

Narrator: Joe Bechta (JB)

Company Affiliations: Shaw's Bakery (Shaw Baking Company); McGavin's Toastmaster

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Summary: Former sales manager for Shaw's Bakery describes his connection to the grain industry through one of its end-use consumer industries. He describes first working for McGavin's Toastmaster as a salesperson before the bakery was taken over by Shaw's. He discusses his responsibilities for door-to-door and wholesale sales, travelling with deliveries around Northwestern Ontario, and the extra goods salespeople sometimes took to more rural routes. He describes the local independent and supermarket competitors, Shaw's prominence over other independent bakeries because of their early automation, and Shaw's joining the Holsum Bread co-op group. Bechta illustrates the working conditions in the bakery, which could sometimes be strenuous because of the long hours, and the seasonal turnover of staff because of part-time workers from the grain elevators. Other topics discussed include being part of a national union, purchasing flour in bulk, consulting with the reopening of Five Star Bakery, Shaw's closeknit workforce, supplying buns to chain restaurants, changes to the bread market due to changing eating habits, memories of long drives to make deliveries, and the switch from the horse and buggy to van deliveries.

Keywords: Shaw's Bakery; Shaw Baking Company; McGavin's Toastmaster; Bread baking; Food production; Food marketing; Salespeople; Labour unions; The Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union; Automation; Flour milling; Commercial bakeries; Holsum Bread; Northwestern Ontario; Management

Time, Speaker, Narrative
EP: Let's start off by asking you to give us your name?
JB: My name is Joe Bechta.

EP: How did you come to work in some kind of rough association with the grain industry? What kind of work did you do over there, a scan of things?

JB: Prior to or prior to the bakery business?

EP: How you came to work in the bakery in association with the bakery business actually begins to answer it.

JB: Well, I originally started on the railroad as a brakeman and was stationed in Hornepayne for five years, and we had just got married and I was laid off at that point, so I decided that I wasn't going to take a [inaudible] and move down east or stuff like that.

I don't think that was going to be the life for me. So what my wife and I did, we moved to Beardmore into the mining industry. My brother-in-law worked for the gold mine in there, so I got a job there. And then I only worked there for nine months, and we were expecting our first child, and so we moved to Thunder Bay. We stayed with my mother and my parents for a little while and meanwhile I was looking for work when I was here. And I went to the unemployment insurance as they used to call it at that time. Then they said, "Well, we have an opening. Can you sell bread?" I said, "I have never sold anything in my life actually." "Well go ahead," he said, and he gave me a form. He said, "You go down there to McGavin and Toastmaster on Main Street there and they are looking for salespeople. They are opening up a new division." So I said, "Okay, I will do that." So that is how it started.

EP: So you started to gather Toastmasters, which was a National Company?

JB: Yes, it was. Actually they were from Manitoba right to BC. They had about five bakery plants across the western parts of Canada, and Allan McGavin owned all of that. So I started out with them.

EP: Right. And the operations here in Thunder Bay at the Lakehead as it was, which were two cities at the time, did not involve baking?

JB: It was Fort William at that time, I guess.

EP: Did they establish a bakery?

JB: Yes, they had a bakery at 402 North May Street. I think there were a few other bakeries. The names changed, but it was still the same company. It was McGavin's. I am trying to think of the other two names, which is probably not that important, but it was still owned by the same company.

EP: Right.

JB: International company.

EP: Right. And when was this exactly?

JB: 1961 and until 1968 when Shaw Bakery bought the assets. I guess they had made a proposal to Shaw's to get them out of the market.

EP: And Shaw's themselves turned it over to Shaw?

JB: They wanted Shaw to move out.

EP: Oh, I see.

JB: Because Shaw was the dominant bakery here at that particular time, and their motto at that time was a wagon on every street in Thunder Bay or Fort William and Port Arthur. They wanted the whole thing, and instead the Shaw family made a counter proposal to see what it would take to take them to leave town. So that is what happened. And when it happened, they took everybody over. They took all the office staff, all the salespeople, all the bakers, all over to 40 South Algoma Street, and we worked in competition with each other the same way as we did when we were apart as bakers. And then after a while, everything kind of merged together as through attrition people left and didn't like this or didn't like that, so they probably got the work force down to size.

EP: Yes.

JB: So I was a salesman for a couple of years I believe. Two or three years.

EP: You said that Shaw Bakery took over in--?

JB: In 1968.

EP: 1968. Seven years later, and then you sold bread until--?

JB: Until that point.

EP: In the early 1990s right?

JB: Oh yes, I sold--. No, I wasn't a salesman all the time. I was a salesman for Shaw for three or four years, and then I was approached to go to management by supervision or working supervisor. I accepted. At that point, sales manager approached me—was Theo Litterlar [sp?]²—and he is no longer with us. So I accepted that job and was in management ever since.

EP: Right.

JB: And travelled all of Northwestern Ontario.

EP: And we should note the later end, Shaw closed down operations. When was that?

JB: Not quite sure of the date. I retired in 2001, and they were still in operations.

EP: So that was 40 years that you were with McGavin's and Shaw?

JB: Yeah, with MacGavin's and Shaw.

EP: A nice long period of time!

JB: Oh yeah.

EP: And about 30 of that then I guess was in management? Pretty much in 1971 through?

JB: Pretty much, yeah, that I was in management.

EP: Right.

JB: It was pretty much. It was an opportunity which I didn't regret. I enjoyed it.

EP: Right. Right. So we have a little bit about selling to talk about, and then it is the management function I guess. What is involved in selling bread? How much pushing was required?

JB: Years ago, when I first started out, I use to go door to door and things like that. We would have 150 to 200 accounts in a week to call on with a basket of bread and door-to-door. And every time you lost a customer, you had to knock on five doors to get one back to keep our sales up all the time that was pretty low. That was the retail end of it or the house-to-house part of it. The wholesale part of it, you had to also make calls and offer your services to try to service these different accounts. The more accounts you had the bigger your route got.

EP: Yes.

JB: Because most of it was all commissioned salesman at that point.

EP: Yes. What was the split, if you will, in terms of sales? To what extent was bread sold at the door and at what extent did stores of various places sell bread?

JB: Years ago, retail to the home was very big. With both people working in the home, well, that eventually faded away to the point where it wasn't profitable to deliver door to door.

EP: Right.

JB: Things like that. And the wholesale part of it got a lot stronger. We used to travel even in the country like here to service the farming community. We would do three days of wholesale and two days of farming community. One route would do that and go one direction Monday and another direction the next Thursday or something of that nature for timing.

EP: This actually forces us to talk about the retail end of things. When did the supermarkets appear in the local market, Safeway and Loblaw's? Those came in as part of Keskus, I guess, did they?

JB: Loblaw's was in Keskus, yes, and there was an A&P on Court Street I remember as the first one that opened up. That was the first A&P store in Thunder Bay was Court Street, and prior to that, they were all independents.

EP: Wilmot and Settle, for example?

JB: Wilmot and Settle, Buset, you know in the East End, and there were several others. You wouldn't believe the East End had probably 22 confectionary stores just over that bridge.

EP: Yes, in the East End?

JB: Yes, the East End alone. If you took some history of the East End part of it, every corner there was a corner store of some sort where people derived their living from it.

EP: Some number of those building are still there as a matter of fact.

JB: Oh sure, yes.

EP: Serving whatever purpose?

JB: Like the Ferrari's and the Buset.

EP: Right.

JB: And the Glutnicks.

EP: Sure.

