

The following transcript of  
John Menard's interview  
on

***Memories and Music***

(broadcast May 21, 1976)

was created by  
Videoplus Transcription Services  
in 2013.

**00:00:00**

**Track starts.**

DON MACMILLAN: Well, folks, we've got another guest, a most welcomed guest on Memories and Music and I tell you that-, I know I can say we've got a great story today, a, a gentleman with a big heart if I may say so, and I think you'll agree with me after you've heard our whole story, but let's find out for of all who have here. And what is your name, sir?

JOHN MENARD: John Menard.

DON MACMILLAN: And when did you retire from Inco?

JOHN MENARD: October 1975.

DON MACMILLAN: And what sort of work were you doing when you retired, John?

JOHN MENARD: I was maintenance foreman in the mill.

DON MACMILLAN: Okay. Well, now having got the preliminaries over, we start back at square one. Where were you born?

JOHN MENARD: I was born in Hanmer.

DON MACMILLAN: And in what year?

JOHN MENARD: 1927.

DON MACMILLAN: Okay. Well, now let's take a look back to Hanmer about-, in the '20s. You were telling me that you-, your father, was he-, did he have a mill contract or something then?

JOHN MENARD: That's right.

DON MACMILLAN: Well, now I found that surprising. Now tell me, what-, how did he get this, or was this common in, in the north here or what?

JOHN MENARD: Well, that was put out on bids the same as the-, as today that the government project would be put out on a bid as a tender and whoever, not necessarily the lowest bidder, but under the same principle and he was awarded the contract.

DON MACMILLAN: They choose the man they thought probably who could do the best job is the general idea, eh?

JOHN MENARD: Definitely.

DON MACMILLAN: Well, now any idea how he got to Hanmer and how he got into that line of work?

JOHN MENARD: Well, he likely came down from his hometown of Clarence Creek and this was at a time of the great copper discovery in this area and he likely came up to look for a job.

DON MACMILLAN: Well, good for him. He was just looking around and then this looked pretty promising, eh?

JOHN MENARD: Pretty well.

DON MACMILLAN: Now of course there's an awful lot of things I don't know that they-, the Federal Government did not take over then the mail, post offices and what not around here until around the 1950s. Is that, is that what you were telling me?

JOHN MENARD: That's, that's correct.

DON MACMILLAN: Well, every day you learn, gentlemen, maybe you don't, but I do. So that's, that's something. Now-, well, now further, John, where the-, trying to get things tied together here, did your not-, your grandparents, it seems to me you were telling me on your mother's side, did they operate a boarding house in Copper Cliff or something? Tell me about that.

JOHN MENARD: Yes, I believe they had a boarding house in, in the town of Copper Cliff. Of course in those days it was just a small village and apparently this is where my father met my mother.

DON MACMILLAN: Oh, yeah, but now again as we were getting ready for the show I had a note that your father lost a, lost a leg in an accident working for the Canadian Copper Company, is that correct?

JOHN MENARD: That's right.

DON MACMILLAN: Was this prior to his becoming the mailman or after?

JOHN MENARD: Oh, yes, prior.

DON MACMILLAN: Oh, I-, this maybe then-, this...

JOHN MENARD: Yes, he was only 18 years old at the time.

DON MACMILLAN: Eighteen and lost a leg and yet he had enough gumption to get up and get another job as a...

JOHN MENARD: And raise a family of 14.

DON MACMILLAN: And raise a family of-, I-, a lot of credit to the old man, I guess, eh? Good for him. So then-, well, this thing is starting to, to fall into place now. And of course your father is no longer living now, eh?

JOHN MENARD: No, sir.

DON MACMILLAN: When did he die?

JOHN MENARD: He died in December 1935.

DON MACMILLAN: Now we're talking Hanmer. I think and it tells me-, were you a, a newsboy or delivery boy in Hanmer?

JOHN MENARD: I was the first Sudbury Daily Star newspaper boy in that area.

DON MACMILLAN: I'll bet there are people out in, in Hanmer today who remember you delivering the paper, eh?

JOHN MENARD: Oh, likely some of the old timers.

