

Diana Matthews Interviewing Chris Wren. ON April 10th I went to the home of Chris Wren At 36 Concession Road, Fort Erie. The interview started at 2:00 p.m. and lasted for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

D.M: Hi Chris, can you give me your full name?

C.R: Christopher Thomas Wren.

D.M: How long have you lived in Fort Erie?

C.R: Since 1929.

D.M: How old are you now?

C.R: Seventy-six.

D.M: I've been told you know quite a bit about the Peace Bridge, what can you tell me about it?

C.R: Well, I remember when they opened the bridge, I was going to school in Hamilton and I was picked in a school choir to sing for the Prince of Wales as he came down to open it. He and the motorcade went through Hamilton and I was one of the two students from the school who sang in the choir. Today I can't sing a note, but in those days I could!

D.M: Were you there when it was being built?

C.R: No, I was in Hamilton. The bridge was built and completed before I came to Fort Erie. When I came to Fort Erie the Peace Bridge was the only employer that was..... had anybody working and that was the Customs and Immigration and the bridge maintenance. The railroads were flat, the town was in a complete depression, it had gone bankrupt. There was no Welfare, there was no Relief and that was tough times. We haven't got anywhere near that now, nowhere near. Many and many a day I'd go out on calls, I worked for the Power Company. I'd go into a house and there'd be a family there, the children would have a potato and a glass of water for their breakfast. The mother and father, a young couple, would be tearing their hair out, they didn't know what to do. Everybody lost their homes, mortgages, taxes, but nobody claimed them, so they lived in them. There was no way they could put them out, they had no place to go. Invariably I'd have.....I would buy groceries when I went to a home and saw the conditions, and I had a boss who was W.D. Brown, He was managing at the Power Company and I'd go in and tell him the situation I'd run into and he'd say What did you do about it? Well I said I went down to the grocery store and had the grocer take them up five dollars worth of groceries and not tell them where it came from. He'd reach in his pocket and hand me two-fifty and that happened four or five times a week all during the winter of 1929. As I say the Customs Officers

in those days were getting 80 dollars a month, that was their pay. They were working, the Immigration was working and the Peace Bridge was operating. Other than that I don't think there was anything moving in Fort Erie. They owned coal bins because there was no heat the way it is now. They heated with coal furnaces and coal stoves. Some of them owed as much as 800 dollars for coal. My orders were back in those days if it was a little job to charge a dollar and if it was a big job, two dollars. But if I didn't think they could pay for it, not to charge them at all. So there was very very few charges that I made during 1929 and 1930. The whole town was completely flat, completely. Nobody knew what to do. The Ontario Government gave the town so much a month to keep it going. They had no money at all. They couldn't pay out no Welfare, they had no Relief, they had no way to get anything. The Power Company and the Gas Company were working because we had to supply electricity and they had to supply gas. Other than that this town was a complete railroad town. The whole town depended on the railroad, and it was flat.

D.M: When did the railroad stop coming through Fort Erie?

C.R: Well, it's still going through Fort Erie but it's..... There's no passenger station now. I don't know. I haven't hauled that up, it's been years and years since they took both the C.N.R. and the T.H.&B. station out. They had the C.N.R. on one side of the tracks and the Canadian Pacific or the T.H.&B. on the other side of the tracks. There was nothing doing at all on the railroad. The trains weren't moving, not a thing.

D.M: What did you do for entertainment?

C.R: There wasn't much you could do. You'd go to Buffalo. That was the only place you could go. They had a few dances around and things like that, socials with the Lions Club. They were the predominant club in Fort Erie at that time. We formed the Junior Chamber of Commerce back in those days and I was appointed on a committee to rebuild the arena. The old arena had caved in with a snowstorm that winter, and we started out to get it rebuilt and it was a job! I opened my mouth and said something and so they appointed me the chairman of the arena committee. Fortunately I had a The vice president of the committee of Niagara Falls was John Lawson who owned the Niagara Falls Junior Flyers. He was quite interested in hockey and he told me to use all the time I wanted to get the arena going, and we had one awful job. I interviewed I guess five or six people in Fort Erie, managers of firms, to ask them to take over chairmanship

of the arena committee and we couldn't get anybody. Finally it was suggested that I go to Walter Deitcher who knew aircraft and he took it hook, line and sinker. He was the chairman of the committee. I spent three solid months in his office every day from nine to five organizing and getting the thing going. We raised enough..... We raised quite a bit of money but we didn't have enough. The superintendent of Horton Steel, McMurtrie, was president of the Lions Club and he got together the cohorts and he was able to get the town to put so much money in a debenture and they would guarantee it. With his help we were able to get the building up and got the building reconstructed, that was the first arena that was built. When we built it, it was a tin shell made by a company that builds steel buildings and it was guaranteed to stand winds up to 100 m.p.h. For some reason or other they condemned it after a few years and had to rebuild another one. But that first one..... When we got the arena built, we run out of money before we had any lights in it. I put the lights in the building as a donation to them. I think it cost me around 1800 dollars to put the lights in at the time, and they had no money to pay me so that was my donation to the arena to get it going. We had many many events in that arena. We put on a industrial show in there and we had people from Ottawa come down here and told us that they never saw anything like it. We had Strong Cobb Arner in town at that time and they were making pills and they came up there and set up machinery and made candies for the kids, pouring them out by the bushel load. We had very good success with that arena. I remember the chap that managed it, we met, Louie Ziff was the mayor at the time. We met in his office and a fellow name of Zieg Smith he was a radio announcer at WGR and he lived at Erie Beach. He came down with a proposition that he'd manage the arena. He wouldn't take any money until they cleared ten thousand dollars over top of all expenses. And when they got to twenty thousand, he'd get fifty percent. Now this was twenty percent clear profit, and then he'd get up to seventy percent if he got around thirty thousand. Well we all looked at him and we had to give him the job because we couldn't see how he's gonna clear ten thousand dollars over paying off the debenture the town had quoted for the thing, the operating expenses and that. But he was up in the fifty percent bracket. He really made that thing go. We had teams coming from all over the United States, North Carolina, came up here to practice here. The motels, the Hotel Fort Erie was packed, all the hotels and that were packed for the training period. He really made that arena go.

