

Big Announcer ([00:02](#)):

You are listening to the Safety Moment Podcast by Utility Safety Partners. Safety is always a good conversation and it's a click away. Here's your host, Mike Sullivan.

Mike Sullivan ([00:16](#)):

Did you know almost 4 million Canadians work abroad? I was surprised by that number. That's roughly 10% of the population. Now. What does it mean to work abroad? How does one prepare? How does that affect us? How does it affect our families, and why do so many Canadians do it? Well, my guest on this episode of the Safety Moment is Brad Burlock. Brad and I first met each other when we worked with the National Energy Board back in the early to mid nineties, I guess, and we've been friends ever since. Our careers took us in different directions, but we've always kept in touch and I'm really thankful for that. Back in 2005 when I was working with Alliance Pipeline and we had both moved on from the National Energy Board and Brad was with Enbridge, I got a call from Brad asking if I would be interested in accompanying him on a job.

([01:03](#)):

Now, little did I know that one of the most unique experiences of my career was about to unfold. Brad, thanks for joining me today. We've been talking about this for a long time and I am really glad to be doing this with you. I mean, first of all, it's fun to do this with somebody. I know it's a lot easier, but thanks for doing this. You remember that 2005 phone call. We'll get to that in a minute, but before we get there, maybe I just ask if you could introduce yourself, talk about your career, and you're now retired.

Brad Burlock ([01:33](#)):

Yeah, partially, but we'll get into that a little bit. Yeah. So yeah, thanks Mike. It is always great to see you. Of course. And we've had many a good discussions, industry and related and otherwise, so it's

Mike Sullivan ([01:48](#)):

Some very intelligent and then some not so

Brad Burlock ([01:50](#)):

Intelligent or it got more intelligent as the night went on. But that's a whole nother story. This is really about this one particular experience that occurred about 20 years ago. We're coming up on 20 years, I think this October or December, November. Yeah. Anyway, yeah. So for me, or as for me, well, I've been in the industry for about 30 years now. I started, I'm an engineer by trade Saskatchewan, born, raised and trained, I guess as they say. And all roads led to Calgary at that time. When I graduated in the mid nineties, I had been involved in a co-op, an engineering co-op program to get some experience and landed at the NEB now CER, and that's where I met you, and worked there for a couple of years and moved on to Enbridge. And that's really where I spent most of my career in various roles, various positions, various geography, but largely most of my time in the operations realm. And then applying that forward. And funny enough, I ended my career in internal audit doing operational audits for Enbridge. So I felt a little bit like it ended the same way I started with doing CER audits or NEB audits, but interesting work nonetheless. And the opportunity came to retire. I took it and I didn't retire very well, and after about three months decided to do some consulting.

([03:32](#)):

And that's where this takes me today. So yeah. All good. All good. No complaints.

Mike Sullivan ([03:38](#)):

Hard to believe that somebody I know is retired. I mean, I know some older people that I am are retired, but I'm not ready yet. But who knows when that opportunity comes and if it works, it works. But good on you for staying in the game. You've got a lot to offer. You're intelligent guy and you've had a lot of experience. Thanks, Mike.

Brad Burlock ([03:56](#)):

I prefer to call it repurposing myself a little bit, reinventing that sort of the retirement, not so much. Anyway.

Mike Sullivan ([04:02](#)):

Yeah, I haven't been musically discovered yet, so I have to keep working. I have

Brad Burlock ([04:06](#)):

To, yeah,

Mike Sullivan ([04:06](#)):

Well

Brad Burlock ([04:06](#)):

Keep going.

Mike Sullivan ([04:08](#)):

But the fateful day back in, I think it was November, 2005, we'll get to that. But part of what I wanted to talk about today is, and you'll remember this too when we're with the National Energy Board, and I'm sure you saw this at Enbridge as well, and I saw it when as alliance too, it wasn't uncommon that there would be delegations that came to Canada, came to the NEB, came to Alliance and I'm sure to Enbridge and other companies from other parts of the world that they were interested. They wanted to learn more about how Canada designed, constructed the operative and maintained transmission pipelines and the Canadian influence was very strong. And to this day, it's something that Canada should be very proud of that we are globally known for how well we do that. Is that something that, again, Enbridge was involved in this pipeline that we worked on and Senza in Columbia, but is that something that you saw that obviously there's a lot of that influence and Canadian influence in doing this kind of work, technical service agreement with Senza, but is that something that you witnessed as well?

Brad Burlock ([05:26](#)):

Yeah, I think a lot of companies, Canadian pipeline companies that certainly the ones that are interprovincial and international across into the states have, there's a deep operating experience there that is valuable, right? And how these pipelines and challenging environments were designed, built, and now operated, expanded on modified. There's some challenging terrain in Canada and the US and that knowledge is needed elsewhere, especially in emerging, I wouldn't say Columbia was necessarily an emerging energy market, but getting oil from the eastern Colombian foothills essentially to port to be loaded and then through the Panama Canal, it did require some expertise. And that painted a picture for, again, inside of, I think it was, was 1994, I think when Enbridge really got involved in Trans Canada, I actually think got involved at the time in a partnership with the design and the construction and

operation of Enbridge. And one of the spinoffs, or one of, I guess one of the spinoffs for employees and a lot of us were very fortunate and subsequently very grateful for the opportunity, was this technical services agreement, this TSA where employees would go down and share that expertise and support the design and the construction on what was happening.