JB: The Zacks and the Boyds.

EP: It sounds like you serviced the East End for a while?

JB: Oh yeah, yeah. That was part of my training.

EP: What were your routes in the city? What areas of the city did you sale regularly?

JB: Oh, I covered them all. Probably pretty all.

EP: Really!

JB: Because of the changing--. If you bid for a better job, you took on a different area possibly when an opening came up, If you had the opportunity to bid on it. It covers all of Thunder Bay. Then after that, there were even routes out of town that you had to look after.

EP: What is the furthest out of Thunder Bay that you yourself sold bread?

JB: Winnipeg was the farthest. Near the end of the Shaw era, we were trying to keep the volumes up in the bakery business because the markets were shrinking for a number of reasons. People weren't eating, maybe, white bread as much. People weren't doing [inaudible]. More competition, I guess. Like alone at one point there is like seven or eight bakers on one shelf, and like at Maltese Store, for example, they had a great big bakery section.

EP: Of their own baking or different bakeries?

JB: No different bakeries like Tivola and Purity and Parnell's and Shaw's and McGavin's and Bennett's and Roma. We had a lot of bakers in this town.

EP: Yes. Now how important was bread in the retail business? Not yours as a door-to-door, but in the stores, in the independents and supermarkets? Is bread an important--? How important did you sense it was?

JB: To the bakery?

EP: To the business of selling food? Is bread an important item?

JB: Oh yes, it is a big item. It ranked up there with meat and dairy and bread. They were probably the three biggest items in the supermarket. They commanded a lot of shelf space, and it was a necessity of life, eh?

EP: And when the supermarkets appeared, I guess, they got busy baking themselves? Did they all do that from the beginning?

JB: At first, they didn't always. We used to supply like the Loblaw chain. We had a huge bake shop upstairs where we made every cake, birthday cakes, wedding cakes, you name it. We supplied them all with that, and we had a delivery every morning to Loblaw's for their counters. Their counters looked as if they were baking them at that point. But we supplied most of the Loblaw's stuff. And as time went on, they did their own baking. They started putting their own mixers, and that is the way that they did it.

EP: So I guess from when Shaw's took over from McGavin Toastmasters in 1968, there were still the small local bakeries in operation here I guess.

JB: Oh yes.

EP: What share of the market do you think Shaw's had? Did you have a feel for that?

JB: Oh, I am sure like in the restaurant business, Shaw probably commanded probably 80-90 percent of the restaurant business. Our biggest competitors in restaurants, once McGavin was out of the territory, it was probably Parnell and Purity. That was another bakery in the East End. But we commanded the lion's share of that market.

EP: Part of this activity we are talking about involves better than 30 years or some part of that time of a local family then having a dominant position in baking in town.

JB: Oh, probably Sandy would be able to fill you in on all that.

EP: He will indeed!

JB: His family started the bakery business in 1923, and he would say Uncle Jack and whoever--. He would tell you all that.

EP: Yes, we will enjoy hearing all that in a week's time.

JB: Oh yeah.

EP: So you were selling, you said, as far as Winnipeg, I gather? So lots of points in between then?

JB: We had a transport system in place.

EP: You would have had to.

JB: Like 50 percent of our plant business was in the outlying market. We did 50 percent of our production in the plant was the city of Fort William and Port Arthur at one point. The other bit was the outlying market, as far as Wawa on that end, and we even ended up in Sault St. Marie for a while covering some of the Dominion Stores.

EP: Eastward you would be in competition with bakeries I suppose in Sault St. Marie, Sudbury or Toronto or out of Toronto?

JB: Weston's were very big.

EP: Westward you would be in competition with bakeries out of Winnipeg, I guess?

JB: Exactly. You had the Winnipeg plants there. That was a tough market to crack. Very tough.

EP: The westward one even short of Winnipeg?

JB: Yeah.

EP: Kenora?

JB: Well west, we had a trailer loop that ran from here to Ignace with a salesperson there. We had a salesperson in Dryden and Kenora. Double back and cut across Dryden to Fort Francis, Atikokan, that was the loop. But the trailer made at first, it was every night I believe, then after that it got to be every second night, and to make the loads more profitable and to make sure that you had full trailers going because of the price of fuel and that it was a costly effort.

EP: Sure.

JB: And the same thing east. We would go Long Lac, Geraldton, and cut across the back road towards Manitowadge, which was a bush road. That was a rough grind sometimes. [Laughs] And then you would go to White River, Wawa, and come back and do Marathon and Schreiber, Terrace Bay and Nipigon, and then home.

EP: Right. What kind of vehicle did you have on this eastward loop, especially on that bush road? Was it a semi trailer truck?

JB: A Mac truck yes. A semi trailer yes. Yes, that is what they had. Both ends were trailers, 18 feet. Yes, they called them 18 wheelers. The boxes of the trailers were 40-foot.

EP: Forty-foot trailers? Lots of different dimensions to this. Loading a trailer, once it was loaded and with the weight of it the trailer would be and so on.

JB: Well, we use to load around 33 racks of bread. It would be 33 racks of bread and each rack containing 300 loaves of bread or 320. So your load was anywhere from--. Counting pieces and some pieces were smaller, so you could get more on the trailer depending on what the product was.

EP: The racks on each side, and you would be able to walk down the center I suppose?

JB: We got into a system that was on wheels, which made it a lot easier. You push a rack of 300 bread in, and you could load a trailer very quickly. Prior to that we used to use steel trays that used to nest on top of each other, and you would wheel a pile into the trailer 12 high, and you would pick up six more trays and stack them on top to reach the ceiling to get full capacity. I helped in that area at times and training the transport drivers where to go.

EP: Yes.

JB: You know, where to drop the bread off.

EP: Did the shipping involve just the driver or a helper as well? Or did the driver have all the unloading?

JB: The driver did the unloading, yes. There were times I guess he had a helper, maybe in training or something like that because he would make the trip himself.

EP: Is this still happening that the trucks are still running bread out to these outlying areas? Are they now?

JB: Oh, I am sure they are. Yeah. But I think they might be using freight systems instead of running their own vehicle.

EP: All those trucks running, you never know what is inside, I guess?

JB: That is true.

EP: And it could be bread?

JB: At times we had to use the freight system, if our trailer broke down or something. Lease a tractor or a trailer or both or something like that. We use Arnone's or we would use Lakehead Freightways. We used Lakehead Freightways in a lot of towns. There were depots. We would drop it right in the depot. And other areas we would purchase a trailer and get permission to park it in some business's yard. The men would back up to the trailer at night, unload the bread. The salesman living in that community in the morning would wake up and open the doors and he had the bread out in the market the same time we had the bread out in Thunder Bay. You know because the trailer would go overnight. And when they woke up in the morning and the bread would be there.

EP: Right.

JB: We were as fresh selling bread out there as we were in the city with this system.

EP: Right. Well, there are many aspects of the management of all of this to think about as well. Back to the retail business here in town. Home delivery would be primarily then of bread and milk as well, I suppose?

JB: Not on our trucks, no.

EP: Not on yours, but I mean in terms of others doing that--?

JB: Oh yes.

EP: Were other grocery items brought to the house in those days?

JB: There were some small like Squitti's. Mr. Squitti use to offer a service of groceries out in Nolalu and all that. And he probably took bread with him or whatever, can goods, and things like that.

EP: Sure.

OM: Traders Fish Market, I remember their driver running Fridays and dropping off fresh fish.

EP: Yes.

JB: Yes. Out in the country.