DON MACMILLAN: I bet so, eh? Tell me, were they, were they pretty good? Were they pretty prompt pay, or did they give you a hard time?

JOHN MENARD: No, I never had a hard time with them. Course, I was always-, had my paper there on time.

DON MACMILLAN: This is an early morning delivery...

JOHN MENARD: No, it was, it was early evening by the time...

DON MACMILLAN: Early...

JOHN MENARD: ...they received the papers.

DON MACMILLAN: Right.

JOHN MENARD: Course, I didn't have too many papers. I believe the first time I had 18 papers in all.

DON MACMILLAN: Oh, yeah, yeah, still that, that was a job and then...

JOHN MENARD: That was a job, had to be done.

DON MACMILLAN: ...it got you through nickels and dimes, eh...

JOHN MENARD: That's right.

DON MACMILLAN: ...and sort things out. Now you had also something to tell me about the fella who replaced you there. Who was that?

JOHN MENARD: Oh, yes, after my father passed away we moved to Cornwall, my mother's hometown and the, the chap that relieved me of my job was the-, Onesime Tremblay, who is today the Superintendent of the Separate School System.

DON MACMILLAN: Okay. Well, Onesime, there's a little, a little, a little plug for you and maybe you'll give our friend John here a call. And did Onesime do a good job at delivering the papers? Did you ever hear about that?

JOHN MENARD: I've never heard any complaint about it.

DON MACMILLAN: All right. Now, sir, John, we're back to you and we're talking the middle '30s, Depression era and you have some pretty, pretty vivid memories of, of the Depression.

JOHN MENARD: Yes, I have.

DON MACMILLAN: Do-, tell me some, some of them, do you mind?

JOHN MENARD: Yes, I can recall when I was just a young lad at the time, my father was also the tax collector and the assessor and they used to issue the food vouchers during the Depression years and I can recall the grown man, family man, come to my place and beg, tears in his eyes, for vouchers.

DON MACMILLAN: There you have it, friends, there, there-, the truth, truth about the Depression and, and something we must never, ever forget and I guess it's something you'll never forget, John.

JOHN MENARD: Let's just hope it never happens again.

DON MACMILLAN: Let's, let's hope not. Now of course it was, it was pretty bad out in the west, too, you know, we had a fella on the show here from Yorkton, Saskatchewan telling us about the-, they had the dust and you couldn't see the sun in the daytime. They had grasshoppers that would be like a cloud in the sky. Those were rough years.

JOHN MENARD: It must have been, 'cause I seen this on television the other night, the great dust storms.

DON MACMILLAN: Oh, yes, yes.

JOHN MENARD: That must have been terrible.

DON MACMILLAN: Right, right. They were-, the, the times were pretty tough all over the place. You mentioned also, Mr. Menard, I didn't quite get the connection,

but we all remember when the fellas used to ride the rods and they-, the, the Ottawa trekkers and what not, they used to sort of switch lines, CN to CP from Capreol, Sudbury or something, eh?

JOHN MENARD: That's right, and vice versa.

DON MACMILLAN: Ah, indeed. And your home, at least your father, this wonderful man, he, he probably didn't have too much money to toss around, but he did what he could to help them out you were telling me.

JOHN MENARD: That's right. I can recall very vividly the time that these men were travelling back and forth on the, like you said, on the rods...

DON MACMILLAN: Yeah.

JOHN MENARD: ...and they'd walk between Sudbury and Capreol and they'd stop at our place if it was around meal times and I can recall my father going over across the road to the general store, get a chunk of cheese, Canadian, old Canadian cheese, and a couple of cans of sardines or-, and a box of soda crackers or something and hand them out to the men on the-, sitting on the side of the road.

DON MACMILLAN: Yeah, there have been-, there have-, I bet there is a good chance there's somebody listening that may even have sampled some of that generosity and, and-, or, or knows something about it, however, sir, your father died. You went on to Cornwall. We're talking you-, around '36 and then where did you go from Cornwall?

JOHN MENARD: We went to Timmons. I had the two brothers working in Timmons and one of them started a house, so my mother was look, looking after the house and it was my younger sister and I and my brothers of course were working at the time, and that's how we landed in Timmons in 1939.

