



College of New Caledonia Oral History Series

David Holm

College of New Caledonia

Department of History

Fall 2002

Oral History
of Jim and
Margaret
McConaghy



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If there are any errors or omissions, these are wholly unintentional and the author would be grateful to learn of them.

In the Fall of 2002, David Holm interviewed Jim and Margaret McConaghy. They own the nine-hole "Links o'Maggie Mae" golf course, plus adjoining farmland and forest along the Shelley Road, about halfway between Highway 16 and Shelley. In David's words, "I decided to ask them for an interview because they exemplified an early generation of settlers who were short on formal education but long on native intelligence and hard work. The physical and economic imprint they have left on the Prince George area indicates something of their contribution to our history." The interviews were taped, and later transcribed by the College of New Caledonia Library.

DAVID HOLM: *What were conditions like for you?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I was born in Onaway, Alberta in 1933 and we lived there on a farm until I was four. My father passed away and we moved into a little town of Onaway. My mother remarried in 1939 and my Dad had passed away in 1937. I have three brothers and sisters (two sisters and one brother), four of us in our immediate family and two half brothers in our second family. We moved here in 1942.

DAVID HOLM: *Why did you move here?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Work conditions for my stepfather. He went to work on the airport. It was war time and they were building a big airport so he got a job and worked there and he worked at that until the job was finished. [Then] he went cutting cord wood for the likes of the Columbus and the Europe Hotel and places that was all wood or coal in it. And they had a small truck and two or three teams of horses and hired a crew of men and they cut cord wood by hand and hauled it in and dumped it off in alley ways where they chopped it up. Even the jail and the old government building was heated by partial wood and coal.

I went to school until I was 14, then I went to work on a dairy farm. I worked there and I was out of school in grade 7 and I carried on in different farms. When I was 16, I went to a little sawmill which was a big mill at that time called Northern Spruce. I worked in the mill, various jobs and I learned to ride carriage as a dogger and I learned to move up and set. In the spring of the year, I left that and I went, I believe it was 1949, I went to Rupert and I worked in the fish [packing plants].

DAVID HOLM: *That was quite a change for you.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Yes. That is why I don't eat fish today.

DAVID HOLM: *Were you in the Cannery or out in the boats?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No, I worked in the packing where you stood eight hours, nine hours, some days ten hours. I was at a job where I stood at a tank of water, two people on each side of it. In my case I was a young fella, so I stood with three women. It was a very exciting job, I will tell you that. Today I washed the backs of halibuts, tomorrow I got to wash the stomachs, [then] the back side. This went on, I worked there I believe

until July. We went through the salmon run and a lot of that, then I went up to Terrace. I went back into a sawmill there. I worked that summer and I came back and went back to Northern Spruce, working in the mill. I worked in a sawmill until it was '53, I guess, I worked in the sawmill. We worked out of Aleza Lake. We moved mother out to Aleza Lake as my stepfather died in 1945, leaving seven of us in the family.

DAVID HOLM: *Did he die of a heart attack from overwork or what?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No, he died of cancer.

DAVID HOLM: *Oh.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No, you did not die of overwork, there was no such a thing as dying of overwork. You might die of poor conditions, as my father did. He died of pneumonia and there was no cure, gotten wet, he died of that, but as far as dying of overwork, in my eyes that is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard. They talk about education and that, but when you hear somebody say "I die of overwork," maybe too long hours, but when you worked hard, you worked ten or twelve hours, you went in and had a good meal and you went to bed, you didn't head down to the bar, you had regular hours

DAVID HOLM: *You took care of yourself.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: You took care of yourself, yes. You didn't have wash machines as you know today. We didn't have dryers. You took care, we did our own laundry.

DAVID HOLM: *The men did their own laundry?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Nobody was going to do it for you out in camp, no, you did your own laundry. You would be in a small, what they call a bunkhouse. There would be six men, three along each side of the wall. Now, you might be with a bunch of fallers or you might be in with a teamster. Now his clothes reeked with horses so you got used to every kind of smell there was, and there were no bathrooms, you went out into an outside privy.

DAVID HOLM: *Yes, pretty cold! Pretty wet too.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: You spent very little time reading a book, I will tell you that. You did not have the luxury. We had, I wouldn't say always good food, but wholesome food. If you had a good cook in camp you had good food, it was basic, very basic. In those years when we went to camp at the end of Johnson Road (that is just out by the airport) if you went through the old Antikowski farm, it's at the very end of the road and you go about a mile or a mile and a half up the road. We went to camp Sunday night. We sometimes didn't come to town for two weeks.

DAVID HOLM: *Wow, and you worked what, five and half days a week, six days a week?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Six days some days, and then we got down to five and a half days a week. We didn't go to work in the mill after it was 25 to 30 below.

DAVID HOLM: *Right, it would be pretty hard on the equipment probably.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: It wasn't hard on the men, it was hard on the equipment. It is what you got used to and we were happy. Our main goal in life each day was to beat the cut we had yesterday, put out more lumber, sell more logs. You didn't have much for goals, you didn't have the idea of owning a home, I didn't think we would ever have a home.

DAVID HOLM: *Wow.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No.