OM: And in the town too.

EP: Well, that is quite a business. I had not actually thought of home delivery. Milk is kind of familiar enough one that one hears about, birds that know how to peck the tops off of milk out of the glass bottles and what not. But bread deliveries are more interesting and an interesting addition to it all!

JB: In the country, we used probably to fill in our routes as a community were a lot smaller and the routes were, as bread routes, were smaller than they were in the city, so we would use other products to fill in our loads. I don't know if we used milk as much, but we would sell chips off our trucks or confectionary products and things like that, just to fill our loads to maximize the efficiency of routes.

EP: These would be goods that you would buy?

JB: Yes, we had to purchase them.

EP: Sure.

JB: We didn't bake everything. Like we use to purchase Vachon cakes which we sold.

EP: Out of the back end?

JB: Yes. And Wilman's cakes out of BC and Dutch--. I don't know what they are called out of Winnipeg. They were a flaky pastry. Yes, we did a lot of purchasing. But they are not as profitably as manufacturing your own stuff.

EP: I dare say. Because there is already some costs of transport as well as baking itself and the packing itself and so on and so on?

JB: No. The commission and all that stuff.

EP: Sure.

JB: There is usually precious little left.

EP: Right.

JB: But it did help to enable us to sell our products in those towns and pay the salespeople.

EP: Sure. Yes.

JB: Because without them, we probably could not earn or make enough wages to support the families.

EP: No.

JB: No.

EP: You mentioned being on commission. Was there a base amount and then commission on top of that, or was it entirely commission that you depended on?

JB: No, there was a base amount. Some companies went entirely commission, like Weston, the bigger companies. When you reach a certain amount of sales, the commission structure would drop.

EP: Oh, did it?

JB: Because the load was a lot bigger, so they still made an excellent wage.

EP: Yeah.

JB: But it was a base plus commission. They were like union shops, and they were negotiating this every two to three years.

EP: Were you all union members then?

JB: Except for management.

EP: Right. The salesman and the bakers and so on?

JB: The salesman and the bakers.

EP: What was the union to which you belonged?

JB: It was Bakery and Confectionary Workers mainly from the west.

EP: Yes.

JB: And they were--. I am just trying to think. Mr. White was the chief negotiator for years and years that I ran into. And he was out of Winnipeg.

EP: Did you have a working effective local here or were you part of a larger local, and he was taking care of things?

JB: We were Bakery Confectionary Workers of America. So we were a part of them. But we had our own local here in Thunder Bay.

EP: Was the local quite active?

JB: Oh yes.

EP: Grievance procedures I would image are the bread and butter, if you will, of a Union and that is what really justified being members?

JB: Sandy used to have fun with us. I recall one time we were on the picket line, and Sandy would walk with us and want to hold the sign and see what it felt like. [Laughs]

EP: He liked to share all the experiences of life, eh?

JB: Yes, he was a character. [Laughs]

EP: I got that sense chatting with him a few days ago setting up the next interview that he was quite a bit of a character!

JB: Yeah.

EP: Did selling bread involve a typical day?

JB: In what?

EP: A typical day on the job or was one day like the next one? Could you sketch a day?

JB: Oh, pretty well. You had a certain route to follow. You had a time schedule to follow. If you were not there on time, they were looking for you pretty well because when you sold bread products, you always gave enough to last until the next day, with a little bit of a cushion. And if you sold out completely for whatever reason, it could be a pay week. It could be weather that affected the sales. So if they were out of bread maybe phoning wondering where you are and something, or if you were late due to snowstorms.

Some of the days I remember snowstorms were up to here and snowing, and you couldn't use the side streets or anything, and the main lines were plowed, and our salesman even actually put bread on the toboggan and would go across the creek. Do you know where Arbor's store is? It used to be in behind Balsam Street, Arbor's store is-- I can't think the name of the street. Anyways, he was one of our independent accounts. I remember a man by the name of Albert Vanshee was one of our salespeople, and he actually got the bread to him on a toboggan. He couldn't get near the store because sometimes in the '70s or late '60s we had some vicious snowstorms in Thunder Bay. A lot of snow.

EP: Right. What were the hours of work for you as a salesman?

JB: Oh, a salesman's day was pretty long. We would all arrive at work, depending on if it was a restaurant route, you could be early because they want bread and bones for breakfast earlier, so some of the guys would get out at 5:00. And there is only so much room on the dock to load, so we had scheduled times to load like 5:00, 5:30, 6:00, 6:30, and give you time to check your load and put your product onto your truck because you were responsible for every loaf of bread that you put on the truck. And at night, if you had 600 loaves and you had 100 left, you were required to give money for 500 loads. You know you had to balance.

EP: Sure.

JB: Yeah.

EP: Yes of course, and you were doing this with, what, paddle trucks or something of that sort here in the city?

JB: Yes, they were stub vans, yeah.

EP: Stub vans. Those were the terms used?

JB: They were the easiest to operate because they were a little lower to the ground. Out in the country, we used like a box truck, probably a five-tonne truck with a box.

EP: Oh yeah?

JB: Yeah.

EP: A covering box of course?

JB: Covered boxes yes.

EP: Right. Yeah.

JB: Because that became kind of a warehouse for you too.

EP: Sure.

JB: That particular set up.

EP: If the bread didn't sell and if you brought whatever number of loaves back, did the bakery have any use for them?

JB: Oh yes.

EP: They wouldn't be thrown out I don't suppose?

JB: No.

EP: No.

JB: Well years ago, at first, I think they used to take it to the John Street dump. Then after a while they found out that it was quite a big waste. And when you are competing in a market, you want to be the freshest baker of all and have a reputation. You would pick up the bread a little sooner you know to keep it fresher than your opposition. And that would start to pile up, and you would get quite a bit of bread back and you couldn't control your orders properly, because everything you had to well there was a big guess. We had route books, and you acquired a history for each store, and every Monday you would find that you sold basically the same amount of bread in each store within a loaf or two.

EP: Sure.

JB: So once you got the history established, you could become pretty good at guessing what you are selling.

EP: Right.

JB: Once some of the bread was coming back, they decided to have thrift stores because there was nothing wrong with the bread. It was good bread, and people would buy it and put it in the freezers. So that became sometimes probably the profit for the bakery for the year sometimes instead of throwing it out.

EP: Well, it is a matter of selling those last loaves and clearing everything out that makes up the profit, isn't it?

JB: When you are in the market, you had the opportunity to roll one day. Yes, these breads were going on top today and if it didn't go the next day when we came--. The consumer was smart because they wanted freshest loaves so they would dig in behind and get the freshest loaf.

EP: Yes. [Laughs] And they would be perfectly edible?

JB: Yes.

EP: Was that inventory--. Were these sales patterns computerized at any point, or was it all manual through your years of involvement?

JB: Well, we had computer at the bakery from which we got our reports route by route and product by product.

EP: Ok right. So when would that have begun to happen? Maybe you could move us into your management roles of the company.

JB: Actually, Shaw Bakery was probably one of the more advanced bakeries in Thunder Bay. They used to have a line of a cooling system, which was never touched by hands from the time it was baked to mixed to the divider where it divided the bread into loaves. That was the upstairs where the production part. I wasn't involved that much in it, but I was aware.

EP: I have been up there once.

JB: Yeah, and they had half a mile of track up there for cooling. Once it came out of the oven, it would get sucked out of the pans with suction cups with air and the bread would go up on a belt and the pans would go underneath and back to be reloaded.

EP: Yes.