(07:10):

And then Enbridge obviously and operating maintained it until Enbridge sold, I think it was on the heels or in the wake of the financial crisis in oh eight. I think they sold it in oh nine when they were focusing more on core assets in the North American footprint at the time and got rid of some international

Mike Sullivan (07:31):

Now in the work that we did. Now I'm going to get to a fateful day in 2005, but you did some work with Enbridge and previous to 2005, I don't want to go into too much detail, but I mean just that opportunity the first time had to be something because I know when we both went, it wasn't old hat to you, but it was all new to me, and I was lucky to have somebody like yourself to say, here's what to expect.

Brad Burlock (08:03):

Yeah, well, it's a fair point, and it was early in my career, so I had gone down for a longer stint than you and I in 2002. And strangely enough, or ironically, my wife was pregnant with our first one when I went down the first time and pregnant with our second one when I went down with you. And it's a different world and it's a different understanding of things, and there's a lot of due diligence done. You put a lot of trust in your company to make these decisions, to go down to somebody like Enbridge and work in Columbia, completely different culture, completely different. And there's a history there and some risks that goes along with it. Well, it's not Canada. It's not Canada, but I wasn't going to miss it. And I think it was before the days of where you could really Google and dig deep in terms of what you were getting yourself into.

(09:09):

And that probably boded, well for me and my wife, understanding what we're getting into, but it was really my career and it was a choice to do something exciting and when I could, and I did, and I was very grateful she supported me on that. And then a couple of years later, the other opportunity came or the next opportunity, and that's when I reached out to you in understanding where your background came from and bringing some cold eyes to follow up work. That was really the intent of the second visit. And yeah, those cold eyes and just different exposure, different experience you brought I think was very helpful. So again, back to the point you make about the value of Canadian knowledge, north American knowledge, the pipeline industry, and applying it forward to a country and a company like Enbridge in Columbia.

Mike Sullivan (10:10):

Well, that 2005, I think it was November, early November, and I remember I had just landed in Chicago and that earlier that day, the Alliance Pipeline system goes from Fort St. John, British Columbia all the way to Chicago. And I was there to do some work and I got a phone call from you and you said, Hey, Mike, some chitchat and what are you doing in the next couple of weeks in December? And I said, well, I'll be working. I mean, I'm not going anywhere. And I said, why? And he said, well, I've got a proposition for you. Would you like to do some work with Enbridge, be seconded to Enbridge in Columbia and Bogota and abroad? So I got to check with my employer, I got to check with my wife, all these things.

And little did I know, then you told me later on that those checks with Alliance had already been done and their full support was already there.

(11:11):

And that's when you reached out to me. As I said in the introduction here, little did I know that that was going to kick off a really interesting time in my, probably the most unique experience in my career. And to get to do with a friend was so much easier because you had been there and you had all that experience already. I wasn't going in cold and I wasn't going in alone, which was good. But that was an interesting phone call to say the least. And we were leaving really soon. So I mean, fast forward a little bit, the answer was yes, I'll go. And I talked to my wife and she was supportive, apprehensive obviously, and a lot of unknowns, but she was supportive. And we were leaving soon, three or four weeks after that phone call. And we had preparations to do. I mean, so any other Canadian working abroad, often they're going to have to get vaccinations, they're going to have to go through things like we did Proof of life, proof of life video, proof of Life, life handwriting, general awareness of the security risks.

(12:13):

And I remember the vaccinations we had. You've probably had them earlier, but you probably had to take 'em again. And there was malaria, yellow fever, dengue fever I think it was. And we had to take them all at once and multiple times, I believe for yellow fever. And I just felt like crap for weeks after that because you're being given a little bit of that dose. And then there was that confidential website, the confidential doing air quotes here, the confidential website illustrating where it was less safe to travel in Columbia. And I remember going on that and thinking, okay, we're not going in these areas. And maybe a week before we left, Julie called me at work and she said, Hey, I just came across this website. Well, it wasn't confidential at all. She found it wide open and it was the exact same

Big Announcer (13:04):

Website,

Mike Sullivan (13:05):

But you've been through all this. And here I was going through it the first time and I remember thinking, oh my God, is this really worth it? But again, this is something that not only us, I talk about 4 million Canadians working abroad. This is something that everybody who's doing that has to do, they have to go through this. But then we left. We took off, we went to Bogota, flew Calgary, Toronto, Toronto to Bogota. And that I remember you telling me, well, get ready because when you land, this is not going to be Canada. And it really wasn't. The airport was incredibly crowded to this day. Don't really know

Brad Burlock (13:49):

Why. Called organized chaos. Really

Mike Sullivan (13:52):

It,

Brad Burlock (13:52):

It works.

Mike Sullivan (13:53):

It was we really cattle being funneled into an area shuffled through security. And when we finally got our bags, I remember there were some people I've realized later, these were our bodyguards, and they kind of saw us, I guess they had our photos and they saw us in the line and they pulled us out. And when we took our bags and started making our way to the vehicles, we had these land cruisers that were assigned. And I remember somebody grabbed my bag and I thought he was with them, and this guy was going to take it, put it into another vehicle, and the bodyguard ran over and grabbed it from him and said something. And they took off. And we get into the vehicles and started being hustled through the streets of Bogota to our hotel. The Land Cruisers. Yeah, the Land Cruisers. And maybe you can talk a little bit about that.