DON MACMILLAN: Okay. And you, you finished school in Timmons and you got a job. What was your first job?

JOHN MENARD: My first job was in the-, a counterman in a restaurant, was working 12 hours a night from eight o'clock at night, eight o'clock in the morning, seven days a week for \$9.00 dollars a week.

DON MACMILLAN: As, as we were talking about, you learned how to work anyway, eh?

JOHN MENARD: Well, that's...

DON MACMILLAN: You learned that...

JOHN MENARD: ...that was the main, main idea with the first job, lucky to get a job in those days.

DON MACMILLAN: I think so, yes. So you'd serve up the ham sandwiches and the coffee or whatever was ordered, eh?

JOHN MENARD: That's right.

DON MACMILLAN: Did you-, and you went to-, maybe you wouldn't have much business at two or three o'clock in the morning. Would you have a radio going or something to keep entertained or?

JOHN MENARD: Well, there was always the, the old Nickelodeon...

DON MACMILLAN: Oh, yeah, yeah.

JOHN MENARD: ...or jukebox.

DON MACMILLAN: Uh-huh.

JOHN MENARD: And this was a 24 hours a day...

DON MACMILLAN: And you would get business pretty well 24 hours a day, would you?

JOHN MENARD: Well, on weekends.

DON MACMILLAN: Yeah.

JOHN MENARD: Especially Saturday nights.

DON MACMILLAN: Would these be truckers or guys on vacation...

JOHN MENARD: No, they were mostly businessmen and...

DON MACMILLAN: Uh-huh.

JOHN MENARD: ...motor cross people.

DON MACMILLAN: Right. What was the name of the restaurant?

JOHN MENARD: Fern's Cottage.

DON MACMILLAN: Fern's Cottage, and it's still there I tell-, you were telling me.

JOHN MENARD: I believe it still is.

DON MACMILLAN: Right. Then you moved on to another job.

JOHN MENARD: Yes, then I went to work for National Grocers.

DON MACMILLAN: Oh, what, what did you get paid there?

JOHN MENARD: Oh, I got quite a raise. I got \$65.00 a month.

DON MACMILLAN: Oh, you were getting to be filthy rich...

JOHN MENARD: Oh, definitely.

DON MACMILLAN: ...at this, this point, eh? And how long did you stay there?

JOHN MENARD: I'd say about two years.

DON MACMILLAN: And then after two years you, you made another change. What was your next move?

JOHN MENARD: Then I went to Toronto and enlisted into the Merchant Navy.

DON MACMILLAN: Well, by golly, the Merchant Navy. We had a fella on the show here who said he, he considered the Air Force, but they're only looking for tail gunners, so he, he decided he'd try another branch of the service. That, that, that took a lot of courage if I-, if you would permit me to say so. How come Merchant Navy?

JOHN MENARD: Well, I had two friends. One was-, got his call in the Army and the other chap he enlisted into the Air Force, so I figure, well, there's two services, I might as well fill the, the other one.

DON MACMILLAN: So here's a young fella and you, you, you weren't a, you weren't a big man. How, how, how old were you and how much did you weigh and what not then?

JOHN MENARD: Well, I was 15 years old at the time, course I lied my, my age.

DON MACMILLAN: Yeah.

JOHN MENARD: And I guess I weighed maybe around 120 pounds or so.

DON MACMILLAN: 120 pounds wringing wet.

JOHN MENARD: Right.

DON MACMILLAN: And into the Merchant Navy?

JOHN MENARD: That's right.

DON MACMILLAN: Great, great. Now where would you train or where would you serve first then?

JOHN MENARD: Well, first I went on the Great Lakes for the Canada Steam Ship Lines...

DON MACMILLAN: Right.

JOHN MENARD: ...and then when I finally got assigned the deep sea ship, I went for the Park Steamship Lines.



DON MACMILLAN: Well, now these would be on convoys, eh?

JOHN MENARD: On convoys. On the general cargo like...

DON MACMILLAN: And this would be during the time of the subs, the wolf packs were out there, eh?

JOHN MENARD: That's right. We had-, I can remember leaving Halifax about the-, if I remember right, about 39 ships and I think it was only nine of us that reached England.

