.

**[00:57:10.23] - LL**

I had work. I drove there, worked, but I only worked for a week and I was taken to Château at Banff there. I was taken to Château, but on the basement. [laughter] Because I was working—

**[00:57:25.04] - RM**

You didn't get one of the good rooms.

**[00:57:27.02] - LL**

I was working on the coal mine and I was black with soot.

**[00:57:31.17] - RM**

What were you doing at the coal mine?

**[00:57:33.23] - LL**

I was— they were doing it underground. They were putting those ribs underneath to support the ceiling so they don't collapse.

**[00:57:43.22] - RM**

And you were doing that work?

**[00:57:45.00] - LL**

I didn't go inside the tunnel. I was outside doing the fabrication of those. The shop did not have time to fabricate, we were doing that. So I was cutting beam, welding the end plate, and do the fabrication.

**[00:58:00.02] - RM**

You can do everything. Boy, that's amazing. You go from the Second Narrows Bridge to a coal mine.

**[00:58:08.24] - LL**

So they put me in charge to do the fabrication there.

**[00:58:11.26] - RM**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Do you know anything about the strike? It was quite a bitter strike, was it not? Yes. And safety was a big factor because the bridge was stretching across the road, right?

**[00:58:23.13] - LL**

That's what the company say.

**[00:58:24.29] - RM**

Yes, yes.

**[00:58:26.03] - LL**

That's right. They tried to force the strike over. That was quite safe otherwise.

**[00:58:32.07] - RM**

Were you on the side of the workers on that strike?

**[00:58:34.29] - LL**

I was not part of nobody. I just stay off.

**[00:58:39.06] - RM**

But you had sympathy for the workers? You had some sympathy for the workers trying to improve things?

**[00:58:46.09] - LL**

I don't know what you mean.

**[00:58:47.27] - RM**

Well, the workers were on strike. You knew some of these guys.

**[00:58:51.10] - LL**

Yeah, I knew them all.

**[00:58:52.20] - RM**

Did you feel that maybe— did you have some sympathy for them and felt that maybe they were right in this strike?

**[00:58:59.00] - LL**

I was at the hospital and I was—

**[00:59:00.26] - CL**

Did you agree with the strike or not?

**[00:59:02.19] - RM**

Yeah, that's a good question.

**[00:59:03.15] - CL**

Do you think they—

**[00:59:04.09] - LL**

No, I did not agree.

**[00:59:06.12] - RM**

Why not?

**[00:59:07.29] - LL**

Because I was a member, Local 97, which was properly run, and they would start Ironworkers Local number 1. And those two guys who wanted to do that, I still know their names, they were renegades. I would never trust them to be in charge of the union.

**[00:59:31.22] - RM**

Was one Tommy McGrath?

**[00:59:33.10] - LL**

Tommy McGrath and Ed Edison.

**[00:59:37.17] - RM**

Yeah. Did you know Tommy McGrath?

**[00:59:39.16] - LL**

I knew them both before. I've been in some union meeting and Tommy McGrath and Edison, I never had any respect for them.

**[00:59:49.05] - RM**

You know, I like Tommy McGrath.

**[00:59:52.02] - LL**

Yeah, it's okay.

**[00:59:53.25] - RM**

I didn't have to be in his union. I just liked him.

**[00:59:57.23] - LL**

They had a nice personality, both of them.

**[01:00:00.00] - RM**

Yeah. But you think they were a bit misguided.

**[01:00:04.11] - LL**

Yeah. They were renegades.

**[01:00:09.01] - RM**

And, okay, and then the strike was settled and then the work resumed. And did I read somewhere you were the first to sort of cross, walk across the bridge? Is that right?

**[01:00:21.26] - LL**

I was not really across the bridge. One way only had a gap for the for the link of one more member, I got the operator to put the boom across the gap and I walk on the laced boom across.

**[01:00:36.19] - RM**

Wow.

**[01:00:38.05] - LL**

So I come across the first from one side to the other side. But when we put the last piece of steel, one of my men, the best man, best friend, I gave him the order to go across and make sure I had the press to come in to take his picture. I knew the time we were going to do that.