DAVID HOLM: *What did you work for then, what motivated you to work?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I wanted something, I didn't know what but I wanted a piece of land, I wanted a farm. I looked around, I knocked around, I drove a logging truck for a short time on the plank roads of Upper Fraser, part of one summer I drove logging truck and I became a faller. Followed my brother basically the first winter, and I branched out in 1954, I started falling by myself.

DAVID HOLM: *How did you learn how to fell trees? Who taught you? Nowadays people would have to take a course in how to operate machinery and how to fell.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Well, I understand that, because if they are never exposed to anything and they never do anything. I mean if you watch TV and attend the games, I don't think you will learn to fall a tree. If you go out and get slapped with a kick back on a tree you learn pretty quick what is right and what is wrong. You worked with somebody, along with somebody, and you were always learning. You wanted to learn because you wanted to better yourself. It wasn't through education to better yourself, it was through the ability to learn something on your own. If you were a chokerman, who hooked the logs behind the cat, you were right up there. You were allowed to clean the tracks out with a shovel, dig the mud out and then you were allowed to grease the rollers. If you were a real good chokerman, you didn't have to walk back to the bush all the time. You could ride on the arm of the cat.

DAVID HOLM: *That was the reward for good work, good greasing?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: That was the reward, and you weren't allowed to get on and run a cat or to run a piece of equipment, that was a good step, that was a real step in life.

DAVID HOLM: *And people learned that on their own, from someone showing them?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: You watched. You watched and you learned and you tried to figure it out on your own because if you were a good worker, they would work with you. If you were a poor worker you would just... Now, through after the war in the 50's and 60's, men were very scarce in this country. There was always work because we had sawmills all over the place and they were little. We didn't have to go out and look for work like you have to now. If you left a job you could go into town [and get another one] before you walked the length from the Princess Theatre which was at the corner of Vancouver Street and Third and that was out of town. End of town.

DAVID HOLM: *What a change!*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Vancouver Street was the main drag out of town. It went through and down across the slough, where the big shopping mall is there, what is it? Pine Centre?

DAVID HOLM: *No, this one.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Oh, Parkwood. Yes, that was part of our skating rink.

DAVID HOLM: *Wow!*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We skated. Some years you could skate almost from city hall right down through. You would have to go through some of the higher areas. We could go right around if it froze up early and if it didn't snow in, we had to go over across the highway, but we could go right out to South Fort George slough. That was all slough, there was nothing there

DAVID HOLM: *So Parkwood was once a slough?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: It was a slough, it was a big slough in that area, 13th Avenue was a big slough. The whole country has changed. When we came here in 1942 I think there were 2,500 people, there wouldn't be much more, I don't think even that.

DAVID HOLM: *That sounds about right.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We came in on a crew train. After leaving Edmonton, my stepfather got a job at Granada. That is a little town, a sawmill town, about 100 miles out of Edmonton. He worked in the sawmill and we came out here and it was the crew train. Then that little town became a place where they brought in a lot of soldiers, German prisoners, and worked them in the camp there.

DAVID HOLM: *Outside Edmonton.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Yes.

DAVID HOLM: *They did what? Sawing timber? Building roads?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: They worked them for piling lumber, no, not for building roads. You didn't build roads.

DAVID HOLM: *Just made your own?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: You have to remember those years, most of the logging prior to the war years was done by horses.

DAVID HOLM: *Right.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: They loaded. You had what they called an A-frame which was about 30 feet high, a block style, block at the top, chiv up there, cable, down to the bottom, out over and the horse went out there on the cross haul, he would pull the log up, you loaded it up on your sleighs and then pulled it in with sleighs.

DAVID HOLM: *So most of you preferred to log in the frozen weather or the cold weather?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: All in the frozen weather, unless you put in, I never was around it but they had some where they put down two logs and they had big round wheels which were concave and they rode down, they built it like a railroad, but it was basically that. Things progressed after the war here in Prince George in the centre city group.

DAVID HOLM: *What changes do you particularly remember?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Well, if you start with 2,500 people [and] you end up with 90,000 in 1980... The changes have been constant. I think the roads, the wicked roads are deplorable for the millions and millions of dollars that came out of this country. There is no excuse, there is no nothing! But we still have better roads than we had then. Aleza Lake is about 45-50 miles east of here, I've seen us take two hours to come to town in the spring. After the frost and snow was all gone.

DAVID HOLM: *Yes, but the roads were just so soft?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: You had to go on planks. They would lay cross tied planks and then you would come up on these planks and you would go over a frost boil and you went miles like that.

DAVID HOLM: *What were the roads made of in those days, just gravel or dirt?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No, corduroy, a lot of corduroy and a little bit of gravel on top. There are still places where there is old corduroy down on the bottom.

DAVID HOLM: *Wow!*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I would say, motivation is the only thing I would say that has changed. The people have changed. People don't care to work now. If they have to work, they want a big salary. I don't know what to say, I just find it mind boggling that people can't come to work on time and do what they are asked to do. That is, I think, the biggest change, is in the people, in the people themselves.

I wanted to farm. I married a girl who was 100%, she worked beside me. We went from 1960, we were flat broke with sickness and that, we had medical bills and I worked seven years for the experimental farm to pay my way and my \$10,000 debt out.