DON MACMILLAN: Yeah, almost, almost incredible. The-, and it was cold. It was tough work, too, was it not?

JOHN MENARD: Yes, this was in the fall of the year where you get the, the real storms...

DON MACMILLAN: Right.

JOHN MENARD: ...real heavy water, wind.

DON MACMILLAN: There must have been times when you said to yourself, what am I doing here?

JOHN MENARD: That's right, but we stuck it out.

DON MACMILLAN: I bet you got to be-, you pretty-, you made some pretty good friends, eh, you fellas who stayed together in, in the Merchant Navy?

JOHN MENARD: That's right. We got along pretty well.

DON MACMILLAN: I'll bet you did. I-, you're the first Merchant sea-, first Navy man that I've talked to on, on this, on this show, John, and, and believe me, it's, it's, it's a, it's a pleasure. And when, when did you-, when were you discharged?

JOHN MENARD: I was discharged in 1948 in Montreal.

DON MACMILLAN: Ah, indeed. Boy, this, this would be after about, what, about two or three year-, or, wait, how many years?

JOHN MENARD: Close to five years.

DON MACMILLAN: Five years?

JOHN MENARD: Right.

DON MACMILLAN: In the Merchant Navy?

JOHN MENARD: That's right.

DON MACMILLAN: On the North Atlantic run?

JOHN MENARD: That's right, back and forth across.

DON MACMILLAN: Oh, oh, oh. All right, neighbours, you heard it first on Memories and Music. Well, what did you do after you're, you were discharged, John?

JOHN MENARD: Well, then I went hunting for a job in Montreal, but since the wages were fairly low and all they were offering at the time was about \$18.00 dollars a week, so I decided I'd go down to Toronto...

DON MACMILLAN: All right.

JOHN MENARD: ...see if things were not any better. And I seen this ad in the paper about a service station attendant, so I was just-, always dreamed of working in a garage around automobiles and trucks and so on, so I contact these chaps and it happened to be Silverwoods Dairy's garage, and during my interview with these people I had heard through a friend of mine that he could grease 100 trucks a day, so I figure I'd go one better and I'd, I'd state 125. So I can just see the laugh of these, these people after I left their office.

DON MACMILLAN: I can believe it, too. I guess they liked your spirit anyway, or they...

JOHN MENARD: Well, they must have 'cause they hired me on.

DON MACMILLAN: Right. And how long did you stay at that work?

JOHN MENARD: I stayed about a little over a year I believe...

DON MACMILLAN: Mm-hmm.

JOHN MENARD: ...Silverwoods Dairy.

DON MACMILLAN: And, and then what happened?

JOHN MENARD: Well, this is where I met my wife-to-be in Toronto.

DON MACMILLAN: Now tell me the circumstances about that.

JOHN MENARD: Well, I used to go out with her older sister, which I had met at the-, this restaurant where I was eating my meals and of course she had an accent and I finally found out that she was French and she was from the Sudbury District. So one thing led to another and we got acquainted and we used to take in the odd shows once in a while and this one Christmastime she brought her sister down to try to locate a job in Toronto, which she landed with Laura Secord, and this is where I met my wife.

DON MACMILLAN: Well, well, so then you, you were, you were married in, in what year then?

JOHN MENARD: In 1949.

DON MACMILLAN: 1949. Well, now-, but by this time you had, you had left Silverwoods and were working in Sudbury, is that correct?

JOHN MENARD: That's right.

DON MACMILLAN: What were you doing-, who were you working for up here in Sudbury?

JOHN MENARD: Well, I came to Sudbury and couldn't locate a job and Silverwoods Dairy was strictly an icecream depot, so I went to work as a rural mailman with my brother, or give my brother a, a hand...

DON MACMILLAN: Right.

JOHN MENARD: ...until I could locate myself a job and I landed a job with Jack's Auto Service, who was selling Nash cars and Austins and so on...

DON MACMILLAN: Okay.

JOHN MENARD: ...White trucks and...

DON MACMILLAN: Nash. Yeah, I'd forgotten about...

JOHN MENARD: That's right, the old American motor cars.