D.M: Is it still standing?

C.R: No, that's where the present arena is now. They condemned the building and the town then was financially able to rebuild another arena. I don't know that they got any better, we had the same ice service that they have today and they just put a new building around it. We only built a tin shell. But it got us by and we had very very good success with it. We paid the town back, paid the debenture off and got everything clear within three years. Something that very few people know and I was fortunate that I worked for the Power Company and my boss told me to forget the Power Company and get the arena built, and as I say I spent every day up there, we'd go down, we'd have our lunch in the executive dining room at 12 o'clock and back up there 'til five. Nine o'clock the next morning. I was there three solid months. I remember saying to Walter Dietcher one day, Walter, what do you do here? What do you mean? I said well there's a door coming from the General Office in there, here's the door I come in, the front door, I said now I don't see a soul in here but you and I all day long. You don't sign a paper, you don't do anything. Oh, he said, this place runs itself. He was so enthusiastic about it he was able to raise quite a bit of money. When we came to time of setting a quota what we were gonna do, I said to my boss, what'll we do, how will we start this? Well he said I'll start it rolling for you. We have so many employees here and I'll donate three thousand dollars. Now if we've got thirty employees, that's a hundred dollars apiece. Now we set that as a standard for the rest of the industry, which we tried to get out of all the industry that we went around to. We had some very sport minded people then, George Straton of the Mentholatum and McMurtrie at Horton Steel and it was Walter Dietcher at the Fleet Aircraft, John Lawson at our own company and through their efforts we really got the thing going. Now I remember that you were talking about the Peace Bridge, that thing was built like a fort when it was first built, the towers, the concrete towers all around it, I remember that when I first came to town, but it seemed that every few years they had to make some changes and I was in on the renovation of about three different times that they redone all the buildings and rewired the place and those contractors used to run anywhere from 700 thousand to a million dollars for the general contracts when they made their changes. The Peace Bridge always made money! That was an asset, good business. Mr. Bayer in Buffalo was the man that financed it and the understanding was that at the end of 70 years he would hand it over to Governments, free. No strings attached to it, which he did. The Canadian Government has one side and the American

Government has the other side. The American Government get their money, they send it back to the city of Buffalo and they have their say on that end and the Canadian side, Fort Erie, don't get no money. They get so much in lieu of taxes. The Federal Government takes it all and gives Fort Erie peanuts out of it. Why they don't give the same thing in Fort Erie as they do in Buffalo I don't know. It's been a very very good thing for Fort Erie, it's supplied them an awful lot of work, an awful lot of work, both Customs, Immigration and truckers. I think we're the second port next to Detroit as far as traffic is concerned.

D.M: You said you had been to Erie Beach, can you tell me something about that?

C.R: Erie Beach? I vaguely..... I came down two or three times from Hamilton and went up to Erie Beach. It was an amusement park, similar to Crystal Beach, and when the owner died, I forget what his name was now.....Bardol. When Bardol died his sister-in-law ran the business and the boys who owned Crystal Beach bought them out and took everything that was any good up to Crystal Beach. They only left the foundations and the railroad, Fort Erie Snake Hill and Pacific, remember that? Running up along the riverfront had an engineer and a fireman and he'd stoke up the fire and go back and he was the conductor! It had three little cars on it and it run from the ferry up to Erie Beach. When the Peace Bridge come through that knocked that for a loop because the Peace Bridge went right over the railroad and old W.F. Wilson was one of the prime factors in getting the bridge through as far as the Canadian end was concerned, he was a very strong Liberal and the Liberals were in power at that time and he was working at the Canadian end of it. That was Ray Wilsons father, the lawyer that just recently died. And he had.....There was three Customs Brokers in Fort Erie, W.F. Wilson, Smeaton was the other one and Duke McIntyre. Today there's about a hundred of 'em out there! There were just the three of them. W.F. Wilson built that big building up there, he was the first one. They more or less worked out of their homes or little shacks down on the Boulevard, that's where they had their offices, if you could call 'em offices and they uh..... W.F. built this building that's up there today and he was one of the originals, the only original that's left.

D.M: Do you remember when the park closed?

C.R.: No, the park was closed when I came to Fort Erie. I had come from Hamilton. In those days it was an awful long trip to come from Hamilton to Fort Erie. By the time you drove from Hamilton to Fort Erie, you had about two hours in the park and you went back home again because it took six or seven hours to make the trip from here to Hamilton. There was no highways, it was all stone roads and the cars were lucky, if you had a good car you could make the hills and get up and down and get this far! There was very few cars on the roads in those days, you didn't have to worry about traffic, all you had to worry about was horses, horse and buggies, they'd rear up when a car come along. But uh..... I remember going up there, as I say we only spent a couple of hours there and then we headed back for home. They had a ferris wheel and the figure eight and a few things and they had a big dance hall up there and that sat out there, out in the lake. The foundations for that are still out in the lake. But uh.... it wasn't doing much business at that time, when the Peace bridge come over, they'd come over the bridge and go up to Crystal Beach. Otherwise the people used come over on the ferry and get on the train and go up there, there was no cars, people didn't have automobiles back in those days.