JB: Yeah, that system goes right into the bagging machine without being touched at all. It was tied just like a sewing machine thread and that is how it was tied.

EP: By a machine?

JB: Yeah. But prior to that, I will back up a little bit. McGavin Toastmaster acquired one of the first few automatic bagging machines in all of Canada, and it took Shaw's a while to get it. Because we were all using wax paper at that time to wrap bread. Actually did gain a big market share just because of that plastic bag. The bag was advertised as having many uses for freezer uses and that.

EP: The people could make use of the bag after the bread.

JB: Exactly, and they really liked it, and Shaw's really had to scramble to get a bagging machine into their possession.

EP: Right.

JB: Because there was a line up or a waiting list for these machines at the time when it first started out, but they kept up. But Shaw's was probably the only automatic plant in Thunder Bay which was right from start to finish.

EP: Right.

JB: And that was back in the '50s when they were doing that.

EP: Oh yes. Well, when you move into management, I guess, allow me to ask you about the various activities that went on in the bakery. We have been talking about the distribution end of it. The bread comes out, and you now describe how the bread is packed for sale and the kind of packaging for sale.

JB: If we started at the other end--.

EP: What was the other end of the process? Was it the purchase of flour?

JB: Yes, right from the start. We did that. They had probably one of the only transport trucks that brought flour to the bakery. It was brought in by railroad over by Irwin Ready Mix.

EP: Oh yes.

JB: There was a track where they put the flour in, and we would pump it into a tanker truck and bring it to the bakery and pump it into the bakery. Other small bakeries would have to handle all their flour by bags.

EP: And you were bringing them in bulk?

JB: Bulk. White and brown mainly were the wheat that was in bulk because this was the biggest part of our operation.

EP: Yes.

JB: The smaller products, they came in by bag. Units were only mixed by 100 or 200 loaves or something.

EP: How many different kinds of flours than would you be buying? The white and the brown?

JB: The white and the brown. Then you could mix different into the brown and into the wheat.

EP: Right.

JB: You could mix a cracked wheat or a different type of grain that you had.

EP: Right. How many other kinds of flours would there be from your end?

JB: I think there would only be white or brown. You know, I am guessing.

EP: Oh, I see right, yes.

JB: And then they would mill it at the milling process.

EP: Sure.

JB: They would mill the wheat flour.

EP: Were you buying from any particular milling company?

JB: I am not sure. We probably would buy from the company that gave us the best quote.

EP: Yes. So I suppose it could vary?

JB: And a lot of times, we were behind the eight ball with these because the Weston empire, they owned their own mills, and they owned their own flour places and all that stuff. They had a bit of an advantage on you.

EP: I think it was through the 1920s that the organization of supermarkets began, and the big bakeries and the milling companies were older than that, but the vertical integration that began which you are describing in which Weston's controlled a chief control of the market to get the best.

JB: McGavin's had their own flourmills. Weston's had their own flour mills because they had to keep up to compete.

EP: Yes. So you would be buying from one of Robin's Hood or Ogilvie's or one of those who would be two of the independents I suppose?

JB: Yes. Robin Hood and Ogilvie's.

EP: Yes, then there were Five Roses and--. How could you begin to remember the various kinds of flour mills that existed?

JB: Yeah.

EP: In later years, the making of bread would become much more varied with all kinds of different kinds breads that are being baked now. Did Shaw's remain primarily in white bread and brown bread and various mixes of that or did others, rye bread for example--?

JB: No, rye bread was a small part of our operation. But white bread was the biggest at one point.

EP: And the Holsum bread loaves?

JB: Probably 60 to 70 percent of our bread was white. Originally people loved white bread.

EP: Yes.

JB: And around 30-some percent was whole wheat, and by the time we finished close to the time when I retired, the wheat breads dominated over the white breads almost. Either they were dead even or they were even. There were more varieties coming out.

EP: 80 percent to 60 percent or 100 percent or whatever it is, and that is I guess just the mix of the brown and the white flour?

JB: Yes.

EP: What other ingredients go into the baking of bread as well?

JB: Well, there is when it is milled.

EP: Yes.

JB: With the white bread everything is taken out of the flour and then it is put in as an additive after. You know like you put it back in.

EP: Yes.

JB: And that part I am not too familiar about. You would have to be a chemist. [Laughs]

EP: Yeah. Well, the whole bread milling these days you can buy bread that is made from stone-ground flour, for example. That is still grinding went out with the last third of the 19th century, I think, when Hungarian roller milling came in. I guess they were milling on the Danube. Anyway, that is another subject which I have a vague sense as you probably do as well.

JB: Yeah exactly.

EP: So you need yeast obviously and what not. Were you ever involved in the purchasing of it?

JB: The production part of it?

EP: Maybe I should ask you what various functions you had in management at Shaw's Bakery?

JB: Not too much with production other than if you needed to have a complaint about a product or some sort, you would have to talk to the baker for improvement. But yeah, not too much in the baking end. Mostly it was with sales, totally sales.

EP: You were then managing the sales?

JB: Yes.

EP: I see.

JB: I had an area. Because there were three supervisors with--. At one point, there were four supervisors we had. We had four different ways. When they did take over the McGavin's business, their business doubled in 1968. It just took right off.

EP: Right. And all the baking was being done at the Algoma Street building in that building there? It must have been a pretty busy place.

JB: Yes. Our plant just could not run. Like you can run all the bread for Thunder Bay in 8 to 10 hours.

EP: I see.

JB: Like 3600 loaves an hour can go through that oven, you know, and we can bag 60 loaves a minute. Yeah, you can pump out a lot of bread. We could never fill a 24-hour shift.

EP: Yes, I see. So even on--. The business grew when you had all of this business, which was still quite feasible to operate through that? The baker leads an interesting life in terms of hours I suppose. If the salesman starts at five, the bakers--?

JB: The bakers are there at midnight or before preparing the bags to mix, and depending on what product they were going to make, they would probably make white bread last to make all the small runs first, then that after that you would run white bread for half a day or whatever.

EP: I suppose then that the white bread was the real test in terms of freshest too?

JB: Oh, white and wheat. Wheat was 60 percent our biggest sellers.

EP: Yes.

JB: It commanded most space on the bread shelf too. That is how you could tell too. The white outsold the wheat. The wheat outsold the rye or French or whatever. Other breads you made.

EP: So the baker's day was done by 6:00 in the morning or whatever I suppose was it?

JB: Some of them would be finished by 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning, and then the other crew would take over—the ones who were wrapping and whatever else they were doing, then loading trailers in the afternoon. And then the sales force would take over the next morning. You had to bake ahead. You had to bake through the day today for tomorrow's deliveries.

EP: Okay, right. So if I was envisioning baking through the night and then it is going out, well some of them did I guess?

JB: Oh yeah, a lot of times they did. A lot of times the salesmen would be waiting for their bread. They were there in the morning probably because of bread down or something in equipment, the run came late, so they would be waiting on the dock and has most of their variety breads on the truck and all they would be waiting was for their white bread and the brown bread.

EP: But there was a second shift baking through the day and their product would be going out in the mornings, so the morning delivery would be probably really fresh stuff baked that night? And other that would have been baked the previous day?

JB: Yes. There were times when, because of competition, we would bake a certain amount of bread and let the salesman going in the morning. Let them go and they would come back in the afternoon and pick up hot bread and deliver really fresh breads to the stores. Any baker that just baked once, he had a hard time keeping up to us.

EP: Yes.

JB: Because we had two fresh bakes.