DON MACMILLAN: Yes, yes. Okay. Well, now, John, the-, and your work there, you had a pretty regular customer that you, you say you-, tell me about him. He was a pretty tough guy to please, you were telling me, but that you-, able to please him. You didn't take any tips and this led to something. Now what, what was that story?

JOHN MENARD: That's right. Well, he used to come and have his car serviced at our service station, our garage and I was the service station attendant at the time, so I'd-, I used to look after his car all the time. It was a fella by the name of Mr. Arson, so-, but he was always underneath looking to make sure that everything was done right. So this one day I went in to see my, my boss, Jack St. Pierre, and I, I asked him, I says, who is this gentleman here anyway? I says, you know, some of these days he's gonna have an oil dripping down on his shirt or suit coat. So that's how I found out who he was. He was the personnel manager for International Nickel. Well, when he used to come for service just before closing time some evenings, he got his wiper blades replaced or what have you, and he'd offer me some tips.

So I'd say, no, no, thanks. I won't accept any tips. So I say, someday maybe you'll be able to do me a favour and this is how things stood, things stood.

DON MACMILLAN: Right. So?

JOHN MENARD: Pardon me.

DON MACMILLAN: Go ahead.

JOHN MENARD: So this one time when we were expecting our first child, we didn't have any medical...

DON MACMILLAN: OHIP or whatever plan or whatever...

JOHN MENARD: Well, we had no plan at all at the garage at the time...

DON MACMILLAN: Yeah, right.

JOHN MENARD: ...and of course the big mining companies had, had better working conditions and so on, so I contacted Mr. Arson and made, made an appointment to see if he could line me up with a job, which was very fortunate. I went through and got my medical and of course I wasn't a very big man, I guess I weighed about 121 pounds at the, at the medical centre of-, compared to all these big men, 150 and 145 pounds and, and up. So when I came back from there I, I called Mr. Arson in his office in Copper Cliff and I asked him, I says, well, do you get the result of our medical? He says, by the way, he says, I just got your file back today. So, well, I says, what happens now? Well, he says, John, he says, you're pretty small. Well, look, I says, I'm not very tall and I've got very small bones, but I'm willing to try anything. So he advised me to-, if I was willing to go work in the, in the mines, so I said, well anything that's got mechanical...

DON MACMILLAN: Some of the connections, eh, with, with mechanical work...

JOHN MENARD: That's right.

DON MACMILLAN: ...something like that, eh?

JOHN MENARD: That's right. I was always, always interested in mechanical work.

DON MACMILLAN: Uh-huh.

JOHN MENARD: And that's where I landed the job back in 1951 with International Nickel.

DON MACMILLAN: I wonder if Mr. Arson is still around, you don't know, eh?

JOHN MENARD: It's a good possibility.

DON MACMILLAN: If he is and he hears this broadcast...

JOHN MENARD: Or a Mr. Fraser...

DON MACMILLAN: ...and (inaudible).

JOHN MENARD: ...there was an-, also Mr. Fraser...

DON MACMILLAN: Mr. Fraser was involved.

JOHN MENARD: ...that was involved in the employment office at the time.

DON MACMILLAN: At that time, eh?

JOHN MENARD: That's right.

DON MACMILLAN: Well, maybe he'll give you a call. I hope he does. Okay. So you went to work where?

JOHN MENARD: Went to work in the rock house number five shaft at Creighton.

DON MACMILLAN: Mm-hmm.

JOHN MENARD: And then I got a job in the 6,400 level crushers and I stayed with that job between Creighton and Stobie until 1953, then I went back to the old number three shaft at Creighton on the crushers, and then I got a job at-, as a spare hoistman in Levack and I was on a hoist after that for the next 14 years.

DON MACMILLAN: Well, now, John, we're gonna get around to another aspect of our little interview today, but before we do that I know that you have a fine family of whom you are very, very proud. Do you mind telling me what their names are, where they are and what they're doing now?

JOHN MENARD: Yes, I've married a wonderful girl by the name of Rose Contois. We have five children. My oldest is married, Michelle. She's married to Mike Guy who was-, is in the instrumentation department in Copper Cliff. My second daughter, Denise, who is attending Waterloo University is married to Frank Schneider. And my third daughter, Giselle, was hoping to start at Cambrian College this fall. I have a son, Joe, oldest son who is 16 years old in Levack High School and my youngest son, Donald, who is in the public school in Levack.