I was gonna say that The Old Fort is something that should be looked into. I don't know why it hasn't been thought of. It's the only American Fort in the British Empire. It's not no longer the British Empire but in those days it was and when the war finished the British gave the Americans Fort Niagra, the Americans give the Canadians Fort Erie. Now they uh.... The British attacked Fort Erie and in the process of the attack, as the British soldiers were going over the walls into the fort, a British shell hit the ammunition dump and blew it. It killed everybody in the fort and all surrounding the fort. They just took all the bodies, dug a hole and threw them in the ground. Both British and Americans. They could tell the different ones when they dug them up and replanted them. The buttons on their uniforms were brass and they were still there. They could tell who was British and who was American. Now why somebody don't think to set the Fort up as a tourist attraction, which was one of the best in the whole continent I think. If they set that up..... It's an American Fort because it's built in the shape of a star and that's the way they built their Forts. The British built

their Forts square or round, they didn't have any..... if you look at that fort you'll see it's exactly as a star. It was advertised in that way, an American fort. I think the tourist traffic would be terrific. People come up and don't know it's there. There should be more advertising to it and things like that. I think the.... I'm sure the Park Commision, who operate the fort, will coöperate with anybody that wants to do something about it. It would be one of the better things, I think it would..... in the summer time it would create a lot of employment. Niagra Falls New York was where the British..... see they were in the United States, they had the fort over there and the Americans were in Fort Erie and they had the fort here. And, as I say, during the peace negotiations, they just traded forts. The British gave the Americans Fort Niagra on the American side and they gave us Fort Erie. The fort is still there, the same original shape it was. I think there would be somebody in the Niagra Park Commision who would give you a great deal of history on it, who knows it. Why it's not used as a tourist attraction, with just that one end of it, the Americans would be awful pleased to come over here and see an American fort. I think as a tourist attraction it would be terrific. I don't know why it hasn't been done.

As far as the Peace Bridge, if you've read Al's [Spear] book, Al made a complete study of the bridge, complete. He's in a position that he knows, being manager of the bridge he can get all the information that you want. Al's a real smart, smart, he's a smart boy. I remember when he was managing Lucidol in Fort Erie.

D.M: What's that?

C.R: Lucidol Chemical on the Garrison Road at the railroad tracks. He managed that when he made the application and got this job on the bridge. I asked him I said what training did you have? And he said none whatsoever. He said they hired an employment agency in Hamilton to interview the candidates and he said I went down and he said I got the job. He got it on his own merits. If you've...I would say if you read his book and if there's any information you need, I would talk to Al. He's the type of fellow that will coöperate with you and be very very good and sincere with you on it. He'll help you out alot. Other than that I can tell you they've done an awful lot of building and rebuilding at both ends of the bridge and they've spent millions of dollars and when Joe French was the manager he always wanted a Fort Erie contractor to get the job, and Archie

McGlashon had the job for years and years and years, he did all the renovating jobs, and just before... just as we were finishing up the last job Archie did, he dropped over dead. Joe French said well the bridge will take over and finish it, we had about two or three weeks to go to finish the job, which we did. Another fellow that could tell you an awful lot about the bridge is Butch Belleperche. You know Butch? Butch was superintendent of maintenance on the bridge, he knows the history of the bridge real well. He's on Injury Retirement now, has been for a few years. His wife is Al's secretary and if you get a if you called Butch Belleperche and could make an appointment, go up and see him some evening or sometime after 5 o'clock when his wife's home from work, she's still working on the bridge, still's Al's secretary, between the two of them they'd give you an awful lot of history on the bridge, because she's worked in the managers office up there for years and years and years, and Butch was superintendent on the bridge and he knows it from soup to nuts, inside out, both sides, the American side and the Canadian side. That will be where you'll get more information on the bridge than anybody that I can think of. Other than Al Spear who made a complete study of it.

D.M: What can you tell me about Crystal Beach?

C.R: Well, when the Halls owned it, it was a very thriving business. They used to have a big dance hall there and all the big name bands from the United States used to come over there.

D.M: Which bands?

C.R: Oh, I forget the name of 'em. But all the big name bands, I don't know who could tell you the names of them because I didn't pay too much attention but I know I seen them when they came over. One band leader that was killed in the war, he was flying over to entertain the troops over there and his plane got shot down over Germany, he played here, there was quite a few big bands, big name bands. I don't know who.... I'm just trying to think of who could talk to you about Crystal Beach, I don't know..... Halls, I don't know them at all, I knew the Bardols but I didn't know the Halls.

D.M: Tell me about the Bardols.

C.R: Well Bardol had a home at the corner of Helena and the road along the lake...Edgemere. They had a big, big white frame house, it's still there. Well there was three boys, unfortunately, shortly after

the old man died, one son committed suicide, and the other son became a confirmed alcoholic. He lived a long time, his home was built on the lakeshore right at the end of Albert Street. If you drove down you hit his home. He was the last, there's Ed and Bob. Ed built a home on Thunder Bay Road which that hockey player out of Boston, you remember the fellow that drank himself out of a job? He bought that home. 750,000 dollars, it's Sanderson. Played for Boston. He had a fortune. He made it playing hockey and he blew everything. He went right down to the very bottom, I think he's still alive. But Ed died, the one boy committed suicide and Bob, he just drank himself to death

D.M: Did you know Mr. Bardol when he owned Erie Beach?