Brad Burlock ([14:49](#)):

Well boil proof glass and are you armed? This is where the arms are located. There wasn't much said, lots inferred, but don't roll down the windows. You probably can't. Each one of the windows weighed, I think about 25 or 30 pounds anyway, but everything had a purpose and there was a system and you really had to put a lot of faith in that system that your best interests obviously were looked after and you were in good hands. And the second time, of course, was a little bit more, just a little bit more comfortable in that respect. You knew to respect. But everything was different. Each trip was a little different. Each thing's plan as companies mature and change things in the way they do things, we were just sort of the product of that and going along with it. We were there to do a job and the rest was somebody else's job.

([15:48](#)):

And for us to support them in any way we could. And I mean, it's an interesting place and it certainly has a very interesting and challenging, beautiful history, Columbia, what you don't want to, Columbia is an amazing country, and we saw so much. We went there for the pipeline, which itself is sort of a technical challenge, intriguing from a technical and engineering standpoint. But the people and the geography, just the commerce and the history of the food, the future, the art scene, the whole thing, like Bogota itself an intimidating city, but it is extremely cosmopolitan and forward. It is a great place to go. And now in hindsight, I can't wait to go back another time, and I've put it on the agenda so many times. But getting there, yeah, I mean it's unlike anything else. Just to your point. And what was to come over the next in the weeks to come was really just wow. And there's a lot of stories. We get a chance to go into some of 'em.

Mike Sullivan ([17:03](#)):

I remember when we got to the hotel that first night when we landed and we got to the hotel,

([17:09](#)):

I guess it was a doorman at the hotel, and he came to the vehicle to open the door, and he had kind of a ski mask thing on because it was cold out and wow, it must be really cold. We had the windows up and it was warm inside the vehicle, and then he opened the door and it had to be about, I don't know, 20 degrees Celsius, but to them, that was really cold. And the bodyguard said, okay, see you tomorrow morning. And that was it. We went inside, checked in, and that was then the next day, our first day on the job that was, and this is again anybody traveling abroad, things change. And I remember we met with Mr. Ken Mechi. He was, I can't remember what his title was, but he was really the guy who was managing our stay there.

([17:56](#)):

And he said, guys, there's been a change. And he says, in order to do the work you're going to do here, and you'll remember this, you have to go and do a physical examination, and you have to become Colombian citizens for a year. And like, okay. And he said, if you don't want to do it, that's fine. We'll fly you back and that'll be it. I remember you. And I said, no, no, no, we will do it. And away we went. And I remember thinking again, to your point earlier, Columbia is a cosmopolitan city, and I didn't know this. All we hear is what we see in movies and stuff. And I thought, well, what kind of facility are we going to be taken to here to do this physical examination? And they took us to a clinic, and it was state-of-the-art, art. It was fantastic, clean. The people there were so nice and accommodating. And then we had to go and do the Colombian citizenship thing, our passports for the next remainder of that life of the passport. It was, I had that Colombian citizenship, which did not make it easy traveling in and out of the us, which I had to do a lot with

Big Announcer ([19:06](#)):

Alliance.

Mike Sullivan ([19:09](#)):

But that was again, something that this was thrown in front of Enbridge, and we had to do something. It had to be able to adjust. And then after that, we went, I think that was pretty much most of the first day, although I do remember going to the office and we had to go through security and all that, and we met a number of the expats who were working at OA Senza. For people who are listening, it's the South America or something like, that's America. And that was my first and your second, but my first exposure to the work culture there, which was very different. Maybe you can talk to that more than I can, because for you it was like, yeah, it's old hat, it's still the same, but a very different work culture,

Brad Burlock ([19:58](#)):

Different culture entirely, and how work was done. And you do your best to adapt and read people's signals, even though I wasn't fluent in Spanish and nor were you. I mean, we had translators, the opportunity to maybe break down some barriers between who are you here instead of taking more of approach where we're here high handed and going to help you, how are we going to blend in and then find a way to find the common ground. But I'll go back to just the Colombian people, very proud, very educated, and very, very inquisitive I guess, and wanting to do better and wanting to learn. And I just never really felt that we were imposing, or in fact just that learning attitude that I thought Ensa had, which to me, precedes time. You talk about high reliability organizations and safety culture, and a lot of these things in today's world, especially in the industry that we work in that was present, there was that pride of ownership, that brothers keeper, sisters keeper mentality.

([21:41](#)):

And so that culture, I probably learned, well, I'd say I learned more from them in that respect than they would've ever learned from me on a technical standpoint. So it worked. And I think they grew into a company. And now when Enbridge sold, I think they sold to Eco Patrol, which is the national oil company in Columbia. And I'd like to think that everybody who went down there and who was involved in the project from cradle to grave, including ourselves, left a little bit of ourselves on or in the pipeline and made some friends along the way. The cultures meshed up quite nicely. In fact, I do know a lot of, there's a few number, actually a large number of Colombian Ensa employees that did come back up to Canada and some made it their home. Others stayed for a while and worked for Enbridge. So there was a compatibility there for sure.