EP: Yes.

JB: In the city anyways, and in the country, well, it was one bake that had to go in the evening, and in the morning it was there for delivery.

EP: How did the competition gradually develop? You know the small bakeries, some of which are still in operation. The supermarkets' bakery, we mentioned that earlier of course, but how did that gradually develop as the various stores--? How did that become more difficult for Shaw's over the years?

JB: Ah. I don't know what was the difference. There were different changes like people were eating less bread. They were getting into muffins, English muffins, and different types of products. So that ate all into the white bread department in the bread business.

EP: Yes.

JB: People's tastes became different. They wanted to try something new. All that, plus the little bakers, they produced a product that you couldn't make you know. Because they would make it 50 loaves at a time or 60 and they would bake their 300 loaves of bread and then go home. They were happy that they could accommodate the individual, say like Vienna Bakery.

EP: Sure.

JB: He comes in around midnight, and in the morning, he has got bread, and he sells that bread by the afternoon and then he is finished.

EP: Yes.

JB: But our products, well, it was just a little different that way.

EP: So in a sense, if I can use the word, you were an industrial bakery, or was that adjective used?

JB: Commercial bakery.

EP: Commercial bakery?

JB: Yes, commercial bakeries.

EP: Bennett's may well be the best known of these—well, maybe I shouldn't say that—of the small competing bakeries.

JB: Bennett's grew quite a bit because they started to take over some of the business that was dropped by us when the plant closed. Five Star was a beneficiary of a lot of that volume. There were probably all quite happy to see Shaw's go.

EP: Right. Into the 21st century. Yes, it did. And I gather that you weren't or were you involved with the attempt to get it restarted?

JB: Oh, I was hired on, how you say, on the basis of helping them out in certain areas. I am trying to think of the word it escapes me right at the moment. When they hire a person, what do you call that?

OM: Consult?

JB: On a consulting basis, yes, you have the word. On a consulting basis. I had it on the tip of my tongue. On a consulting basis and we would work helping train salespeople or even go into markets and solicit more stores and businesses to try to get the business up.

EP: Yeah.

JB: Especially where there was competition. We would have to travel. I travelled with G.H. Shaw, Graham, which he is still selling bread right now in this market like under the Shaw label. You don't see much of it, but out in the country apparently like Manitowadge and different places he has got quite a bit order out there.

EP: I see.

JB: There is no one out there.

EP: Right. What is he buying and is he baking?

JB: He still buys from a Holsum plant out of I believe it is St. Cloud. It is a Holsum.

EP: Oh, in Manitoba?

JB: No in--.

EP: In Minnesota?

JB: In Minnesota yeah. So they meet trucks half way and he loads his truck and comes back to Thunder Bay.

EP: I see.

JB: And then other ways he gets breads is through a transport.

EP: Right, right.

JB: But I am not totally sure of his operation and how it works.

EP: Holsum is a brand isn't it? It wouldn't be easy to establish a brand. At first blush, it is just a standard product. It is all white bread.

JB: Exactly.

EP: So how do you distinguish your own brand from others? How do you make Holsum stand out?

JB: Oh it was interesting. It was Shaw's Wholesome Bread years ago with a W-H-O-L-E-S-O-M-E, meaning I believe wholesome bread.

EP: Right.

JB: And we joined the Co-op. This was a co-op through the States and Hawaii and a few other places that bakers belong to that.

EP: Sort of a continental business by the sound of it?

JB: Yes, it was. Their offices were based in Chicago. And fifty bakers banded together to be able to compete with the big chain bakers.

EP: Yes. The supermarket chains.

JB: The Supermarket chain and Weston's and McGavin's and all those guys, Dempster's you name it. Dempster's weren't known through here too much because they were mostly down east.

EP: No.

JB: And in order to have the same buying power as them, we got together.

EP: So it was first of all a purchasing co-op then was it in terms of buying flour?

JB: That is what it was. Yes. We had the big kick off at Lakehead University when the introduction was made.

EP: Oh yes.

JB: To all the people that worked at the bakery, their families and everything.

EP: Do you remember off hand when that was?

JB: No, not totally. I think it was in the early '70s, around '72 or '73.

EP: Find it in the newspaper.

JB: And they got this big red bag which nobody had, and they had the rights to the red bag all across North America.

EP: Right. And this was H-O-L?

JB: And this was H-O-L-S-U-M.

EP: Yes, S-U-M now.

JB: And Shaw's was W-H-O-L-E-S-O-M-E.

EP: Sure. Wholesomely, the dictionary word for it is was "wholesome bread." Did you think it was or did it represent a gain for you to be in the co-op?

JB: It was an exciting time when we went into that because of the buying power, it was able to keep us in business a lot longer because the kind of operation we had was only like four or five independents left in all of Canada that could bake bread on the type of system that we had. We had a sponge and dough method system, and there wasn't many bakers left that did that because it was a little more expensive to make it that way.

EP: I see.

JB: And the big bakers now use that kind of a continuous mix that just pours out like porridge into the pans you know and then rises. It is a different system.

EP: Not as good, I am sure.

JB: It wasn't. You could really notice the differences in the bread.

EP: Yeah.

JB: Yeah. Because how do you say the sponge and dough method was almost like, they followed the same ideas of how you baked bread in your own home. You put yeast in it and punch it down, let it rise, and we did the same thing but with machines.

EP: The machinery that you used at Shaw's Bakery, was it acquired before you got there, before 1968?

JB: Oh yeah it was ancient. [Laughs]

EP: Yeah, so that--.

JB: It was a matter of being quite old.

EP: You looked ancient by the time I say it in the last ten years.

JB: You could never get parts for them. Oh yeah, we had a machine shop, and we had people working in our machine shop. They could manufacture or make a part in a machine shop to keep it going yeah.

EP: Well, well where are we? [Laughs] Are there aspects of the business that we haven't talked about? And I am sure there are. [Laughs]

JB: No doubt.

EP: So you worked basically in sales either as a salesman or a supervisor?

JB: Pretty well, yeah as a supervisor yeah.

EP: Someone else can tell us about the various other branches of the business.

JB: Oh yeah, Sandy could probably tell you all the in stuff and the office and how it functioned and--. Oh yeah.

EP: What would you like people to know about the work that you did?

JB: What they liked? I am not sure if I would want anybody to totally. No, I enjoyed my job, yeah. It provided for my family and I don't know, I enjoyed it. Like they said, "Can you sell bread?" I said, "I have never sold anything in my life." So after once you

got into it, it was kind of a like every morning was one big family you would meet, eh, at 7:00 in the morning or 7:30 or 8:00. “Hi Mary.” “Hi Joe.” You got to know everybody. It was part of a big group.

EP: Sure. And I suppose at the door, the bread would sell itself in a way when you were doing the retail?

JB: You got to know what the customer wanted every Monday or every Tuesday.

EP: Yes.

JB: Just leave me one loaf and a piece of pastry or something. Or leave it in between the door and mark in your book and they would pay you once a week or once a month.

EP: You were collecting as well, I suppose?

JB: Yeah. You had to collect yourself. That was a different operation, and I wasn't there when the horse and buggy, but I remember chasing them the horse and buggy down the street when we lived in Westfort when I delivered bread.

EP: When would it have mechanized? After the War?

JB: I don't know exactly when Shaw started to go automotive.

EP: You would have been 10 in 1948. Were you 10 when you were chasing the horse and wagon?

JB: Oh probably 10 years old. Yeah, so it is probably in the '60s.