C.R: I never met.... never met him, nope he was never around. I met his wife, Mrs, Bardol, I knew her. But his wifes sister or his sister, no. It was Mr. Bardol's wifes sister, she ran Erie Beach Company after.... they still had their company, they didn't sell out the company they just sold all the amusements. I put a refridgerator in there, I remember I had to have about eight men put it in, it weighed over a ton. It was a four door, 18 cubic foot refridgerator, I'll never forget that, when we went over that porch we had to put planks down so we didn't break the side porch going in. Yeah, that was a beautiful home when they had it, oh boy. Did you go in there after Knox moved out? They had quite a settlement out there. Herb Milch was a lawyer over in Buffalo, and just at the back here old Jake Blakefield had a place, he was a ragman! He bought all the stuff the schineys picked up.

D.M: The what?

C.R: Schineys we used to call them.

D.M: What's that?

C.R: Used to go round hollering any old rags, bottles. They'd chant on this wagon as they drove around with their horses, call out on the street as they were going down if you had any old bottles, rags or bones or anything, they would take all the garbage and then they'd take it and sell it to these junk dealers. Jake Blakefield was a ...his father had a junkyard over in Buffalo. We used to call them schineys! They were nearly all Jews. They were running this rag business, junk business as it was called. They must have made good money because those homes along the lakeshore ain't no cheap homes, Some of them are quite valuable. I remember one night I had to

go up there and wire a yard, one of the yards up there for a doctor. Herb Milch was a lawyer and it was his brother-in-law and he was having this party, he was..... we wired up the back yard and oh boy what a wearing job and I said to him at the time, now how do you want this, do you want this put in so it will last? No no, tomorrow morning you can take it all out. So we temporarily wired it in order to get some light, and he had everybody come out to his house to this party and they all got out of their cars and he hired busses and he took them up to Crescent Park to where that chinese restaurant is now, the big one on the right hand side, The May Wah? He took 'em up there and they had drinks and something to eat up there and then he brought 'em back. He had a two car garage and the bartender from the Statler Hotel. He had a bar in there and oh what a party. The next morning we went up to take the stuff out and he said well I want it left in. I says we'll have to take it and put it in over again if you want that lighting back in, I said I asked you if you wanted it in permanantly and you said no. Well I said I just wired it temporarily, just for the night and that party went on 'til about four or five o'clock in the morning. The lawyer, I was good friends with the lawyer, he told me, he said he spent over 15,000 dollars on that party. He rented a piano from the Statler Hotel, he had all these musicians come over and he had a party, I'm telling you! He was a batchelor and he was apparently a millionaire and he was just spending his money, he spent it! Herb said to me, Chris, you never saw such a bunch of indians in all your life! He says they got drunk and they had a swimming pool there and they were throwing money in the swimming pool and the women and the men were diving in after the money with all their clothes on, all their party clothes on! He said you never saw such a bunch of hooligans in all your life! Oh what a time. I think it cost him nearly a thousand dollars to light the back yard up, just temporarily and take it all out the next day. He had the waiter, the head waiter from the Statler and all the different places. They had no water up in Erie Beach you know they had.... they all had to pump their own water, and I was sitting on the Fort Erie Council for a couple of years, Herb Milch come to me and he said we'd like somebody to get water up there, so, he was a lawyer and he knew all the finiggeling and what to do and he said We'll pay for everything Chris, we don't want it for nothing, we'll pay. Well, there was no

water in Erie Beach at this time, on Albert Street and in through that area and we would have to go through there, so then we had to go across Bardol's property and he owned from Bardol I think it is to the street on the other side if Albert, he owned all that vacant property in there and they didn't want to spend the money cause it was nearly three quarters of a mile of water main that had to be run through there, it had to be paid for. So Herb says well Erie Beach Association, we'll pay for it. So they paid for the water line to go through there and they said what if the people in Erie Beach, there was a poor degraded area down there, what if they don't pay their bills? He says we'll take care of any deficiencies that you have. So they of course were all millionaires in there and they didn't worry about it and I got a I got the water line through and he came down and he said Chris now he said I want to take the Fort Erie Council over to McVans Night Club, he said now, he said the parties on me. You take it..... I think there was 12 or 13 of us went over. And in this night club he gave us a table right next to the stage and everything you want, everything you wanted was there. They started out and they ordered drinks, well it took the girl, I think there was 19 of us sitting around the table, it took her quite a while to come back so then they'd order doubles, then they were ordering triples, when it come time to eat, they all looked at me because I was the instigator to get the thing going, you see? So I picked the most expensive meal on the menu out, well then they started! The bill was over 800 dollars for the night. And he said to me Chris if you don't get them drunk and get them stuffed so that they can't move, he says I'll kick you all over Fort Erie, he says now you make sure they do. When we went out the owner of the night club, I forget his name, McVans it was, but it was a Jew that owned it, and Nels met us at the doorway at 3o'clock in the morning, half past three in the morning when we left. We sat through three shows..... and they shook hands with everybody and he made sure thateverybody was well satisfied before we left. What a party we had that night! The only time we'd had a party like that in our life before. I don't know what he paid for that, it must have cost him close to two thousand dollars for the night.

D.M: When was this?

C.R: I..I forget now. I sat in the council for two years and I forget when I was on there. Must be thirty years ago. Skip Howe was the Mayor