Mike Sullivan ([22:44](#)):

Well, I remember you and I talking before we went and we both realize, and you really imposed it too. So don't lose sight that we're guests. And I never mean you have to have an element of humility and be humble when you're there because you are a guest, and yes, you're lending some of your knowledge and expertise, but for anybody who comes in there being a know-it-all, that would not go over well. And something to be said for that self-awareness of what role you are playing, and yep, you're there to assist. You're there to help, but you're also going to learn something. And you mentioned the Spanish language, and yeah, it was a hurdle for spoken, but I realized, I guess I really paid attention, but all the reports, everything we were handed was all in Spanish, but it's so close to the French language that I didn't have any trouble reading it, but at least I could understand what we were doing. But the culture as well, the workday began early in the morning, seven o'clock, and it ended after 7:00 PM and in Bogota is a big city, and people had to make their way to work and get home after that, take care of their families, and as a 12 hour plus workday, and they took a longer lunch, but it was a different thing. And then as you and I remember the people coming around with coffee

([24:23](#)):

In the afternoon and emp pinatas,

Brad Burlock ([24:26](#)):

Yeah, it got used to that.

Mike Sullivan ([24:28](#)):

Oh yeah. And it was like, this is not like Tim Horton's coffee here. This was the real deal, right? Were pretty, I felt really catered to it. Mind you, the cups could have been bigger. They weren't that big. We're used to these big jugs of coffee, but that was something else. And we spent about a week, I think it was about a week or so in the office, and we were preparing for the work across the pipeline system. And in general sense was about a week in the office, a week to 10 days. We were in a helicopter and abroad, and then about another week or so back in the office. But the real work really began when we got in that helicopter and we saw stuff that, and experienced things that I don't think very many people ever experienced. And the first day, and even to back up from that, and we talk about a security management program for pipeline companies here, and the Ensa security management system is really governed by the military.

([25:37](#)):

And so everywhere we went, we were on military bases, and the first day we took off, I remember we were leaving from an air base, it was military, and we took off in a helicopter, and it was the two of us. We had an interpreter, we had somebody from Senza with us as well. And then there were two pilots, and we were flying for at least an hour, maybe 45 minutes to an hour. And all of a sudden we took an abrupt turn and we're going back towards the air base. And clearly there was something going on, but we didn't know. And we asked our interpreter, what's going on? And you'll remember that. Well, they think they heard an explosion. So we're going back to the air base. I think it was at that moment, everything we had gone through with the proof of life video and the security awareness and everything that we had gone through in a heartbeat became very real for me.

([26:40](#)):

And I was like, okay, okay, here I am in South America and my family is thousands of miles away. And at this point, after leaving that day, we could not reach out to our families. There was no ability to reach out to our families for a good seven to 10 days. And I thought, wow, this all became really real fast. And

we landed back at the airbase, we found a place to grab lunch in about a hundred degrees Fahrenheit. And then we got a call, yep, we're good to go again, false alarm, and away we went. But we saw, we traveled the right of way. And as you said earlier, the senza line, we're going through mountain ranges, incredible mountain ranges, and then the required pump stations. And as the engineer here, I mean, what's required to get to move that product and it's different.

Brad Burlock ([27:40](#)):

Well, yeah. I mean, I looked at it as, and Columbia, the right of way that we flew is interesting because it was really, I don't always say Columbia, it's kind of like five countries in one. We experienced a lot of the urban, obviously the coastal side and the jungles and the Savannah and the mountain ranges. I dunno if that adds up to five or not, but it just shows you how diverse they were in several kilometers, obviously. But it was a real eyeopener to the challenges of how that pipeline was designed and subsequently built. And then the challenge is to operate it from an emergency response standpoint, as you say, a security standpoint and just doing general maintenance on valves and everything had to be helicopter deployable and had to get into areas that not only were geographically challenging, but from a security standpoint, let's not forget that there was still a stronghold in presence of ELN and FARC and gorilla paramilitary organizations, all those things that people kind of associate with Columbia at the time.

([29:01](#)):

And when we talk about operational risk and in pipelines, it's always about integrity and process safety and let's keep the fluid, keep the fluid in the line. And there there's another level of that on top of that. And it was really eyeopening how we do things here in North America versus there at the time. And we're starting to see some of those threats, let's call them creeping into our industry. And I'd like to think again, that maybe we've learned some, well, I know we've learned some things from them for decades of having a deal with that particular security and vulnerability and threat.

Mike Sullivan ([29:52](#)):

A short time ago, utility safety partners awarded two very deserving recipients of our very first scholarships. And this is for post-secondary education. If you're going to go into post-secondary, keep watching our social media, whether it's LinkedIn or Instagram or even our website for more opportunities for scholarships going forward. And I wish, again, to congratulate the recipients of our very first 2025 scholarships. And again, keep watching for more of those opportunities coming up in the future. We were doing, as you said, right of way inspection and emergency response inspections. And we would land and we'd look at what they had to deploy and how they would deploy it, and strategically located along the right of way security management. And then there's also, it wasn't in the plan, but we happened upon an integrity dig one day, I think it was several days into our flight, and I remember when we landed, we had the opportunity, they asked us, do you want to take a look? And sure, it was in a very open area, like a Savannah type of area.