DAVID HOLM: *That was a lot of money in those days.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Yes, it was a big pile of money and then from there on, in 1962, we bought this first piece of property. We started to clear land, and we built our own houses, our barns, we sawed the timber for our barn. A gentleman by the name of Lawrence Grindy had a sawmill. We logged burnt timber out of the Buckhorn, which was free, just go take it. [With] the good wood, we made heads for the planer, we would do eight inch casts and six inch. He tongued and grooved it. We took the culled stuff for the barn and picked the best stuff out for him to build a house on 15 Mile Road for his daughter. The hay shed, we got plywood which was bought but the lumber itself, getting the logs out for the posts and timbers we did ourselves.

DAVID HOLM: *How much property did you buy in 1962?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: In 1962 I bought a quarter section, 160 acres.

DAVID HOLM: *Have you added to that since then?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We have in the vicinity of about 1,400 acres.

DAVID HOLM: *You have done very well.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We have done okay. We have worked hard. We have had one vacation.

DAVID HOLM: *Is that all, in all those years?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Well, we have gone to see her folks in Saskatchewan for four or five days, six days, ten days, but other than to go there, no. We went to Hawaii once.

DAVID HOLM: *How many years ago?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I would say in 1981 or 1982.

I have no hankering to go anywhere. Why would I want to go somewhere when I can go out, did you notice the beauty of the country when you drove out?

DAVID HOLM: *It's gorgeous right now, the forests are all yellow.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: In the winter time we have beautiful days, when the sun is shining and the frost is hanging on the trees. It's beautiful.

DAVID HOLM: *It is.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I like to go out and I like to see something happen, I like to see at the end of the day something done.

DAVID HOLM: Yes.

JIM MCCONAGHY: We have now about six or seven hundred acres cleared, that is rough cleared and finished, and we will clear more land next summer.

DAVID HOLM: *What type of farming did you get into when you came here?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I started out with some dairy cows and we shipped cream; milked cows and shipped cream. We had chickens and we fed the skim milk to the pigs.

DAVID HOLM: *Okay. When you said shipped, to where? by what? by train to Edmonton?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No. We took it downtown to First Avenue. There was a creamery just across from the railroad station, in the vicinity of Crazy Willy's place. When they quit doing that, when there was no more of that, you had to get rid of it. Dairy cows had no value as far as beef, so we eventually had to start switching over. And I could not get a milk quota, I won't go into why we couldn't.

DAVID HOLM: *Politics?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Politics, yes. They were giving the quotas. If you were a landed immigrant you could get a quota. At that time there were a lot of German people in the 1950's [that] came in, Dutch, Danes, they could get grants from the government to start.

DAVID HOLM: *But those of you who had lived here couldn't?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: In one incident I went in with two coloured gentlemen to be interviewed this one day. We had one hundred sixty acres, about thirty acres cleared on it.

DAVID HOLM: *You yourself had that?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Yes. The other gentleman had, I would say, one hundred acres cleared. He had a bunch of cattle, I say bunch, he may have had about thirty, thirty-five head. He held a job and had a truck, was working. He applied as a landed immigrant. He got the property, they gave him the whole works, because he had a background, and what they told me was to carry on working for the Dominion government "You will not clear 100 acres on this farm. You don't have an education, you don't have nothing going for you." This is basically what it said, that isn't the way they put it, but that is what it meant.

DAVID HOLM: *So it was pretty crass.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Well, every time they slap you, you dig in deeper.

DAVID HOLM: *Yes. So how did you survive? You converted to beef cattle.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We converted and I worked out steady, I worked out. We built it and I worked every day. Between the wife and I, we put it together. She picked roots and she's worked side by side with me on tractors. If we are out on the fields there are usually two tractors, she's usually out there with me.

DAVID HOLM: *Wow. She's a good worker, both of you.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: She's got stamina, far more than I have. She comes from a farming family in the Prairies, her ancestors came out of the Ukraine. As far as, how did we do it? we done it. You know the old saying, a little makes a lot and that is just the way we done it.

DAVID HOLM: *Good for you.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We sacrificed a lot of stuff. We never went to shows, we never done nothing. When other people were going to shows and that, her and I were out. For something to do in the evening we would walk out into the field and see what had happened, we were interested.

DAVID HOLM: *Good for you.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: It's what turns your crank.

And this golf course, when you asked me, I see in here you want to know something about this golf course.

DAVID HOLM: *Right.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I was into trucking and logging and that came naturally. You built into that over the years because things were growing and you were able to. I got into a truck, a logging truck, just by accident. It was not something I ever intended to do but I, they practically put me into it for very little down and it was

a different walk of life. I hadn't drove truck for to haul logs or anything since I been on the plank roads, so in 1971 I bought a logging truck.

DAVID HOLM: *And contracted to CanFor?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No. CanFor wasn't here. I worked for an outfit by the name of McDermid and Lofting who were logging for Northwood.

DAVID HOLM: *Okay.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Northwood came into place here, I think they started a mill in 1966 or opened in 1967.

DAVID HOLM: *Sounds about right.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Yes. At that time I was working for a machine shop in town. I started when I left the experimental farm, got squared away, I got a big promotion, I got two dollars an hour working at the machine shop

DAVID HOLM: *Wow.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Yes, that was a big issue.

DAVID HOLM: *Actually, that was good money in those days.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: That was good money.