I remember, you wouldn't know Skip Howe I suppose. HE was an insurance agent in Fort Erie. Broadly.... you know Sargent Broadly that just retired off the police force, his father was on there. Al Currant was a Custom Officer, Phil Duncan a railroad man. Doc Reid was a veterinary surgeon, used to be at the carner of Main and Concession, Main and Concession, yeah, he uh..... I think it's still a veterinary hospital isn't it, at the corner? Old Doc Reid, he married Cannon Bert's daughter, Cannon Bert of the Anglican Church. Bill and I, we represented him, we were in one, we were in war one, he and I. We were the two representatives. What a time we had in that council. When I stop to think now, they don't.... they're ashamed of what they're doing, they go into committee all the time. Always going into committee. I went.... When I sat in that council we had only one night that we went into committee and the fellow that was in X-rays at the hospital, his daughter was 15 years old. She got out one night and she got pregnant and he came down to the town to see if he could get some assistance. So I got up and said I think in this case we should go into committee. She was only a little girl 15 years old and I said I don't think we should discuss this in public. So we went into committee on it and that was the only time that we didn't bring the facts and figures out for everybody, we never had any trouble. They have at these council meetings, calling the police in to get them out and everything else. We never had that kind of thing. We had fellows there that were doing under the table tricks, we'd bring it right out in the council meeting. I remember one night I said to Bill Duncan, I said Bill, will you take the cards out from under the table and put them on the top so we can all see them? He wanted to sell a piece of property up the Gilmore Road here. You know where the industrial park is now? Well from Warren Street all the way up to the..... there's a big vacant field and somebody came over here looking for the property to buy it to put up a plant and he wanted to know what we wanted it for and Duncan, he got wind of it see, and he was gonna have somebody buy this property and he'd sell it to them. He was gonna buy it for 600 dollars, that whole great big block of ground, for 600 bucks. I said, I'll sell the property for a dollar if the man will build a plant here, and I said I'll give him the dollar to pay fot it, if he'd build

a plant, but I said I won't sell it..... I said what are you gonna do with it? Somebodies gonna graze sheep on it. They weren't gonna graze sheep on it. They were gonna but it for peanuts and sell it to this person and make some money on it, so anyway, the deal fell through, it never, never developed but as I say, all our business meetings, any time we went to council, everything was discussed in open. We didn't have peoplr coming to our meetings, there wasn't any people interested in coming out. But one man I remember, the night manager of the Royal Bank, sometimes he'd be the only man there. He was at every council meeting we ever had. He sat right at the rail. When the Mayor would ask if anybody had anything to say, he'd never open his mouth, never say a word. He'd just sit there and watch what we did. Of course our bank account was in the Royal Bank. I guess he was, he was quite a smart man, he got promoted well up in the bank, the Royal Bank, before he got finished. I can't understand the way they operate now, I can't..... if they're elected by the people, why they don't discuss the peoples problems in public, why do they have to go in hiding? I can't see that at all, I don't know why they do it.

D.M: What can you tell me about the blizzard of 1939?

C.R: 1939, uh-huh. I happen to be sitting on the council at that time and I was chairman of the streets..... and the Mayor Skip Howe called me New Years morning, 2 o'clock, and he said Chris, you're the new chairman of the streets. He said there's 7 feet of snow on the ground, both plows are broken down, now get the town cleaned up, and he hung up the phone. So I got my snowshoes..... I went down to the and got my snowshoes out and I remember seeing a bunch of cleat tracks at Horton Steel. So there was about 30 men in Horton Steel, they were stuck there, they couldn't get home, they were in the plant and I got up there and I said Mac, what about using some of these cleat tracks? He said I haven't got no blades. I said gee whiz. There wasn't a thing moving, nothing moving.

D.M: What's a cleat track?

C.R: These bulldozers with the.... that they use for hauling stuff around. But they had no blades, they were just used for moving machinery. So I said, well Mac, I said, how about taking the plow off one of the trucks and putting it on the front? No, he said, we can't do that. I said well how about pushing the truck? He said okay, we could do that, but he said how are we gonna connect it up? So we

thought for a while and we called Walter Deitcher at the Fleet, he had about, oh, 30 or 40 men in there, they were stuck, they couldn't get out. So we called him up and he was stuck in the office, he couldn't get out so we said how about making a bar, can you make us a bar out of airplane steel to push the truck? Yeah, sure, okay. So I said fine. Jimmy Flake, that's Jimmy's old man now, his father, he said he'd drive the truck, he'd drive the cleat track, no winshield on it, nothing, just sat on the seat in the wide open. So we went down on one of these things, I stood in the back of it and we went down and we got the truck and hooked on the truck at Finches Garage, that was on where Freeland's Travel Agency is now. It was a Dodge truck and we towed it up to the Fleet and they made a bar. The Mayor, he came down and rode up in the truck. We got in the truck and I steered the truck, well we got up there, 3 o'clock in the morning we got the bar finished. We started down the road. Well, we got down Gilmore a ways, and all of a sudden the truck would go in the ditch that way and the cleat track in this way, back it up and hit it again! I looked out the window of the truck and here's all the guys from the Fleet coming down behind us. I said what in the world are they gonna do when we get to the boulevard? So, I said, I don't care what they're gonna do, when this truck hits the boulevard, I said he's gonna turn and go over to Bertie Street and get the Hospital open. Then I said he'll go across Concession and come down every other street, and back up. One track so the ambulance can go up and they can walk one block that way and one block that way. Well, that went on for, oh, 3 days. And we got the town slowly out. They called me from Toronto and the Minister there says do you need any food? We'll send down some milk and bread. I said no, there's no sense in sending us milk and bread, I said the grocery stores have all got groceries, but I said they've got 18 feet of snow on their front door. You can't get in them. I said how are they gonna get to the railroad station to get the milk and bread? I said they can't get there. I said what I want is some plows. I said how about loaning some plows? He said I got 19 plows broken down between Toronto and Fort Erie. He said I can't do a thing to help you. Well, we pushed around and we got the town cleared out pretty well, we were a long time doing it and we had to get Archie McGlashon's steam shovel. He had an old shovel there, a deep track thing and we lifted the snow and hauled it down

in trucks and dumped it in the river to get Jarvis Street open. It took a week to get the town open. Oh, it was something. And that was one storm. Then I was in the midst of the last storm we had.....
The last big storm we had.

D.M: When was that?

C.R: It was in the seventies.