([31:05](#)):

It had to be well over a hundred degrees. And here we are wearing our fire retardant clothing, our jumpsuits basically, and there are not breathable. We were dying with the heat hard hats and safety glasses and hard steel toe boots. And we were just melting. And we were also walking around. They were working. Yeah, they were. Yeah, exactly. And they were barely breaking a sweat and laughing at us. I remember vividly, they kept giving us water, cold water, and they had these water packs really? And just putting 'em on our necks. And I just was like, how does a person work in this? And then mind

you, if they were to come to Canada and we're working in the middle of the winter in musk cake, that's nice and frozen, we can work in it. They'd think, what the heck are you doing

Brad Burlock ([31:55](#)):

Working in the house? Yeah, yeah, a hundred

Mike Sullivan ([31:57](#)):

Percent. But it was, again, culturally and just the extreme elements that we have to deal with. But we had a couple of interesting episodes along the way, and I remember one of my first memories of that, we were talking about right of way inspection, and they would have the valves strategically located across, and the valves were all encased in bunkers, cement, bunkers. And I remember asking the question, well, why is that? Well, because they get targeted for, they'll be exploded. They'll be targeted by nefarious individuals and ruptured. And I remember asking, can we ask the pilots to go a little lower here because I'm looking at slope instability, that type thing on the right of way.

([32:47](#)):

And they said, no, no, we have to stay at this level at this height because we are out of the range of stinger missiles. Okay, this is good. Well, let's leave it as it is. But you'll remember when. And keeping that in mind still, the range of stinger missiles, we were flying through the jungle. I mean, well, beautiful territory and incredible view. And all of a sudden we started going down, we were landing, and it was really obvious we were landing and we had no idea. And we landed in a clearing, not a very big clearing of the jungle. And you and I remember, we didn't know what the heck was going on, and all of a sudden to my right, we saw this soldier, soldier full

Brad Burlock ([33:37](#)):

Camel face and everything, right?

Mike Sullivan ([33:39](#)):

Yeah. I mean,

Brad Burlock ([33:40](#)):

Automatic

Mike Sullivan ([33:41](#)):

Weapons just slowly emerged right to the right of me and the door to the helicopter. It was pulled open. I pulled it open with a guy, I think the pilot was open the door, and he reached in and the pilot gave him a kit and he left. I closed the door and we took off again, and we were looking at each other. What was that? I remember our interpreter saying, oh, was a snake bite kit. Somebody got bitten by a snake and they didn't have,

Brad Burlock ([34:11](#)):

Wow. Yeah, no, I remember that one really, really well. He disappeared as quickly as he appeared with this. And we were gone as quickly as we could again, to get out of any sort of munitions range, but to start to understand the trials and the tribulations and what a lot of these, and it kind of blends nicely

into some of the conversations we had with soldiers, these young Colombian men who mandatorily have to, they give their two years of service to their country. And a lot of them saw action. And

Mike Sullivan ([34:49](#)):

We got a chat at age of 18, I think.

Brad Burlock ([34:50](#)):

Yeah, yeah. I don't remember the age specifically, but they were young. And you could see that some of them saw a lot of action. And in these particular cases, you had somebody who's in the middle of the jungle and pit by a snake. The hazards, again, that go along with the job that were generally, I mean, we have rattlesnakes here in parts of Western Canada and whatnot, but just the hazards to do a service and provide protection of a very important piece of infrastructure. But it was a really good learning for us understand what it took to keep the pipeline open or keep it going, right.

Mike Sullivan ([35:46](#)):

Yeah. Well, I remember it, was it later that day maybe, or the next day we had to land, I think it was at a base where we supposed to land, but we got there early or we had to avoid some of the right of way. And we landed early because there was engine trouble with the helicopter. So yeah, go ahead land wherever you got to land, take care of that. And it was at a significantly large military base, and we had a lot more time there than we normally would because they're doing repairs to the chopper. And I remember we were sitting in the shade of one of the buildings in the compound, and the soldiers are all kids. I mean, they're kids here. We were in our thirties and hey, we're outsiders. Somebody knew they were interested, what's going on? And through our interpreter, we started talking with one of them and say, well, can we get a picture with you? And oh, he's so proud. He came out with his rifle and we took pictures with him. And I remember asking him, I think you asked him through the interpreter of you, have you seen any action? And I wasn't thinking like, no, they probably haven't. And I remember he said, yeah, just like last week where, and he's just over there,

Brad Burlock ([37:01](#)):

Over there

Mike Sullivan ([37:03](#)):

Where? Over there. And he's pointing to an area less than a kilometer away. And again, it is like, okay, we're not in oxbow Saskatchewan here. This is a different place. It again, reinforced just how different it was. And I think you and I recall as well going through the mountain ranges, the pump stations would be at the bottom, and then there was one station or office, whatever it was at the top of a mountain. And we were landing there. And this is interesting in terms of the security management, but as we were landing, there was, I don't what you call them, but on the corners of this compound, as we were landing, there were security posts. And as we were landing, I happened to glance over and the soldier was firing his weapon into the jungle below, and I didn't think much of it we're not wired this way. And we landed and we had to do the security thing. They had a bag, we put our hand in the bag, you pull out a ping pong ball, and if it was a colored ball, well, you're going for a drug test. And they took you for a drug. They took me for

Brad Burlock ([38:24](#)):

A drug test. That's right. And

Mike Sullivan ([38:27](#)):

While I was waiting for you, I went for a little stroll and I walked over to this edge and where you could look down, you see this miles around the jungle, not thinking I had a white hard hat on. I had a white polo shirt. And one of the soldiers just kind of grabbed me. He was like, what are you doing? And it was like, you're a target man. Don't go there. And again, just that constant reinforcement. This is not Canada. We're in a different place, but those are some of the things that I remember. And you must have had some of those experiences on your first trip as well. I think you told me actually, you were, your vehicle, your armored vehicle is chased right through the streets of Boton.