I started to serve an apprenticeship as a machinist that was open. I went one season down to Burnaby for six weeks and I never felt so beat and humble in all my life as when I went down there.

DAVID HOLM: *Because of the big city?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No. Oh no, that didn't bother me. The city did not bother me or anything. The fact that I did not have an education. I got top marks in the class for my practical, but I knew nothing about what they were talking about.

DAVID HOLM: *Wow, that hurts.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I could not bear it out, I could not bear it. I always had a problem with spelling, reading, I understand nothing. I read for the last ten years, I guess dyslexia is what they say was told up in the family, with the offspring and that in the family, and I guess because I read things, I have a heck of a time to read and understand, though I get her to do my reading. To dictate a letter, to do up a contract, to cover what they want done, that part is easy. So I spent six weeks down there and felt beat up, really beat. And

then I thought, well, this is no good, so I left that [and] went back to the bush, something I understood. In 1971 I bought that truck, we were up to six or seven trucks.

DAVID HOLM: *Wow.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We hauled livestock all over Alberta and B.C. commercial. We did well and then we, ten years ago or so, or a little over that, we decided to build a golf course.

DAVID HOLM: *Oh, because it was easier work? Or why did you make the change?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Didn't know nothing about it.

DAVID HOLM: *Okay.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Somebody said to me that I was always kidding him, that I was always going to build a golf course because he was telling me what a good golfer he was. And my theory was, anybody that would take a club and hit a ball and then go look for it just to find it and hit it again! I said, I could build something you could play on. That kind of started it. I had been approached about it by my brother-in-law. Why don't you put in a golf course? But I thought, oh, I am not a golfer, I had never been in sports or never done nothing. So when this gentleman told me that, I took it as a slap in the face, because I am touchy about my education. I am not ashamed I don't have an education, but to be told that I don't have the smarts to do it. We talked it over and we monkeyed around with it. I was approached by a lawyer in town, a friend of mine, he said, "Jim, if you want to build a golf course go for it!" He said, you can do anything you want in this world if you put in enough time and have a goal. And he said, why don't you go do it? You have done okay with other things. So her and I started and the oldest boy, and we worked out this thing. We have done it over twice, the greens.

DAVID HOLM: *Wow.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We did it wrong the first time so we had to tear it all out. Tear it out and pile the dirt up. Had it been if we hadn't have had the zoning and the property and the fact that it was cleared, we could never had done it. And the equipment.

DAVID HOLM: *Wow. It was a very expensive job if you had to start from scratch.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We have spent everything we had and everything we made to get it this far, plus some.

DAVID HOLM: *That is a big investment and a big risk too; you're not twenty years old anymore.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No. On the 26th of January, I guess I will be 70.

DAVID HOLM: *Wow.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: But at least we got a little more work on it, and then I think we will put in a couple more greens and start on a second nine.

DAVID HOLM: *Good for you. Going up the hill there or where?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No. It will play all around the buildings, in, up, over the side hills and through the bush. We put a dam in, so the very first thing we done was put a dam in, soil samples and a dam, and we have twenty-one feet of water.

DAVID HOLM: *Twenty-one feet down to water?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No, twenty one head the dam, the depth is twenty one feet, it's a head and it goes back not quite a half a mile, and it's 200 feet across, we got lots of water. That was our first goal, was to make sure, you want to remember that there is no income as you are doing this stuff, it is all out of the pocket. We got that in and we hauled sand. We talked to a fella that built a golf course here and he said just haul sand here and he is going to lay it all out for us. We were running all over the country. I said, we can't, we only got a certain piece of property that we're going to work on, if it don't work we will plough it up [and] put hay back into it. We piled all this sand up where we were supposed to have greens and then after the first rain, well, we couldn't get on the sand because there was mud on the clay! So then we spent hours stripping the soil, moving the sand. We moved some with the cat, we moved some with a hoe and piled it up, and we started to dig out the base and put in the drain tile.

DAVID HOLM: *So you had to put drainage in first?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Oh, you have to put the drainage in and you have to put pea gravel. We done it pretty much the way they tell you to do it. We didn't use the soil they all said, but we did use pea gravel and drain tile and then we used gravel on top where they don't do that. We put a foot of gravel over top of our pea gravel and then we put our sand on, and we put a lot of sand on.

DAVID HOLM: *Meaning a foot of sand or how much?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No, some parts of our greens, some of greens have up to three feet of sand because it was easier, not knowing what we were doing, it was easier for us to use sand as opposed to going to haul another material and we built on a side hill so we put a brim in and we filled it with sand and gravel.

DAVID HOLM: *Good.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: When I say drain tile, I mean lots of drain tile.

DAVID HOLM: *Clay drain tile, not PVC pipe.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: PVC pipe. Yes, we wanted to do it proper so we bought loads of it.

DAVID HOLM: *You must have lots of it for a course this size.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: This number one green, I think, has around seven hundred feet of drain tile.

DAVID HOLM: *Wow.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: It's all wish-boned and looped around, we tried to do it the best we could.