EP: It could have been into the '50s then?

JB: A little over 60 years ago.

EP: Yeah.

JB: Yeah. I probably helped a Five Star guy for a while because he was on our street, and their bread was never wrapped. It was like wooded slats in the back, and you opened the doors, and you got a hook and spiked the bread and pulled it into a bag and he gave it to you at the house. It was crusty type bread. And that is how they delivered their bread.

EP: [Inaudible] [Laughs]

JB: I would think so. [Laughs] It's possible.

EP: In a closed box?

JB: Oh yes. [Laughs] Yeah.

EP: What might interest or surprise people about the work that you did?

JB: What might surprise people? Well, they would be surprised that you get a sore back from lifting such a light product. [Laughing] You figure over the years how many loaves of bread you lifted, or trays. It was like 10 loaves of bread to a tray, and people thought it can't be that hard of a job. But some guys, they were pretty tough. They would try to lift five or six trays of bread. I remember a little Italian fellow his name was Casper Ignatia. He did the Dominion stores. He would take bread like that high, so you know he has got 60 or 70 loaves of bread, and he would kind of get it to the dock and drop it like that. But I mean you would pay for that in the end, in older years, and you are going to have back troubles.

EP: Back trouble was one of the occupational risks?

JB: Yes, it was.

JB: The lifting you had to be really. Well we had to train people, don't lift bread like this. Don't lift it.

EP: [Inaudible]

JB: Yeah, you had to tell people because you are tough when you are young, and you are not going to hurt yourself but--.

EP: Tough and stupid.

JB: Yeah. [Laughs] Tough and stupid yeah!

EP: Well sure the back stuff is not important. It's not a cement bag weighing 87.5 pounds but--.

JB: Those guys inside lifting bags, they lifted over 80 pounds bags or 100 pounds bags.

EP: Of course they did. Of flour?

JB: Yeah flour.

EP: Yeah.

JB: Speciality type breads.

EP: Yes.

JB: Well, you know some of the hours that we worked you often wondered how you did it all those years. Early in the morning and late at night. Sometimes you get home, and if you have a breakdown or trouble with the truck or anything, you still have to finish your route. Wait and try to get a truck to you and reload the old truck into the new truck and keep on going. There were some long hours. Yeah.

EP: So the conditions of employment in a sense were tough ones?

JB: They were not easy yeah.

EP: It wasn't an 8-hour day?

JB: No, it just wasn't an 8-hour day, no. And you just accepted it. You worked like that, and you didn't know any different. If the job wasn't done till the paperwork was done, what else can you say? You cash in and do your paperwork after the fact. Yeah, it wasn't an easy job, but it was enjoyable work. It was interesting meeting the public and things like that.

EP: Was the employment fairly steady or to an extent was there turnover in the workforce?

JB: No there was no turnover. The only turnover there was in a bakery it was when the salesman that they hired went back to the elevators or things like that because they were better paying jobs. So a lot of times they were out on the street looking for a warm body to put into a truck. Not like in the early days.

EP: They couldn't compete with the grain handlers?

JB: No, and the wage-wise nothing--. And they had wages, and they had families and benefits and everything, and they had unionized shops, but still the wages were a lot better. There was probably overtime and things like that. So they made pretty good money in the elevators or in Northern Woods or places like that. Along the shoreline there were all kinds of elevators at one point you know in the early years.

EP: Were there?

JB: Oh, there were tons. Sandy Shaw will tell you about that.

EP: Ok.

JB: How he stands on Hillcrest Park there and looks.

EP: Oh, you mean along the waterfront here? Yes of course, yes. No, I thought--. Yeah, there were 30 plus or whatever the number was.

JB: Yeah.

JB: Those were good times. There was a lot of money around.

EP: Yes.

JB: People spent it. People were all working, and you know there was probably a low unemployment rate.

EP: So suggest to some extent that people who were in the bread business--. Of course, working in the elevators was not easy work either.

JB: No.

EP: The wintertime I suppose--.

JB: No shovelling grain.

EP: That is where a person would choose which way to go, weather?

JB: As soon as they got laid off at the elevator, they were looking for work.

EP: Yeah.

JB: They would get a job temporarily with the bakery or inside at production of something.

EP: Yeah.

JB: And then when the elevators were looking for them, they were back because the money was good.

EP: So that kind of into and out of--? [Laughs]

JB: So there was always training new people and new faces all the time.

EP: And as a supervisor, you were involved the training I suppose?

JB: The training yes. The thing that really annoyed me was when you trained a guy for three weeks and you let him--. Usually after a three-weeks program he is on his own. Pretty well he can go and swim. And then when the three-week program is finished, the guy says, "Oh, I don't think this job is for me." So boom.

EP: You just want to strangle that guy! [Laughing]

JB: Yeah, exactly.

EP: Yeah.

JB: Because we would train out of town and be out of town for a month, you know pretty well. In Fort Francis that happened to me there.

EP: Sure.

JB: I hired a policeman at one point. Nice guy, good guy, hard working, but he decided I am not going to do bread all my life. He didn't want to do that, once he saw the ins and outs of it and everything.

EP: So then you were looking for someone else?

JB: Yeah, and then in the meantime, I would have to do the job until I hired someone else or if we had a swing person. Sometime there is a swing man available to us that could go on and do the route and then we could train someone else.

EP: Yeah.

JB: Sometimes the training was done right on the routes.

EP: Yes.

JB: Like a guy would come from out of town and work with our people in town.

EP: Yes.

JB: It was interesting work though.

EP: So essentially--?

JB: Yeah, challenging. [Laughs]

EP: Indeed! What are you most proud of as you look back on these years of selling bread or supervising the selling of bread?

JB: Most proud of? Hm. Tough questions there. [Laughing] Well, I believe that I lasted out that long in that type of business. But once you got into it, you enjoyed it. Especially the contact with people.

EP: Right.

JB: And it just becomes part of you.

EP: To what extent was Shaw's Bakery a family? You mention greeting people when you came to work in the morning and so on and so forth.

JB: Oh, as a family?

EP: Like a family?

JB: All the people that worked at Shaw's--. And I might add that all of our kids went through at Shaw. The University of Shaw you might call it. You know, they had their first jobs working in a thrift store. Until they went to university, they had summer jobs. They worked inside the plant.

EP: Sure.

JB: So they were that good to the families. They would hire all your kids and things like that.

EP: Right.

JB: I enjoyed that part. And the kids at 16 years old, they were having an income so they could spend their money and not mooch off mom or dad. [Laughs]

EP: Yeah.

JB: All our kids went through it.

EP: Sure.

JB: Probably anybody that had children, they went through Shaw's in some way shape or form. Yeah.

EP: To what extent was there a social side to the business? Christmas party or--?

JB: Oh yeah, there was every year they had a Christmas party and we had picnics and we also had promotions. Like in the summertime if you had a sales event like hotdogs and hamburgers would be the best and the highest salesman for selling a product--. Then you would have a great big BBQ and things like that.

EP: To celebrate the achievement?

JB: Yes. Summertime was always our biggest fun as you can tell.

EP: Sure.

JB: In July and August, the buns sales would just boom like that and towards the middle and end of August they are all gone. You are tired of eating all the charcoal and hotdogs. [Laughs]

EP: Yes. Yes, supporting BBQs, sure.

JB: They had Christmas parties and things like that.

EP: Was the business five days a week or was it six or seven days a week? The bakers, for example, they were not baking every day or were they?