Brad Burlock ([39:14](#)):

Yeah, and I was with the gentleman that I went with first time, Kevin Underhill, he's also retired from Enbridge. And again, same sort of thing. He kind of mentored me and took me down there and gave me the confidence I needed. He was a senior enough guy that it was like, okay, at least I'm in good hands. So there was that, and yeah, same sort of thing. But what they did that particular time, and what we found out later was, so we're driving in again, a land cruiser and yes, in the streets of Bogota and from the office to our accommodation and two motorbikes started falling us and moving in, moving out and creating some havoc. And then the driver obviously had to react. And we weren't given any specific instruction other than put your seatbelt on, I guess. But it turned into a little bit of back and forth and some good driver training on display. But what we found out later, Mike, was that it was an exercise. So they did certain things that represented scenarios that sometimes we see on television or it looked like a scene out of clear and present danger or something where Harrison Ford movie or something. But it was nice to know they're practicing. And again, a display of very competent security or sculpts that not only could they protect us physically and in the event, but they're really good drivers too.

Mike Sullivan ([41:10](#)):

They're really good drivers. And navigating the streets of Bogota. Oh my God, you talking? Yeah, that's amazing. We got anywhere roundabouts, right?

Brad Burlock ([41:17](#)):

Amazing. We got anywhere.

Mike Sullivan ([41:18](#)):

I mean, I remember we were driving and our driver kind of honk his horn real quick, and you said he's not honking at the guy, he's angry, he's just letting him know he's here. And it was true. And you never saw a fender bender, but the was incredible after. Now we saw incredible terrain. We saw the mountain ranges, as you said earlier, the Savannah, all the way to the Caribbean Ocean. And I remember when we got to that, the Caribbean ocean part, it was late in the day and they brought us to some, looked like a massive hotel or something like that.

Brad Burlock ([41:55](#)):

It was, yeah,

Mike Sullivan ([41:56](#)):

A

Brad Burlock ([41:56](#)):

Resort.

Mike Sullivan ([41:58](#)):

Yeah, we were about the only people there. It was empty, this massive place. And there I remember thinking, oh wow, there's a pool and we get there and it's green. Well, we're not going in there. And it was so hot and it was right on the beach, and they had this big gate and we weren't allowed to go out there. And we went back to our rooms, and I remember we got a call and said, Hey, come on out. And they had two chairs for us on the beach, and they let us go out and have a couple of beers, and I guess they had security around us, and we were allowed to dip our toe into the Caribbean ocean. And I remember there was a big party down to our left somewhere along the beach, but we were okay there. We had security watching us, obviously.

Brad Burlock ([42:49](#)):

Yeah, there was a little private beach party almost. They had put the plastic, the white plastic launchers down, and that's all near Colonas terminal at the end of the pipeline. And then listening to Cumbia be music. And they brought us some food, and the food was awesome. The drink was nice. It was, and it was just a way to wind down and they made that happen. So yeah, it was, again, you felt like you had the whole place to yourself because that part of the Caribbean Ocean where that pipeline terminates, the Mars Carib is all protected by it's mangroves, it's very sensitive area. And a lot of what the emergency response program and the protection of that pipeline in that area is so, so important. And it was beautiful. And I was like, oh my gosh, let's do a good job protecting this. Because something like a vessel leak being loaded offshore or whatever, it would cause some significant havoc there and do some significant damage. But that was beautiful. It was, again, one of those memories where I felt

Mike Sullivan ([44:16](#)):

Nobody can take that away. You had to

Brad Burlock ([44:17](#)):

Live it. Well, it's so privileged to go because I don't think you could buy that experience. Or maybe some could, but certainly not us. And it was pretty special all the way through.

Mike Sullivan ([44:30](#)):

I remember the next morning before we left, I walked out to that gate again and I took pictures of a guy fishing with a net out there, and it was just like, wow, this guy's life. He has no idea what we're doing here. He doesn't even know we're here and this guy's life. This is every day for him. But maybe you can talk about that. That day, our last day in the helicopter, when they gave us an opportunity to go to the tanker loading unit, and I didn't think anything of it, but maybe walk us through

Brad Burlock ([45:01](#)):

That. It didn't happen the first time. And I think it was the first time with Kevin. I think what had happened was because visibility becomes an issue, obviously it's very, very misty, very foggy. The humidity is off the charts. It's so humid at times that you can't see the separation of where the water is

in the sky. It's a blend. And so flying in a helicopter, again, a number of kilometers offshore to the terminal loading unit, which is essentially from the terminal on the seabed kilometers out, comes up to a manifold. And that manifold is what the large ships, the very large tankers hook up to load. And so it's a floating unit, like a box that contains all the fittings and the manifold to connect, but to get out there, and we got that chance for whatever reason, we got clearance to go and go have a look.