DAVID HOLM: *Some people pay large amounts of money to have professional course designers design their golf course for them. You've done it in a much less expensive way.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: When we first started this, an outfit from Victoria phoned and they wanted to come out and go over the property and tell us if it was suitable or feasible to put it in. It was only going to cost me five thousand dollars and tickets up here, and a day spent here and go back and do their study and that was the cost. Prior to that, we had been a year or two, we had been to a golf course in Edmonton, a ranch. They had only been open three or four years and then they were going to have some big tournament, so we pulled in and asked if they had done all this work. We talked to them in the clubhouse and that, if you have done all this work after putting in three years, why are you digging up the greens? Well, they weren't done properly. Who done it? Well, we had an architect do it. I said they weren't done properly, who's paying for this? Well, he said, we have to pay for it. I said, he set it up and he is not responsible? No. And before we can have these, whatever playoffs they were running there, we have to change this, which did not make sense to me at the time. Now I understand a little more about it. So we talked about it and talked to different ones and I said, we cannot afford [it], five thousand dollars goes quite a ways, it is hard to come by! So we went on our own, we looked and [did some] reading. As I said, I don't understand everything but I was in attendance at a family reunion and they were putting in two greens and they were in two different stages and I saw what they meant. Got onto it and spent about ten minutes on each one and asked a couple of questions. We talked it over and I came home. Simple as falling off the table here, you are on top of it, it's no big deal taking it in. I understand we did not do ours right completely but I understand now more about it. And if I was to do it again I would have a better [idea] and I would know what to do.

DAVID HOLM: *Just in terms of the shape of the greens in or in terms of the length of each hole or the width of the fairways, where to put your water hazards, your sand traps, things like that; how did you learn how to do that?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I didn't learn nothing, it was there. We took a piece of land and we worked with what we had. We didn't have the money to change the lay of the land, we didn't have the money. We took the ponds that were swamps so we knew you can't have the swamp with peat moss in it. We took that and hauled it

out on the clay on the fairway. Now the length of the distance between the tee box and the green, this is how naïve we were, or I was. A par three had to be three hundred yards plus, so needless to say some of our first par threes that we decided to put in turned out to be a par four — and our shortest par three is about one, about a hundred sixty five yards at the most. So we had some learning to do as we went along. This almost cost us a divorce.

DAVID HOLM: *Over a golf course?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We had some quite heated discussions over it and I say these are the worst ones we ever had. We worked with the lay of the land, what we had to work with, because we didn't have the money to go and do other things.

DAVID HOLM: *You have done a remarkable job.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: It takes a long time and I can see, we only have old equipment and we patch it up, and we keep patching it up because the new lawn mower, the new greens mower, is around twenty-seven to thirty thousand dollars.

DAVID HOLM: *Wow!*

JIM MCCONAGHY: That's a tri-power, a three gang. A new greens fairway mower right now, state of the art with all the bells and whistles on it, would be eighty-seven thousand, so you don't go out and buy.

DAVID HOLM: *Wow, you can almost buy a highway truck for that.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Well, yes, that last highway truck I bought, I paid a hundred thirty-two thousand. I was never so glad to see the end of something as I was the trucking industry.

DAVID HOLM: *Why was that? Because of the expenses?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Help. Need help. Expenses, you can have the best job in the world, I always say you can have a weak linkage between the steering wheel, you are going to have trouble. No, the fact when I send a truck on the road I was responsible for that man in that truck when he was in Vancouver or Victoria or whatever he done wrong, it came back on me. No, until people are held accountable for their actions it's tough. I had some very good people. The law of average says you are going to have an accident. It takes a good driver to keep from that, and it only takes a cigarette to fall out of his hand on the floor to cause an accident. It's that simple, it happens that quick. You can't correct it and when you do correct it, then it's too late, you roll over. We just got tired of it. You get called out to Tete Jaune to turn the tap on the tank because it got shut off so he could get home, stuff like this. The last truck I had cost me thirty thousand dollars [by the] time I was through with the accident. Ten thousand dollars better meant on ICBC three insurances, trailer, truck, cargo, two thousand five hundred each, make the payments on the truck while it was being fixed, it

was just a little over thirty thousand dollars. I took the truck to the sale, Ritchie's charged me four thousand dollars for selling it. They got forty thousand dollars for it, so I ended up with not even six thousand dollars. That's painful. This year the trucking industry was good but it just was getting to me trying to keep them going and it is a problem today, and the rates have dropped down so low that you can't make it.

DAVID HOLM: *The fuel prices are getting so high too.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Fuel, everything is going up, they're cutting the rates, they're setting the time you have to unload, they don't take into consideration [that] if you miss your time to unload you have to rebook the next day. You have to be there at a designated time. You leave Prince George and you're headed to Vancouver, you have an accident and you're held up on the road for some unknown reason, that don't count. And they wonder why they have these accidents on the road, and inexperience. For you to do your job, how many years of schooling did you have?

DAVID HOLM: *Twelve years up to grade 12 and thirteen years of University, twenty-five years.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: How much can you make in a year approximately?

DAVID HOLM: *Right now I get about seventy two to seventy four thousand dollars a year.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Some truckers can make up to that money. Now, all they got to come to work with is a lunch kit. You supply them with a hard hat and gloves. They have to have steel toed boots, you give them a vest. And he has to have six weeks training in the school downtown here for a thousand bucks and he can make forty-five, fifty, sixty thousand dollars a year.

DAVID HOLM: *That's pretty nice.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: That's pretty nice.