**[01:00:56.16] - CL**

The Province photographer?

**[01:00:58.04] - LL**

And I arranged that.

**[01:00:59.22] - RM**

Was that Norm Macdonald?

**[01:01:01.10] - LL**

Norm Atkinson.

**[01:01:02.19] - RM**

Who was it?

**[01:01:03.16] - LL**

Norm Atkinson.

**[01:01:05.17] - RM**

Oh, Norm Atkinson, yes, yes, yes, yes, exactly right. I talked to him. He was 88 when I did my article for the Globe and Mail. He was a terrific guy.

**[01:01:14.27] - LL**

My best friend. When I came to BC I was sent to Prince Rupert on the pulp mill there. And there's a guy, he come in the pickup truck to pick me at the plane there, and he became my friend forever. And I made him a foreman and the superintendent he was. I went to his funeral. That was my best friend.

**[01:01:38.20] - RM**

And you went through the collapse together.

**[01:01:41.10] - LL**

Yeah.

**[01:01:41.22] - RM**

Yeah, it was a miracle he survived. He talked about hitting the bottom, just like you did. And then he just saw the light of the sun coming through the water at the top, and he thought, I'm going to be saved.

**[01:01:54.22] - LL**

We don't really see the sun, we just see a ray, a ray of light.

**[01:02:00.14] - RM**

And that's life.

**[01:02:01.19] - LL**

So we know which way to go. Don't go down deeper.

**[01:02:07.01] - RM**

That's another thing, it reminds me. I mean, one of the things you've talked about is all the mud and how dark it was down there.

**[01:02:14.03] - LL**

Well, when the bridge hit the bottom of it, there's still the mud. So there was dark, dark, dark. You could see nothing.

**[01:02:22.21] - RM**

What was it like that time when you did go up, did that crossing of the bridge? Not what Norm Macdonald [Atkinson] did, but when you did it, what were you feeling?

**[01:02:32.28] - LL**

I was very proud of myself. That was an achievement. And it was an honor to do that. But I was going to say the word. I got reprimed for that.

**[01:02:47.09] - CL**

Reprimanded.

**[01:02:48.21] - RM**

Really? Why did they reprimand you?

**[01:02:52.02] - LL**

I shouldn't have done that. That was not safe.

**[01:02:56.16] - RM**

And you believed in safety.

**[01:03:00.08] - LL**

To me, that was safe. I did it and I came back.

**[01:03:03.12] - RM**

So you didn't reprimand yourself?

**[01:03:08.21] - LL**

The engineering department and the superintendent, they blamed me. I shouldn't have done that.

**[01:03:17.12] - RM**

I read somewhere, it's actually in this book, you formed this club, the Order of the Prudent Penguins.

**[01:03:24.23] - LL**

Yeah.

**[01:03:25.09] - RM**

Tell me about that.

**[01:03:27.04] - LL**

Anybody who wear a life jacket, who use it and survive, will belong a club, the Penguin.

**[01:03:36.19] - RM**

And whose idea was that?

**[01:03:39.01] - LL**

That was a company that sell the life jacket.

**[01:03:43.16] - RM**

Oh, really?

**[01:03:44.15] - LL**

Which had nobody on it.

**[01:03:47.21] - RM**

But that was an important thing to wear life jackets.

**[01:03:52.01] - LL**

Yeah. That was a must.

**[01:03:53.18] - RM**

Yeah, but not everybody did wear the life jackets before the collapse, right? Did some of the workers not wear a life jacket?

**[01:04:02.14] - LL**

Every time you work on the water, that was a must.

**[01:04:05.11] - RM**

Even then in 1957?

**[01:04:08.08] - LL**

Before that.

**[01:04:10.08] - RM**

Yeah. So one of the things that you've done obviously since you retired and people have paid, they've paid more attention to the the Second Narrows collapse, you always go to the ceremony that they hold.

**[01:04:24.18] - LL**

To the memorial.

**[01:04:25.24] - RM**

The memorial. Why do you keep going back?