JB: Six days a week. There was one down day for the bakers, which I think were in the middle of the week which was Wednesday.

EP: I see.

JB: Yes, we would bake a big order for Monday and another big order for Tuesday to cover Wednesdays. So there are two-day bake there and then the inside people would have that day off.

EP: So of course, this meant they were baking I guess Sunday night for the Monday morning?

JB: Exactly.

EP: Yes.

JB: Or Sunday afternoon.

EP: Or Sunday afternoon.

JB: To get all the loads out and ready for the country and all that stuff.

EP: Yeah. I suppose that is pretty standard in bakeries probably?

JB: Yes. The family tried to introduce different ways to cover the market every day of the week.

EP: Yes.

JB: At times when the competition was there and was really strong, you had to be one step ahead. So they adopted a system something like they did at the mills.

EP: Different shifts?

JB: Four days with two days off. Five days one day off. It kept on running every day of the week.

EP: Yes.

JB: Yes, with the trucks out there. But the baking process pretty well stayed the same.

EP: Mmhmm.

JB: Yes. So you had to juggle.

EP: Right.

JB: Juggle production around the sales part of it.

EP: When you became a supervisor did this take you out of the union or were you still--?

JB: Not while I was out of the union.

EP: You were out of the Union?

JB: Yeah, into management yes.

EP: Yes. How many times were your actions grieved or did that not happen very often?

JB: My actions? Well, there was always a complaint, but usually you tried to solve them before you got to a certain point. Before they festered.

EP: Yeah.

JB: And that does the trick.

EP: Right. You mentioned Sandy's mentioned wanting to heft a placard. How many times did Shaw's workers strike?

JB: Oh, well shortly after I--. No, I think I was still at McGavin's in the '60s.

EP: Mmhmm.

JB: And so, we were picketing the Shaw Bakery out in front and walking up and down the street.

EP: Right. Do you remember what the prime cause of the breakdown was at the time?

JB: It always ended up being money or benefits or things like that or improvements of that nature.

EP: I understand as a principle of union negotiations one should never strike for money because workers are always going to lose because of the strike because of the principles involved.

JB: There are benefits and things that you are trying to get.

EP: Benefits are very often--. Well, it's obviously financial I guess?

JB: Yes, benefits are financial. Like dental plans and things that got to be pretty big dollars for the company.

EP: Sure.

JB: Pretty big money. It's like the School of Medicine or whatever.

EP: Yes.

JB: It is settled now because I guess there were some--.

EP: Yes. I saw them at the gate, if you will, this afternoon when I went by. It should be over by the weekend.

JB: Were they getting help from Sudbury?

EP: Well, that is the other part of the medical schools so the workers there, some of them came in from Sudbury.

JB: Yes, as support system.

EP: Well, some of these questions really--. Your work didn't contribute to Canada's success in international grain trade?

JB: No.

EP: And you are keeping grain handlers well fed I suppose? [Laughs] What major changes did you see over the years with your employment at Shaw's?

JB: What major changes?

EP: Would you be able to focus--. I guess technologically, there wasn't much change? Shaw's when it started and ran it until it was over?

JB: Exactly. You say pioneers in that area, and when I joined the company, they were automated.

EP: Yes.

JB: So didn't see too many changes other than the automatic bagging machines. They bagged the product, and you didn't touch the bag by anybody's hands.

EP: Right.

JB: Because when I worked for McGavin's, you had these felt cloths on your hands and the bread would come out of the ovens. You would grab the hot pans, banged them onto the belt, and they went down, and somebody at the end of the belt would grab the bread and put it on cooling racks. So that was a manual thing. So that is how McGavin's operated. They never had an automated plant, but Shaw's did.

EP: I see.

JB: Most of them did. And some of the big changes other than that--.

EP: There would be changes in the marketplace I suppose?

JB: The market was--. The way it was changing, yes. The big-chain baker kind of took over everything, and if you were not in with them on everything and offered them what they needed you were shut out pretty quick you know.

EP: Yes.

JB: Yeah, you had to be on top. We had to travel lots, to go to head offices and things like that to try to maintain your business.

EP: Supermarket head offices where you were selling the product and convincing them they should buy from you?

JB: Yes, yes.

EP: Take A&P on River Street, the store, and Safeway would be the two that I would personally have known.

JB: That kept Shopeasy.

EP: Oh yes.

JB: You remember Shopeasy?

OM: On Victoria Avenue.

JB: Yes, they were all over the place.

EP: That came before my time, I guess.

JB: They were red and white plaques in front of their stores. Red and white stores.

EP: Remember the Holsum bread on the shelves at A&P as an example. And I guess you were supplying A&P, but Safeway did its own baking or have I not got that right?

JB: We supplied Safeway's.

EP: You did?

JB: Yes, but they controlled you on the shelf. Because they had a bakery, Empress Foods in Winnipeg, which they had to keep their plant running and full.

EP: Yes.

JB: There were all kinds of pressures, if you will, to keep their bakery going.

EP: Yes.

JB: And us trying to keep our bakery going.

EP: So let's take the competition between yourselves and Safeway for example now. Providing bread to A&P, in terms of freshness, you would have them beat all the more. What would Safeway's be doing? How quickly can they get bread out onto the shelves?

JB: They used their in-store as kind of a thing saying, "We are the freshest because we bake it right here."

EP: That is the front of it?

JB: Yes, and you get the idea that their bread is fresh they have got an oven right there.

EP: Yes.

JB: And it came from Winnipeg, like overnight.

EP: So there would be a truck or trucks coming in every day?

JB: Every day or every second day.

EP: Baked one day and overnight?

JB: Another one was the Superstore. Like they all get bread out of Winnipeg.

EP: Oh yes, the Superstore at Intercity.

JB: Yes, and the Wholesale Club that is all the one and the same.

EP: Right.

JB: And they travelled overnight. They would bake products in different plants for us across Canada. In Winnipeg you would have a one plant which is nothing but buns, and mostly Canada for hamburgers and hotdogs for McDonald's, for Burger King. They have all those. We had all seven McDonald stores at one time.

EP: All we can get at a Tim Horton's bakeries these days, but that is an issue neither of us knows enough about. We could have a good discussion though.

JB: There is one baker that we bought product from that made pies and things just outside of Hamilton. He bakes for Tim Horton's like bagels and different things like that.

EP: Yes.

JB: And their warehouse, oh gosh, it has got to be three storeys high inside with a different machine that--. Kind of a drive-in freezer where they would bake and just fill that right up to cover all the Tim Horton's in Ontario.

EP: Right. So what they were doing was sort of pre-baking or whatever and then freezes it and sends it out and then it goes finished off in the Tim Horton's stores I guess? Yes.

JB: Well sometimes Tim Horton's stores like that egg sandwich that they make, that was always brought in frozen.

EP: Hm.

JB: And it is just like you would think it was baked there, eh? So they have a plant somewhere that does nothing but those egg sandwiches or whatever that they have.

EP: Yes.

JB: So every company has a different way to make their business profitable.

EP: Yes. Freshness is a very important part of it. To what extent is the freshness is more in the advertising than in their reality?

JB: Advertising is a must. You need advertising to keep it in the public eye all the time you know. You have to have that. But freshness is very important. You can advertise all you want, and if you don't look after your product out in that market, you are

going to burn a customer once, maybe twice and next time they are not going to buy it, no matter how much money you spend on advertising. So it would be foolish not to back up your advertising with good bakeries.

EP: You do your darndest to get it there to keep it fresh.

JB: Oh yeah. You have to.