DAVID HOLM: *He doesn't take home the loads of marking that I take home.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: But he does put in long hours, if he's going to make good money. This is what I mean, this is where we fall down, that is why we are having so many problems on our highways with our equipment and this is what you have to hire. If you are sitting with a payment on a piece of equipment, it's got to go, you have timber coming out of the bush or whatever, no matter what, it has to go, so you take what you can get.

DAVID HOLM: *How long were you in the trucking business?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: From 1973. I still have a truck.

DAVID HOLM: *Okay. Your son drives it, doesn't he?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: My son has it, my one son has it all over the place. I don't think the boys would ever be without a truck. The one boy, he's got his two trucks parked. Well, both of them have their trucks parked, the one is working for somebody else and the other fellow hasn't turned a wheel for over a year and a half. They are paid for, they are sitting there.

DAVID HOLM: *It's good they are paid for.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Well, yes, you couldn't have them if they weren't paid off.

I don't know what to tell you, that is pretty well my life.

DAVID HOLM: *Tell me, when you set up your farm here, how many head of cattle did you run on how many cleared acres or not cleared acres? How much of a living did you make? How many acres does it take up here to make a living?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: That is a very good question. This year it would take every acre that I've got to raise and winter all my cattle, that I have got and I have got a hundred cows between the boy and my wife.

DAVID HOLM: *Six hundred cleared acres is not enough to feed one hundred head of cattle?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Not if you don't get the rain, and we never got the rain. It's going to be tough. Now I have seen years where we could feed them on eighty acres, it depends on the weather and what you're getting. Everything in this country, no matter what, depends on the weather. Except if you are a school teacher, the weather don't bother you. Whether you are going to make a living off the land or logging, weather is the biggest factor.

DAVID HOLM: *That makes sense, but that's a huge swing from six hundred acres not enough, to eighty acres good enough.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: That's to raise enough feed.

DAVID HOLM: *For one hundred head of cattle. So what happens then, you don't get as much feed grain, or do you plant a lower yielding crop, or do you just let them feed off the grass or do you plant special feed for them, or what?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We have a pile of it.

DAVID HOLM: *Just hay or timothy?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We seed timothy, alsike clover, red clover and brone grass. Alfalfa will not grow here, the soil is not suitable. Now this year the clover [has] done nothing because we did not get the rain. Here we got rain south and what goes around this hill, we are very high here, I can look at the University off the hill, straight across. If we get rains in the spring we are set. We had cold, windy weather in the spring and that is no good for hay. We are just about out of pasture. We have about seventy acres of grain out on the field that we were going to cut for grain feed but it is still standing out there, we may get it or we may not.

DAVID HOLM: *What sort of grain do you grow for the cattle: rye, barley?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Oh no, we grow barley and oats, but if you are going to take a crop off you have to have it seeded in the ground in May, early in May

DAVID HOLM: *To harvest in October?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: You have to harvest in September, because look at our Octobers, you can't dry then.

DAVID HOLM: *Weather hasn't been that good.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No, wasn't even that good in September; no it's terrible.

DAVID HOLM: *So what sort of cattle did you raise back when you started and what do you raise now? Same type of cattle?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No, we started out with Ayreshire cows, milk cows. Now we have a commercial herd, some shorthorn mixed in, predominantly we have Hereford cows.

DAVID HOLM: *Why did you switch? Why did you change?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Milk strain cows have no value, it's in the breed market, and if you can't milk and sell your product, what's the sense of having them, so you have to switch.

DAVID HOLM: *Okay, and you went to Herefords, why? Why them, not Black Angus or Charolais or something else?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Well, Charolais was a very high priced cow. We started out buying little calves here and there, a calf here, a calf there, and raising them, and yes gradually got into it. We tried Limousins and they were no good, we did not like them.

DAVID HOLM: *Why? They didn't calve well or what?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: No, they calved excellent, but they were too hard to handle and the market did not hold them. We swung back into straight Hereford pretty well and crossed some with Angus, which would be the best cattle in this country in my eyes.

DAVID HOLM: *The cross?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: The cross, the Hereford cow and the Black Angus. And get your Black Walldi Hereford calves and they are tough. They forage better and they winter better, no bag problems.

DAVID HOLM: *What are bag problems?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Their udders, they seem to have tighter close up, held up, udders and the calves always do good and they like them and they feed them.

DAVID HOLM: *Good. Do you still get a good price for the meat?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Definitely, and you get a good easy calf. We swung into Charolais for many years and the first thing we did was bought a calf for her, which we used very very seldom. We were very lucky and we were very fortunate to get the right bulls and easy calving bulls and we had no problem, but in the later years, this getting up in the night to go and check the cows... we went to Red Angus. I would go out at midnight, eleven o'clock, everything was quiet, get up in the morning at six, usually would start our work day. If you got a cow that was calving you would pull her in, check her and see if she was okay. If she was okay, you would go into the house and have your breakfast. Then you would spend the rest of the day doing up your mess around. The farming today is very easy, it takes us one half hour to feed our cows for a week. We set out round bales and running water, the work isn't here, [like] it used to be. You used to have to bale it, pick up the little square bales, today once you've got it baled, you have it baled. You didn't have a bale prior to that unless it was in a barn, covered, because the water would go right through it and it's rotten.