**[01:04:30.27] - LL**

It's a — not a responsibility, but I don't have the right word.

**[01:04:38.06] - RM**

You feel that you owe it?

**[01:04:40.06] - LL**

Yeah. That's for respect for the ones that lost their life and their family.

**[01:04:45.14] - LL**

Make sure we don't forget them. The same as the war, on the armistice for the soldier, so that the same, they risk their life to build a beautiful bridge for your community. So I go there for respect for the— not the men no more, they're dead— but their family that's still alive.

**[01:05:06.01] - RM**

And have you got to know some of the families?

**[01:05:09.06] - LL**

Most of them.

**[01:05:09.28] - RM**

Yeah, yeah.

**[01:05:11.07] - LL**

They come to me. Some I knew before, lots of them I knew their family before, their wife.

**[01:05:20.08] - RM**

And as you know, you're the last person that was on the bridge that's still with us. How do you feel about that?

**[01:05:30.04] - LL**

I'm very proud of that. I got the privilege to have interview with you, see?

**[01:05:39.19] - RM**

The highlight of your life [laughter].

**[01:05:42.11] - LL**

To have both of you here today asking question.

**[01:05:47.23] - RM**

One thing that I saw that you said one time is that what happened was a motivation for the rest of your life. Do you remember saying that? That it kind of motivated you? Maybe more attention to safety or to never forget those people?

**[01:06:07.03] - LL**

More attention to safety for sure. Like on the bridge, there's not only you fall off the bridge, there's so many things. Like on those cuts, we had to get rubber hose for the impact wrench and we got rope on top to tie the float. So if somebody move a hose like this, they can kick you right off. We have to watch for that running cable. One guy, there was a coiler cable on the bridge and he managed to touch it and the coil come out on his leg. He get thrown over the bridge and die.

Same as a hose. You don't pull your hose without looking at it. You may throw somebody overboard with that. And the oxygen acetylene, make sure that was tagged properly because because that's dangerous.

**[01:06:56.24] - RM**

Did you know everyone that went down that day?

**[01:06:59.15] - LL**

Yes.

**[01:07:00.17] - RM**

Including the guy that was in the cabin of the train?

**[01:07:04.15] - LL**

The operating engineer, Mr. McLean.

**[01:07:06.20] - RM**

Yeah. He had a terrible time.

**[01:07:09.29] - LL**

Yeah. They tried to get him out, but it was too late.

**[01:07:13.18] - RM**

Yeah. That's the one that—

**[01:07:15.04] - LL**

He was the guy running the locomotive. So I knew him. Every day he come with a load.

**[01:07:22.28] - RM**

What were you feeling when they changed the name of the bridge to the Ironworkers Memorial Bridge?

**[01:07:27.14] - LL**

That was a very nice thing. Feel good. That's our bridge.

**[01:07:35.06] - RM**

Did you ever think that would happen?

**[01:07:37.11] - LL**

Never. I was there that day when the Premier of BC helped us to change. We asked for all that. He agreed with it.

**[01:07:49.28] - RM**

Was it emotional? Yeah.

**[01:07:52.00] - LL**

That became our bridge.

**[01:07:54.13] - RM**

Yeah. Well, and now it's the Ironworkers Memorial Bridge.

**[01:07:58.26] - LL**

It is, yeah.

**[01:07:59.23] - RM**

With all the traffic.

**[01:08:01.01] - LL**

And I am an Ironworker. Like what you say something a minute ago, I am known as the last survivor of the bridge collapse. That's not the way I want to be known. I want to be known as a successful ironworker who helped building that country. I was the top ironworker on the union here.

**[01:08:28.24] - RM**

What do you want to say about iron workers? What are they like? What are iron workers like? What's good about them?

**[01:08:34.25] - LL**

That's a tough breed of guy. Because that's dangerous. And we go put bridge, Fort Nelson on the Yukon, on the thirty below zero weather on the ice, in the canoe. If it rain or snow or cold or wind, we still on the job up in the air. Not everybody wants to do that. Matter of fact, after the bridge came down, some of the men that survived, their wife didn't want them to be an iron worker anymore. They went on different trade or way of living.