DON MACMILLAN: Well, friends, there, there you've heard it. The-, we've talked with John Menard here, not a very big man, but big enough to put in five or six years in the, whatever it was, in the Merchant Navy and, and 20 some odd years as a miner, so I don't think that weight or size has really got too much to do with, with living on this world here. Now we've come to another little thing. Sir, you, you discovered at one-, somewhere along the line here that you had a, a heart problem. Will you tell us something about that?

JOHN MENARD: That's right. Back in 1971 as I was working in the machine shop as a mechanic I discovered I had a-, sort of a burning sensation in the chest. So I went in for a medical check-up and found out I had a, a heart murmur, which was due to the aortic valve being restricted and as time went by apparently it got a little worse every year, until I had to-, I was advised to apply for retirement in April of 1975.

DON MACMILLAN: Okay. Well, carry on from there

JOHN MENARD: Then in July the 16 while I was at my summer cottage, I was getting fainting spells and they took me into the Memorial Hospital where a good team of doctors by the name of Dr. Mathur, Dr. Maki, and my family doctor, Dr. Moye, from Levack also assisted me and my surgery.

DON MACMILLAN: Okay. Well, I mean, don't leave us hanging in the air. What, what, what was done then? How did it turn out and everything?

JOHN MENARD: Well, the, the day prior to my surgery Dr. Mathur was the heart surgeon, advised the, the wife and I in the hospital exactly, step-by-step what he was going to do, and the-, he was going to remove the aortic valve and replace it with a, a substitute of the nylon type of valve. Now the operation was very successful, and like the good doctor says, he says, there's no guarantee how long the valve is gonna last, but hopefully it's-, actually, he says, you have a better valve then I have, so I'm, I'm keeping my fingers crossed.

DON MACMILLAN: Oh, that's great then. Do you remember waking up after the operation, or do you not?

JOHN MENARD: Not too...

DON MACMILLAN: That's a pretty tough question...

JOHN MENARD: ...well. I, I, I do remember a bit of it 'cause my family came in to see me...

DON MACMILLAN: Yeah.

JOHN MENARD: ...but it was sort of vague because I'm being under all the..

DON MACMILLAN: Anesthetics, I guess, eh?

JOHN MENARD: Right.

DON MACMILLAN: Oh, well, I'll be darned. Now, however, now you, you're, you've gotta take life a little bit easier, but you told me that you've got some hobbies like cooking and fishing and that, that you just don't find enough time, is that right?

JOHN MENARD: That's right.

DON MACMILLAN: The-, little gardening, too?

JOHN MENARD: Oh, a little bit of gardening as long as it's not too strenuous. Course I got good family to help me out there, my son-in-law and my sons and daughters, my wife.

DON MACMILLAN: Now I don't know how to phrase this exactly, John, you've-, you get it-, as I say, you've put in those years at the Merchant Navy now-, and you've been out to the very edge, if you like, on this heart thing, have you got a philosophy? Is it a sort of-, would it be fair to say sort of enjoy today for today as it were or, or what would you say about that?

JOHN MENARD: Oh, yes, I-, definitely so. I can thank the good Lord and the type of doctors at the-, that we have in this area.

DON MACMILLAN: Right.

JOHN MENARD: And it's like when I wake up in the morning, it's a nice sunny day I can be thankful to the, the good Almighty.

DON MACMILLAN: Right. Thank you, John. Well, ladies and gentlemen, I assume that you've been as impressed by this interview as I have. Our guest has been Mr. John Menard, who retired in 1975 after 24 years with Inco. He's told us something of his earlier years back to when he was a-, delivered the Sudbury Star in Hanmer through to this war time experience, through to

open heart surgery right through a time where it's, it's good to be alive,  
which I think-, would that be a fair statement, John?

JOHN MENARD: That's right.

DON MACMILLAN: All right. Thank you, John Menard, for coming and being our guest on  
Memories and Music.

JOHN MENARD: Thank you.

**00:25:32** **Track ends.**