D.M: '77?

C.R: No, I don't think it was '77. I could have been. I had the.... my business then and I happen to be the center station because I was in.... We dispatched all the fire companies and the fire companies were in charge of everything. During that storm.... I could see it coming, I called all the operators in and there was one girl who couldn't get in and I called the police and they went out with a cruiser and brought her in. I beat it down, I saw the storm coming so I went down to the grocery store and I bought a load of groceries, got them up in the place and we started. As we were the central station, St.Catherines called me and said we want snowmobiles to patrol the highways. He says we'd like to have 2 go up no. 3 and no. 3c and down the boulevard. So I hung up the phone and I thought where am I gonna get snowmobiles? So I called Nichols Marina and I said Blake, have you got any snowmobiles? He said no. So I called Bud Williams, I said Bud, you've got a snowmobile sitting at your place, I said we've gotta get some snowmobiles. Well, he says it;s here but I'm not gonna drive it, he says, you can have it and he said somebody will drive it. Alright so, Blake said there was a snowmobile club and they gave me a guys name and he was stuck in the Fleet that time and I called up him and I got a hold of him and he was head of some club that had disbanded, but he knew everybody had snowmobiles. I called him and he got stuck going from Fleet up to Ridge Road and he finally got home, and he called me up and within two hours he had 30 snowmobiles on the road..... and I said well alright, send 2 down no. 3 and send 2 down to Garrison, send one out to Stevensville, and what you got to look for is cars stuck to see if people are frozen. they found one woman who was 3 hours on Rosehill road and she was running her car to keep warm and her car had run out of gas, and they just got her in the nick of time. They got her in and there was a car stuck in front of Thibodeus Landscaping place on Dominion Road. And they got up and they got chains on it and they pulled it off and there was another car underneath it. He drove right up

over top he didn't know there was another car there buried in the snow! Well, we uh, finally uh, there was no electricity, you couldn't pump any gas, couldn't get gas for the snowmobiles, we had an awful time and I had an emergency lighting plant in my shop running on gasoline, it run out of gas, we had no power. The phones were all out, everything was out so I had to get my car, park it up alongside the building and hook my gastank up 'til I run that dry. Finally they was able to get gas, somebody got a road open into Stevensville, so the police went to Stevensville and brought me down five gallons of gas. And then they got power up Bertie Street to the hospital so the hospital could run.... and the fellow who had the gas station at the corner of Gilmore and Central....Or Bertie and Central and everybody was getting there cars out and they were all lined up to buy gas and you couldn't get into the place so I just called the police and I said I need gas, I gotta have gas I said I'm running out, my car will soon be out of gas. So they came over and got a five gallon can and they went up and they got me gas and brought it down and we were able to keep going. The snow was so deep, we had everybodies caterpillars and everything, all the equipment we could get and I remember up at Thunder Bay, we had to get the fellows in to drive the big bulldozers that they had at the quarry. They were operators, they were the only ones that could operate them, had to bring them in from somewhere around Kingston, but they got here and they plowed the road crosswise and they piled the snow right up over the telephone wires. One woman called me on the Thompson Road and she said the snowmobile just knocked the aerial off my roof! I said yeah, I said uh..... she said I heard the thing and tha aerial fell down, she says I can't see out, I can't get out. I said where are you located? She told me and I said well lookit I..... She said I'm fine, I got heat and I got lights and I got groceries. Yeah, I says, if something happened to you, they don't even see your house, your house is buried. I said I better have somebody come up and shovel you out, I'll get some fireman to come up and shovel you out. She says alright, but tell them there's my car sitting in the driveway and it's a brand new car, tell them not to dig into that! I said alright. So, they went up and they dug her out and she called up and she says that my chimney's knocked off! I said what kind of heat do you have, she says gas, well I said then you'll be alright, it won't hurt, I said gas don't require any draft, so you'll be okay there. I said did they get your..... Yeah, they got me plowed

out she said, they dug me out and I can see out on the street now. She couldn't see out her front door, out her windows or anything, her house was completely buried. They called me from St. Catherines and they said don't worry, we got all kinds of generators, we got a dozen of them here. I said what good are they in St. Catherines? I said the snow's right up to the top of the overpasses on the Queen Elizabeth, nothing can get through, I said what good are they in St. Catherines? They're no good to me! I said another thing, I said if we have them, we can't get gasoline to run them anyway. Well finally they called me and they said, how's your electricity in Fort Erie. I said I don't know but I'll find out, I'll call you back. So I called the Power Company and I said Harvey, I said Harvey, how's the power? He said Chris, we're hooking up the last 3 houses up in on Dominion Road near Thunder Bay, he says there's 3 houses to be connected up and we're 100 percent back in service. So I called him back and I said within half an hour, the whole town will have electricity, the whole area. Oh, I don't believe it! I said I just talked to the Power Company and they're on the last three houses now, they'll finish them up and we'll have power everywhere. I could see it coming, I could see we were going to run out of oil. There was no oil delivery, so I called the oil company that had these oil drums, used to be over here where the lumber company is. He was in Niagara Falls, I said people are gonna start running out of oil very shortly, he says Chris, I can't do nothing about it, I'm down here! I can't get out of Niagara Falls, so I'll tell you, the keys for the tank and the truck are in the meter box up there inside the fence. I said alright, so I called up the Fire Hall and I said will you bring a snowmobile over and take me up to the oil tanks there, and they said yeah. Well if you ever rode on a snowmobile, trying to hold your overcoat closed and tried to hold on to the snowmobile and those guys don't drive slow! They hit 'em wide open all the way! We went across Concession up to Gilmore and I got there and then he left me! I walked over the fence, I didn't have to climb over it, you just walked over it, the snow was right over top of the fence and I opened the meter box and I got in there and it was all full of snow and I'm digging the snow out and I can't find no keys. The snowmobile had left me up there. Oh ho was I ever cold! I had a spring coat, that was all I had on, and I got hold of one of the Passero's, he ran the restaurant in where the laundromat is now. So he came up with