DAVID HOLM: *And the big round bales, you didn't have to worry about the water?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: The big round bales shed the water. You always have a loss, yes, most certainly.

DAVID HOLM: *A lot of people cover their bales in plastic now.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Yes, you should, then you get no loss, the wind blows. We should have been very well off with hay this year even with a shortage of hay because we sold a bunch. They wanted hay last year, they were short hay, and I said, well, we will get rid of the cows. But what do you do with the property if you get rid of the cows? You got a weed problem, you still got to take the hay off, and this has been a excellent year for the price of hay, next year you're gonna have nothing. Last year we sold thirty five dollars a bale, [it] was unheard of.

DAVID HOLM: *Is that for the big round bale?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Big round bale, that's about an eleven hundred pound bale. This year they are getting seventy and eighty, you can't afford to buy hay and feed cows, and the cattle prices are down this year.

DAVID HOLM: *Is a hundred head of cattle enough to make a living on now?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: How educated are you?

DAVID HOLM: *Well, I don't know much about farming.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Well, I will tell you what. You don't have to be very smart to figure out the taxes on this place, the cost of putting the hay up, the costs of your repairs, your vet bills, you add it all up, your insurance and license.

DAVID HOLM: *Buying the cattle to begin with.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Buying the cattle. You've got one hundred cows, you're gonna have, some people say, we use a rule of thumb, ten percent one year, you will have a one hundred calf crop. Last year we had one hundred one. This past summer, this past spring, we lost I think seven. Some years you can go lower, you can lose them on pasture, you can lose them anywhere, but we usually use a rule of thumb of ten percent losses. There is a big plus if you have no losses and if you have no losses, you either have a good line of BS or you got a good neighbour that is moving a lot of calves. Very few people come out with one hundred percent. If you come out with one hundred percent, that is only once in a while. As I said, we had five sets of twins last year but we lost four calves, so you always lose. We lost twelve head to butchering, we had just a couple turned up, we don't know where they went, I guess, we have never found the remains so someone's [got them] somewhere. You have as simple as in you, if you were to raise your calves you would average six hundred fifty, that is a pretty good average. Some people with Charolais calves, they calve very early and have good barns, might get seven hundred pounds, but I doubt it, average. You get \$1.40 a pound so what have you got there about...

DAVID HOLM: *You're going to get around one thousand dollars.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Yep! So you sold ninety calves.

DAVID HOLM: *So you get ninety thousand dollars.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: But now you have to take out the trucking. You are not going to get ninety thousand dollars, you have nine hundred dollars a calf. You are not going to get it, you can't get it. Yearlings, I feed them, you might get one thousand bucks, you have a winter's feed into them. It takes you years to become a teacher, it takes years to become anything. You can take home more money with your two hands and a car

to run off to work than you can make with all this and no anti. Right now, we are putting a tractor back together. We tore it in half. It's all these things that come unforeseen, the motor went on one, it's all these things that come up. No, you can't be self sufficient on a farm with that kind of money.

You can go to the Pulp Mill. My brother was a night watchman at Upper Fraser and he worked Saturdays, Sundays and all holidays. At] Christmas, he had an evening with the kids or when he got in, in the morning, but he was night shift, steady. He had a first aid ticket, he grossed more money than I grossed some years on a hundred acres. It is a way of life. The only time you are going to get anything out of the farm is when you sell, you might have some break. You have to buy your own medical, you don't have a pension plan, because there is no money left at the end of the year to buy a pension plan, and you're seven days a week. Oh, you can go to town at dinner time if you want, lots of times, or some days you don't have to do a heck of a lot of anything, but that is nothing to say you won't be out there at 4 o'clock in the morning calving cows and getting up every two hours to go down if you're having problems. But it is a good life.

DAVID HOLM: *Good, you have enjoyed it?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I have enjoyed it. I have never had a job that I can say I disliked. I never [did] anything I didn't like to do.

DAVID HOLM: *Not many people can say that.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Why, when you get up in the morning, take the crap out of your eyes and wash your face, and you have a good meal in you, just go and look outside, if you can't see something that is beautiful out there, then you have a problem.

DAVID HOLM: *Yes, this is beautiful scenery around here.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I just like to get up, I get up early in the morning most times and I go to bed late. Now I sleep in the afternoon usually, have a sleep for a half hour. But no, I like to see something at the end of the day.

That is one of the nice things about farming. You can see what you have accomplished during the day.

DAVID HOLM: *You can see what you have accomplished, yes.*

What were some of the fondest memories you have during your lifetime, some of the things that really stand out as highlights, fun or sense of accomplishment or whatever?

JIM MCCONAGHY: Well, I think, sense of accomplishment, I guess you'd say I am kind of a funny person because to do what we done is just something we done it, we enjoy it. I don't know what you mean about a sense of you know, accomplishment, because I think anybody can accomplish anything they want, unless you have sickness or something that sets you back, right. But the average person, if they want to... now if you want

to go downtown to the bars at night you are not going to accomplish a heck of a lot, if you want to go out here and work like a idiot like they tell me I am, well.