(46:08):

And there wasn't a ship being loaded at the time. And that might pretty cool. Might've been part of the reason we were able to go. But nonetheless, I don't, somebody, and I don't remember who particularly somebody I'd kept in contact in the years, months, years after, had said that practice had stopped unless you were actually imperative that you're required to be out there to do any inspections or you weren't allowed on a helicopter out to the terminal unit. I had heard possibly that it was because they had dropped one, dropped the helicopter into the ocean, no fatalities or anything, but again, one of those risks that they wouldn't be willing to take with visitors if they didn't have to. So yeah,

Mike Sullivan (46:59):

That was to me, I mean it was just another day, but then I realized just how unique it was after the fact. And again, we had an opportunity that nobody else really did. And then we got back to Bogota. I just remember walking into the hotel room, dropping the bags and calling Julie right away and said, and as soon as she saw the phone number, she knew and she says, thank God. I said, yeah, I'm back. I'm back. It's safe. And we got another week here, different

Brad Burlock (47:26):

Time we were really out of, we weren't connected. It was different days, different time. There was satellite phones, but it wasn't having those check-in calls with family or they weren't following you on Find me on our iPhones. They didn't exist. And it was, you kind of went into the abyss for a while. And that's a strange concept nowadays, right? Well, it's a foreign concept. Today we're so connected and it's probably very healthy. And for the mine whole thing, I don't know. I can't, with my wife, I'm sure like yours worried. And until you got the actual phone call that you're back on the ground safe and sound, could they take a breath, right? Yeah.

Mike Sullivan (48:20):

Oh, and again, I heard it in her voice and I remember thinking, yeah, this has been really cool and all that, but what the hell am I doing to her? But I had her support and I'm glad I did it. And we had some really beyond the work, and we worked hard those long 12 hour days plus being even back at the hotel we were working. But the last week we prepared our reports. We gave the presentation in a meeting really with the director of operations. I think that was the title of his role. But we got to do some other things. We went up to the top of Maserati and we were treated to a trip to look at emeralds and purchased emeralds. And I remember walking into that showroom, which was quite small, and then they brought us into the back and it was this massive area where we were treated like royalty. Honestly. It was amazing to buy emeralds. And I remember I bought some And you did too. We had a trip to the Za Christmas party, which was on a weekend.

Brad Burlock (49:25):

Wow, incredible.

Mike Sullivan ([49:26](#)):

That was interesting. I mean, because as he left early in the morning from the hotel and the armored vehicles again, and on the drive out there, I remember thinking, wow, these are some awfully big potholes. But they were from detonations of mortars or mines or whatever or something at

Brad Burlock ([49:45](#)):

Some point in time. Yeah, some of the things you

Mike Sullivan ([49:47](#)):

Saw. Oh yeah. And then even at that Christmas party, which is a beautiful kind of plantation or something like that in the mountains away from everything. And we were out for a walk with everybody there. And here we are walking along behind everybody. We had the armored vehicles following us on the path and kind of this grove, and we heard automatic weapon fire up in the mountains. Oh, that was it. They put us back in the vehicle. They brought us back, brought

Brad Burlock ([50:16](#)):

Everybody back up, get in, let's go. Yeah,

Mike Sullivan ([50:19](#)):

Get in, let's go. We went back, but we got to do some pretty cool stuff there. And then there was that trip to the mall, which is just a trip to the mall, then Bogota, and I think you were being fitted for suits, right? Yeah. Which was kind of a common thing to do because it was really inexpensive and beautiful

Brad Burlock ([50:41](#)):

Tailored suits. Well, yeah, the quality of the workmanship still. Anyway. Yeah, that's all.

Mike Sullivan ([50:46](#)):

Yeah,

Brad Burlock ([50:47](#)):

Whole different

Mike Sullivan ([50:47](#)):

Story, whole different

Brad Burlock ([50:48](#)):

Show. Remember

Mike Sullivan ([50:50](#)):

You were being fitted and I was standing in the mall looking around, and all of a sudden along came our bodyguards and let's go. And we were whisked out to the vehicles, brought back to the hotel, no explanation. And that was the end of that. I don't remember. Did you get your suit? Yeah, I did.

Brad Burlock ([51:10](#)):

The place we went to was a place same Kevin and I went into, and they had measurements and it had only been a few years and stuff like that. So they were able to finish off. I mean, that's a thing, right? A good tailor with good clientele. They keep the measurements of their customers. And so they were able to figure that one out and finish the job, so to speak. And they were delivered. I think they delivered them to the office.

Mike Sullivan ([51:42](#)):

That rings

Brad Burlock ([51:43](#)):

A bell

Mike Sullivan ([51:44](#)):

To the office of the hotel or

Brad Burlock ([51:45](#)):

Something. Yeah, you're testing me now because this, yeah, but I'm pretty sure that's what happened.

Mike Sullivan ([51:53](#)):

And then there was a coffee story. So you had to bring coffee back?

Brad Burlock ([51:57](#)):

I did. Yeah,

Mike Sullivan ([51:59](#)):

I did. And I did too. And we got 21 pound bags each and the red

Brad Burlock ([52:06](#)):

Ones we

Mike Sullivan ([52:07](#)):

Got to the airport,

Brad Burlock ([52:08](#)):

Cello, roho, I think or something. Great coffee.