his truck and brought me back down to his restaurant and I called and I said send a snowmobile over and bring me back to the office. So they did and I called Niagra Falls and I said I can't find no keys. Well, he said the driver must have them. So I called the driver and he lives on College Street at the Queen E. That's on the other side of Ridgemont Road. I called him and he says yeah, I got the keys in my pocket. I said we gotta get oil, I said people are gonna start running out of oil and we have no heat. He said alright. I says well lookit, I'll send a couple of snowmobiles out to get the keys, we couldn't send one because if one got stuck, we had to send two. He said that's fine, he said I'll come in with them. I said how are you situated? Have you got a.... you can't drive..... he says I got a snowmobile, he says I got a good one. He said just tell them to be careful of the dog when they get here. Alright, so I sent two snowmobiles out there and they got him and they brought him in. So we started..... How are we gonna get the oil around? So I called Pratt & Lamberts, I said we need five gallon cans. He said Chris, we got all kinds of them up there, but he says, I don't know how we're gonna get them, he says a couple of our men are on the Fire Department, he says tell them. Tell them to go in and help themselves. So the Fire Department went up and got the cans, we went up and we filled these five gallon cans with oil and shipped them. People called in and they had no oil so we'd send them ten gallons of oil. We had to keep doing that to keep their houses going. The Army came in with an eight wheel drive truck. The town was closed up completely. The Town Hall had nothing doing there so we billeted them there, they stayed in the Town Hall. We got them delivering oil with snowmobiles and they had about 25 men in their truck and they'd get out and when the truck would get stuck they'd shovel it out and away they'd go again! And I remember one woman, she called in.... ten gallons of oil was no good to her, she wanted a hundred gallons, and I said lady, take ten gallons and be happy, then I just hung up. Girve Fretz was the Mayor at the time and I called Girve and I said Girve, this woman here in the low renting outfit, I said she doesn't want... she wouldn't take ten gallons of oil, she wants a hundred gallons of oil. I said we're not delivering no hundred gallons of oil! I said where she's located, the snow's over eight feet deep! I said we gotta do it by snowmobile and nobody can get in there.

Now I said, if she calls you for oil, you tell her to call me. Because I said I'm not sending any oil up there, if she's not satisfied.....

We had people calling, would we go and get them cigarettes? We're out of cigarettes! I said lady, you're gonna have to quit. It's a good thing for you, I said you can quit smoking now! We had to get groceries, deliver groceries, uh oh! What a time! My girls worked, I had blankets and that, they worked around the clock. They'd go and have a sleep and come back. I brought in a whole load of groceries so we could all eat. You couldn't get out the door, you couldn't open our front door. What a time we had. They never mentioned anything about it but we were the key to the whole storm, because all the messages being connected to the radio with Niagara Falls and St. Catherines and all around there and St. Catherines would radio our place and we'd talk back and forth on the radio with them and find out what we were doing. But I guess we were two weeks before we got the traffic moving half decent. A bus was stuck on the Sodom Road and one of the big contractors, he went out in a great big bulldozer and towed the bus in, it was full of school kids, so he got them in. We didn't....nobody got seriously hurt or frozen on the deal, everybody... We were lucky, we had two or three close calls, but we got them mostly all in. But they never said anything about that, we were sitting there back, we were the Fire Department, you see, we answered all the phone calls, that was the only thing they knew about us. Then I had a..... we had an awful mess to keep the town rolling. That was two storms I went through, I went through the big one when I was on the council and I went through this one and I don't know what they'll do now. The fellow that bought my business, they tell me that he hasn't come down to see it.

D.M: Which business is that?

C.R: Wren Alarms. Now he came in and bought the thing out. I don't know what he's doing, how he's doing, I haven't..... I saw him once after I sold out and that was it.

D.M: When did you start the business?

C.R: When did he take over? Oh, I've been out now for 7 or 8 years.

D.M: No, when did you start the business?

C.R: When did I start it? Oh in about '75 I guess. I started up when Regional Government took over. Because I had my alarm panel in the police station and we got orders to take it out. I had two weeks. And Oh

boy, what a time I had there, I called Don Scott, he was chairman of the Regional Police, that's the judge that just died here a short while ago. I called Don and I went..... Don had a meeting with him and he said he couldn't do nothing, every place, he said,..... I said lookit, Niagra Falls hasn't got this type of system, they haven't got it. St. Catherines, I said , you have all kinds of an swering services, you can move them into..... I said we haven't got a thing. He says well, it has to be done. Well we started. I had two weeks. I had to buy the building, and while I'm buying that I had to start getting ready to transfer the.... my stuff from the police station over to my building, well then they had nobody to dispatch the fire companies, so I got a contract with them that I'd dispatch all the fire calls, so when you called for a fire, it goes into my place, it don't go into the town at all. It goes into my place and we have radios and everything there and we radio the fire departments and send the fire department out and I know that they..... I went over one time when Creach was the treasurer of the town and I said I gotta have more money I said my girls want more money. I said to him I said look, the C.U.P.E. Union is trying to organize my girls and I said if I don't pay them more then they're gonna organize. He says we don't want that, we don't want that, he says how much you want? I said this is how much I want, no more. The next day I got my check through, cleared, just like that. I said I don't want no C.U.P.E. Union in there, and I found out then that he sat down and figured out.... the girls in his office were getting five times as much pay as what my girls were getting. I said that's a crime, I said I'm still not gonna get up to their wages, I don't expect to. I said one thing, I said , you..... alot of your girls working here, I said, they couldn't work for me because they couldn't handle it. I said my girls are worth more than that, I said well you pay them five times as much as my girls get, I said..... He said well, that's the case, he said, we can't do anything about it. I finally decided when I hit seventy, I said, I'll retire. I'll get out. This chap that came in to see me, I never saw anything like it. He walked in the door, he said I hear you want to sell out and retire, I said yeah. He says I don't care what you want for it, I gotta have it. I said well here's my asking price, he says I'll take it. Just like that.