DAVID HOLM: *Because you have accomplished a lot here, you have got a lot done.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We are happy here. I guess that is what you would call a sense of accomplishment, we're happy with it. The fondest memories of my life were going home to be with mother, because you all remember I left very early and I have the greatest old girl in the world. She kept seven of us together through the tough years and we're all close together. We've all [done] fairly [well], my brother has a hardware store in Quesnel. My other brother is in trucking, he has done very well for himself. One brother is an electrician, the other brother is a... he worked for Northwood for years, he's got a pension and is retired. I don't know, I don't know what, I am very protective of what we have.

DAVID HOLM: *Understandable.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Suppose someone comes here with hard spikes and I catch him on the floor, I just kick him off, no questions asked. We have one rule that applies to everybody, whether it be you or Tiger Woods or anybody, it's one set of rules we live by. I am cranky about stuff like that, I hate to see anybody abuse anything, whether it be your car, your property or anything, I just think it is sad and I am very protective about that.

DAVID HOLM: *You seem to have obtained a lot of happiness in life from the beauty of your surroundings, too. You mention, for example, looking out the window, going for a walk with your wife, those sorts of things.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Oh, definitely, definitely!

DAVID HOLM: *And you went ice skating, too, at some point in the past?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Up until I was fifteen, yes. I think that was the last time I was on a pair of ice skates. I was fifteen. I loved to skate but again you're gone from it.

DAVID HOLM: *Once you start working there isn't the time?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Well, no, and I caroused pretty heavily for five years from the time I was eighteen until I got married until I was twenty-three. On the weekends we would drink and carouse around. I never did smoke and I never got nothing out of drinking. In '62, I quit drinking.

DAVID HOLM: *Just cold turkey?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I just quit. A week ago I quit drinking coffee, from ten to twelve cups a day, I just quit drinking. Everybody said you will never be able to do it. I didn't listen.

DAVID HOLM: *Good for you.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: If I drank ten cups of coffee I would have thirty teaspoons of sugar. I did and I don't miss the sugar and I think I can even feel better.

DAVID HOLM: *Good for you, excellent.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: It's what you put your mind to and what you do, but if you wander away from it, well then you might as well not start it, but it's been a long hard road, but I have enjoyed every minute of it.

DAVID HOLM: *Good for you. Just in conclusion because I think the tape is about to run out, what are some of the biggest changes that you have noticed around this area in the years that you have lived here, either the people, you have already mentioned, or with the place, the physical environment?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Oh, the environment has changed, yes. I mean, I don't know the word you would use for it, the proper word, we have logged it, we have seeded it. I think the biggest, saddest thing that we have done in this country is we haven't had reforestation done in the natural way because we are not going to have nothing on our great plantations of trees. Every one of our trees that we plant have forked top, we call it "school marm."

DAVID HOLM: *Why "school marm?"*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I think that was the name given when it was in the bush and I don't know why. "Widow makers" was a dry snag and "school marm" was a tree with a fork in it and those were just names. And every one of the trees today that have been planted young have been chewed off at the tops. It isn't going to make prime wood because you can't plant and plant in the same place. I don't like to see the chemicals they're using. They're using Round-up. We just had a session with one of Northwood, not Northwood, a man whose dad was a big shot with Northwood, he's a forester. He came here and asked me about spraying the trees next to my property, because they have a woodlot license and I said, what are you spraying? And he told me and I said, do you know if you are spraying Round-up? Well, he said no it's [something else], I said that's Round-up, they usually give it a different name. I said we have no birds, we don't have any squirrels, we have no rabbits, they say "environment friendly," crap! Basically if you are big, you can do [it], if you are little, you can't do it. I don't use fertilizer on them. I use fertilizer on the greens. [On] the rest I use just water. The greens, yes, I use fertilizer. I have to use a fungicide for winter for snow, mould. Other than that we haven't used any, and the grass looks okay.

DAVID HOLM: *It does, it looks very good.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: So environmentally... I am not "environmentally friendly," I just don't like using that stuff.

I think that the saddest thing I have seen is the way they treat the young people today and when I say that I might be contradicting myself but this is a different category. When we were young we could buy a piece

of property and we could build what we could afford. Okay, today they dictate to them, it's kind of a communist situation. You have to build a certain size, so you start out, you have to have a one hundred thousand dollar home or whatever you can, you're broke before you're done.

DAVID HOLM: *You're in debt.*

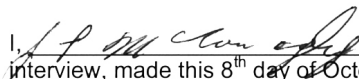
JIM MCCONAGHY: You're dead in the water. Your marriage is going to go to hell because along comes a kid. Everybody loves their children, everybody's children are the best, you would be a poor parent if you didn't, [but] they don't stand a chance. This is my own opinion.

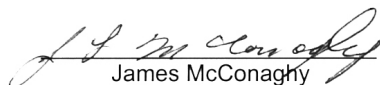
DAVID HOLM: *I share that opinion too.*

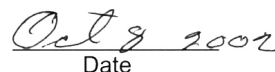
JIM MCCONAGHY: You're dead in the water. We could build a small house, you could buy a piece of property you could put an outhouse out there, you could do a lot of things, that's all taken away from you, you don't have that freedom anymore.

DAVID HOLM: *I watch my students at the College, two years into their post secondary education, twenty five thousand dollars in debt somehow, and they haven't started...*

[End of tape]

I, , hereby authorize the use of this taped interview, made this 8th day of October 2002, for archival, museum, and library research purposes.


James McConaghy


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