**[01:09:15.05] - RM**

That's right, because not everybody went back to the bridge. It was just too much.

**[01:09:20.27] - LL**

Mostly their wife, not the guy. The guy did come back, but their wife say, 'Oh,[shakes head].' Me on the bridge, I didn't have a choice.

**[01:09:33.18] - RM**

And I was at the last ceremony and you had what they call the Iron Rose. Do you want to explain, talk about that?

**[01:09:41.29] - LL**

That was one of my daughters, Heidi. She bought a real rose and said that's to remember the life lost on that bridge. Now the rose, they don't last very long. So the Ironworkers had one made, a mill. They might pass that to the new generation, to new generation bridge men.

**[01:10:07.17] - CL**

The roots in the history of the Rose for the Bridge goes back a little bit further. Before there was an official memorial, the guys would meet and throw roses over the bridge for those that lost their lives.

**[01:10:22.11] - RM**

That's really interesting. Do you remember that, throwing roses into the water? But other people would do that.

**[01:10:29.20] - CL**

That's the story that came down.

**[01:10:31.20] - RM**

Didn't Stompin' Tom Connors do a song about the collapse of the Second Narrows Bridge and talks about the roses going into the water?

**[01:10:39.01] - CL**

Yes.

**[01:10:39.23] - RM**

Do you know Stompin' Tom Connors' song? It's a famous song, Lou. Kidding. And Jimmy Dean wrote a story, did a song about. What did you think of Jimmy Dean's song? Remember it?

**[01:10:53.25] - LL**

No.

**[01:10:54.15] - RM**

Big Steel Coming Down or something like that. He got a lot of details wrong. He was an American country singer.

**[01:11:02.18] - LL**

Well, maybe I forgot about that.

**[01:11:04.14] - RM**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, this is terrific. And do you miss being a— do you miss working?

**[01:11:10.27] - LL**

Oh yeah, I'd like to be there again.

**[01:11:13.28] - RM**

Okay, I'll just I'll just ask you a last time, what did you like so much about it? Because it's not for everybody.

**[01:11:20.15] - LL**

It's in your blood, I guess. Somebody like to be a nurse, you like to do what you're doing, she like to do what she's doing. So it's something you want.

**[01:11:33.28] - RM**

Do you have a message for younger Ironworkers?

**[01:11:36.13] - LL**

Pardon?

**[01:11:37.05] - RM**

Do you have a message for younger Ironworkers?

**[01:11:40.05] - LL**

Keep doing the same.

**[01:11:42.12] - RM**

We need them.

**[01:11:44.00] - LL**

We need you.

**[01:11:45.13] - RM**

And you're proud of the role you played in building BC.

**[01:11:48.15] - LL**

And I'm glad that you have— the new apprentice became foreman, general foreman, and so on. Union member. And the guy, that union, the one we have now, they're so terrific. That union, Paul and this guy, Doug, they handling million-dollar business there. There used to be nothing. And they're real businessmen. You see the new hall they have there and the facility for the apprentices.

Those guys did something that's never been done before here or in the States. They're the first union to do that. Plus now the apprentice used to come from town miles away, pay their room and board to be an apprentice. Now they take the welding, they took that to their door front.

**[01:12:48.18] - RM**

Wow. So things are better.

**[01:12:50.19] - LL**

Those two guys are real smart people.

**[01:12:54.18] - RM**

So Lucien, you've had quite a life. An orphan, to this, you know, this life as an iron worker where you supervised and were all these different projects. So that's quite, quite remarkable. Do you ever think about your old days when you were just young and an orphan and not knowing what you were going to do?

**[01:13:17.07] - LL**

Never thought about that at all.

**[01:13:18.16] - RM**

Yeah, but it's pretty amazing. You must be pretty proud of yourself.

**[01:13:23.11] - LL**

I had a busy life. I accomplished pretty well everything I wanted.

**[01:13:28.12] - RM**

Including this interview.

**[01:13:29.25] - LL**

Including this interview.

**[01:13:32.02] - RM**

Thank you.