Then he said what about the building? Well, I said, I don't want to sell the building, I said I'll give you a long term lease. He said no, I got too much money involved here, he said, I'll tell you what, you get the building evaluated and I'll get the building evaluated, whichever the highest, I'll give you ten percent more. He nearly floored me with that! So, he went out the door and I called the bank and I said check on that guys credit will ya? They called me back in half an hour and said give him a million dollars credit if he wants it, just like that. And, he took over. What a mess he had to start, he decided to move the office into one room from the back, where I had them in the safety room, up to the front office. He said to me, would you come down and give us a hand, to change the wires over? I said yeah. I walked in there and his men went back and we had two or three hundred pair of cables coming in and they just took a pair of pliers and they cut. I said where are you gonna hook those wires up? I took one look at it and I turned around and I walked out. No way! I think he was two or three weeks before he got his phones connected up. What a mess! Good job there was no fires or nothing! They couldn't get a hold of the fire department. He had one awful mess. Apparently he got it straightened away. I built all my own equipment, I didn't buy anything, I built my own station. One of the girls told me here, not so long ago, that she said you know, Chris, there's some of your old stuff left in there and it's still working, that's the only one we don't have any trouble with. He bought all new.... He don't..... He hasn't a clue I don't think. He's just a businessman, he just operates a business. The telephone company came to me and said if you take the answering boards, he said, we'll give you an answering board and we won't put any more in Fort Erie. You've got an exclusive right. Nobody could come in. Nobody could come in and start up a business because, he said, we've got five boards out in Fort Erie and he said every one is losing money, we're losing money. He said, so if you'll take the board, we'll concentrate all in one, he said we'll put a 300 pair cable in, it'll cost 1200 dollars, he says you pay half and we'll pay half, that was 600 dollars, I said okay. When they got through they sent me a bill for 1200 dollars. So I called them up and I said, lookit, what goes on here? You told me it would be 600. He says well, he said we underestimated. I said that's just too bad. I said I'm gonna pay you 600 and that's all I'm gonna pay

you. I said when I quote for a job, if I quote for a job and I say two thousand dollars and it costs me three, I say, I still gotta do it for two thousand dollars. I said that's my quote and that's it and that's all I'm gonna pay you. So, he said all right, and that was it. I said lookit, I says, I didn't want the cables running through my building. So I said I put the fishes in so you could fish the wire in. I said your truck come down here and I said, with the reel of wire on and they pulled up to the manhole and I said they hooked on to my wires and pulled it through, I said, they weren't a half an hour putting the wire in and I said I didn't charge you for that, I said they didn't have to fasten a thing. All they had to do was hook on to the wire and pull it through. I said okay. When they got all finished and we had no service..... boy oh boy, we had no phones, we were without phones for about 6 or 7 hours, if anybody had a fire, if anybody wanted a doctor, they couldn't get them. I had all the doctors and the Fire Department and alot of businesses on there, plumbers and things like that, they were on it. If you wanted them... When you called, you got our office and then we'd hook them through to the..... if they were there. Doctors won't give out their phone numbers, you can't phone a doctor at his home, but they would phone and we'd answer the phone and say it's Doctor So-and-sos office....I'd like to speak to the Doctor..... What do you want, just a moment..... We'd put them on hold, call the doctor and say there's a certain party on the line and they'd say, Tell them to go to the hospital, they'd meet them there or sometimes, very few of them would say well put them on the line, so we'd cut through and they could talk to them, but there was very few doctors that would do that. I think Dr. Docherty is the only Dr. in town that's got his home phone number listed in the book. It was quite an experience we had there. Something new we'd never done before. I put a system in at Pratt & Lamberts that at five o'clock at night everybody went home, and the plant was in full production. If anything went wrong, it would signal my office that there was trouble. We'd call the maintenance man and they'd go down and when they got into their office they could look up and see what machine it was and they could go and fix it. That's all a watchman does. He finds out what's wrong, he can't fix anything, he's gotta call the maintenance man. I did that at Pratt & Lambert and I did it at Lucidol Chemical

Company, when Al Spear was managing, I put it in up there. Then they wanted me to go over to Buffalo and do it over there. I couldn't see going over to Buffalo, it was a very foolish mistake I made, I should have rented the telephone cable from Buffalo to Fort Erie and I could have taken all the calls at Fort Erie and dispatched the men out from here. But it was one thing that slipped my mind and I never even thought about it until I was out of business. I could have done that quite easily, I'd have had an awful business over there because they..... Lucidol wanted me to go up there to Rochester, see, their plant blew up..... big hole in the ground when their plant blew and they moved right out into a populated area, I think they killed about 7 or 8 people on the street and wrecked I forget how many homes when it blew. We had to put all the safety equipment in for them. We never had any problems with our system, our system worked real good and we never..... we had to design everything ourselves and build it because nobodies done it before.

D.M: It was nice talking to you Chris.

C.R: We had alot of fun in this town anyway.

[As I was leaving Chris's house, he remarked that he was the kind of guy who when he got up in the morning, he had nothing to do, but when he went to bed at night, he only had it half done!]