Mike Sullivan ([52:12](#)):

And we got to the airport. And what did they do? Pierced every single.

Brad Burlock ([52:17](#)):

So they test it and then they put a piece of tape on it that says tested, right. So yeah, everyone had been sampled and in hindsight, probably should have just bought it at the airport, like everything. But we were trying to save a buck or two. But anyway, they didn't take it from us. They tested it.

Mike Sullivan ([52:38](#)):

No, they didn't take it. They tested

Brad Burlock ([52:40](#)):

It looking for cocaine, remember opening every one of them. I remember opening in the months or whatever. It got savored. It was only special occasions coffee. And every time I'd open a new bag of it, I'd see that little tested thing and go, well, that's kind of a cool memory. Nobody can say, I

Mike Sullivan ([53:00](#)):

Guess.

Brad Burlock ([53:00](#)):

No going to say I got it somewhere else. It was definitely from Columbia and it was good.

Mike Sullivan ([53:06](#)):

So here we are 25 years later. I don't know where the time has gone.

Brad Burlock ([53:10](#)):

20

Mike Sullivan ([53:11](#)):

And 20, sorry, 20 years later. And you and I were talking recently, and you have a goal to go back at the 25th anniversary and you're trying to convince me to go, and I'd love to do it just to go to Bogota and bring our wives. And yeah,

Brad Burlock ([53:28](#)):

I had love that. I really do want to do that and plan to do it. I think I said earlier in the podcast how nice it would be or how many times I thought about going back, but life got in the way and everything else. So this would kind of presents an opportune time and so much has changed. And to see some of that change I think would be amazing. But yeah, it seems to be a bit of a calling. You look at highlights during a career or over a career, and it's sort of like, what would I like to do either again? Or where is that place I went and would like to go experience something again and always had intentions to do it. So that seemed to be a decent milestone and something to work towards.

Mike Sullivan ([54:25](#)):

Yeah, I'd love to do it myself. And since we talked about it that day, it's like, yeah, I could see myself doing that. And 25 in five years, I'll be retired for sure, just 64. And if we go in on 65, guaranteed I'll be retired. But yeah, I would love to do it and whatever we do there would just be just probably part of a bigger trip, but it'd be pretty damn

Brad Burlock ([54:51](#)):

Cool. Well, maybe some of your listeners can help us say it, give us some ideas, do a GoFundMe or something. I was thinking more about ideas and places to go and that sort of thing. I had like to think

that I could reach out to a couple of people still and get some ideas or just even to rekindle that, but those kinds of things are in the works.

Mike Sullivan ([55:20](#)):

And I have pictures from that trip that I took for inspection purposes. I had a digital camera at the time. There was no iPhones

([55:29](#)):

20 years ago, not that I was using anyway, and Blackberry didn't have camera that was worth its salt. But I do have photographs and I will send them to you and maybe I'll have them accompany part of this podcast as well. Brad, thanks for doing this and shedding a little bit of light onto what people go through when they're working abroad and working abroad isn't always in, it's an exotic place we went to, but it had its challenges and we weren't the only ones that faced them. Our families did too. And despite all the security protocols, and one of the things I still have, as I mentioned, I remember Enbridge telling us during the security protocol and the proof of life, it's very unlikely that you'll be kidnapped, but if you are, the kidnappers will be very good to you because they know that we'll come and get you. And they gave us this card and it had a picture of a Lear jet on it and said, when they release, you call this number and we'll pick you up no matter where you are in the world. That just gives you an idea though of the care that we were under. And it was always around us. It was always protecting us. We didn't see it all the time, but it was there and it made the whole trip easy in that regard. But

Brad Burlock ([56:56](#)):

Yeah, no, I mean, anybody who gets the opportunity, and again, very grateful for the opportunity we were presented, and if anybody does get it, I encourage 'em always to take those as challenges and growth steps in one's career, and the memories will sort of take care of themselves. And that's what it's about, isn't it? It's about the experiences. It is first and foremost. So I'm really, really happy to have shared that and shared that with you and not particularly occasion and yeah. Nice. Well, 20 years later, we got something to talk about, right?

Mike Sullivan ([57:39](#)):

We sure do, and I'll be forever grateful for that call I got in 2005 when I was in Chicago, and I'll never forget it. Thanks for doing this, Brad. And maybe like you said, somebody will hear this and maybe they'll have an opportunity, and if they do get it, just say yes and everything else will fall into place. That's true. Okay. Right on, man. Be good. Thanks. Be good. Take care.

([58:01](#)):

That's going to wrap things up on this episode of the Safety Moment podcast. I want to thank our producers stories and strategies, and also my buddy Brad Burlock for joining me today. I do hope you choose to follow this podcast on any directory you're listing on, and please do leave a rating. You can follow us on X at Utility Safety. We're also on Instagram and Facebook. If you'd like to send us a note, maybe you have an episode idea, email us at [info@utilitysafety.ca](mailto:info@utilitysafety.ca) and put podcast in subject header. I'm Mike Sullivan, president of Utility Safety Partners. Click to know what's above and below. OneClick costs you nothing, not clicking well, that could cost you everything.