EP: City Bread Company in Winnipeg uses speciality breads for Safeway?

JB: Yes, we have bought bread off of them too, City Bread. We had a City Bread route in the City of Thunder Bay and the salesman that is all he sold was rye breads in the morning and then Vachon cakes in the afternoon. Things like that. So that bakery in Winnipeg had good rye bread. Another one was Kub Bakery too from Winnipeg which was quite large in Winnipeg the big bakers.

EP: These were ways you had of supplementing because your basic product was primarily the white and the brown?

JB: Yes. It was easier to ship in 100 loaves or 300 loaves rather than trying to and you couldn't mix it in the mixers because the mixer upstairs would mix 700 loaves at once.

EP: Sure.

JB: And so you couldn't use 700 loaves of rye bread.

EP: No.

JB: Unless you spread it over three days.

EP: And then it is not fresh?

JB: That's right. The goodness was not there.

EP: No.

JB: No.

OM: How much would you produce for McDonald's? Were they a big account for you at that time?

JB: They were huge, actually, because we had three or four McDonalds in the city of Thunder Bay. We had one in Dryden, one in Kenora, and one in Fort Frances. They went on our trailer system out that way. But they were huge, but they were not profitable. They ran their own bakeries in different parts of the country, and they knew what it costs to run a high-speed plant efficiently. And if we were not as efficient as them, actually it almost cost you. They would grind you right to the bone for price because it was all we could run 300 buns a minute or something and if your plant was not that efficient, it was tough to get a contract with them. And if you did bow to their pricing, well what it did at times was fill in the hours in the plants where you had some down times. Say one day you only had seven hours of production and you need 10, it was a good filler something like that.

EP: Yes.

JB: Because you have to pay the staff.

EP: Yes.

JB: Because they are guaranteed their 40 hours a week.

EP: Sure.

JB: Things like that. In a sense, it was good, and in another sense, it wasn't a very profitable thing. Even though you went through the hoops making a lot of buns, but not a lot of money.

EP: A&W as well did you supply?

JB: Yes, we did A&W's too.

EP: Burger King?

JB: Burger King, McDonald's, and A&W's. We had probably the type of bun that they wanted nationally. Like they use to say, "32 sesame seeds on a bun" or something like that. [Laughs] Some of their specs. And if it wasn't there or the seeder wasn't working right you would hear about it. [Laughs]

EP: Even though they would all be eaten up I suppose? [Laughs] Did the changes, the competition, eventually drive Shaw's out of the business is ultimately a question I suppose to ask Sandy?

JB: He would probably be able to answer that better because he was on the accounting end of it with the accountant. But I think, like I said, there were changes going through the industry. Like eating habits of people, Walmarts coming in. We supplied quite a bit of Walmart's stuff. But nowadays, it is Dempster's or somebody is supplying them. Everything does take a little bit out of your business. English muffins are one that we don't produce them. We had to buy them and different types. Bagels you don't make them, you have to buy them.

EP: No.

JB: Because you couldn't run them efficiently and make money at them. So slowly I guess it would shrink. Weston's tried for years and years, 40 years, to try to get into this market and always abandoned it and left town because we were that strong in the marketplace. It was all those things. I guess it's a number of things that affect it.

EP: I guess a good part of it would be changes at the table or wherever you are to put it? People choosing to eat in a more diverse way I suppose?

JB: Well now you are looking at the chain stores. You can almost go and get your own meal there you know.

EP: Yes.

JB: Anything you buy, you can jump out of a car and have supper on the table.

EP: Sure.

JB: Things like that.

EP: Deli sections of the stores?

JB: Both people in the family are working now and there is not a lot of time.

EP: Yeah.

JB: For them to do all the things they want to do as a family you know.

EP: Is the door-to-door retail business you were mentioning that earlier, as the wife of the house was also out, away from the house?

JB: At times yes. But I think mainly then years ago a lot of women did stay at home.

EP: And that is when the retail business. Of course, they could have been baking their own bread, but they were buying?

JB: They did too. Yes, they did both.

EP: Yes.

JB: Like even in the country where they could have baked bread, you would take a basket full of bread—like eight ten loaves of bread, donuts, sweet buns—walk up to the house, and they would empty your basket and take everything because they would see you next Monday, so they would try to buy for a week you know just like groceries. They would come into town and buy for the month can goods and things like that.

EP: Yes.

JB: No, a lot of things affected--.

EP: Was there a point when the rural business was given up, when you stopped? You said the population changed as well?

JB: Yes. The cost to run vehicles, gas was a big deal. At one time I think we use to pay what 35 cents a gallon in the '60s, you know, and even diesel fuel 29 or 28 cents.

EP: Right.

JB: Now at 1.09 a litre, which is close to five or six bucks a gallon. You have to charge a good buck.

EP: To justify it.

JB: The products that are fairly expensive and if you get resistance from the consumer, nothing you can do unless if you are so efficient that you can absorb that cost somehow, or produce the product better, faster, quicker or whatever, yeah you could probably stay alive. If you didn't keep up with all the changes you would slowly lose ground.

EP: And people were moving into town or the population in rural areas fell off as well I suppose? You have to go further to get to a door or would that not be the case? I guess Kam's population is pretty small?

JB: Small or constant, eh. Stay the same.

EP: Yeah.

JB: But we used to ship out of Pickle Lake. We used to drive our bread truck up there in boxes to ship to Pikangikum Trout Lake.

EP: The northern Communities as well?

JB: To all the northern Communities. And we could ship a case of bread for what was it a 48 cents stamp on the box. You see it was like a postal point.

EP: Oh I see.

JB: So you could ship a box of bread for that much.

EP: And Canada Post would take it?

JB: They would take it in, yes. But they had to watch how they took it in because bread was very bulky.

EP: Yes.

JB: They would have to top load it or else they were not profitable.

EP: No.

JB: They could not take a load of bread because they would go broke doing that.

EP: No.

JB: They would have to have everything else with it.

EP: Yes.

JB: Canned goods and who knows what else.

EP: Were Northern Stores in some of these communities?

JB: Yes. Pickle Lake had Northern Stores.

EP: Right.

JB: Pickle Lake has and I don't know if they still have it or not they may have it. It is called Northern. Most of these places had Northern Stores in the outlying markets.

EP: Were Northern Stores buying from you?

JB: Yes. Yes, they were. They were buying from us and from Winnipeg also.

EP: Right.

JB: Depending where they could fly out of.

EP: Yes. I was going to say they would be flying the bread in?

JB: Yes, they would fly it in. We did it through Pickle Lake post office, and we also did it through Red Lake. At Balmertown there was an airport there in Balmertown. So we delivered the bread there.

EP: Does Canada Post still do that? Do they still handle the freight?

JB: Oh yeah. I am sure they still postage bread into the communities, yes, because it is subsidized by the government in some shape or form.

EP: Yes. What do you want to--. Say if liquor could be sold across the province in the same standard price, why not bread and milk?

JB: Exactly.

EP: Canada Post could play some part in ensuring that?

JB: Yeah.

EP: Oh boy. Nooks and crannies we could get into! [Laughs]

JB: It's unbelievable what went on. You wonder how you did it.

EP: Well, these changes clearly impacted the industry. Did the workforce at Shaw's decline over the years or was it pretty steady? The equipment remained more or less the same?

JB: In each community we still kept a salesperson there, but we just tried to bolster their sales with other products to keep them there. So the outlying communities the salesman stayed there. At times there if we had to amalgamate, we would get one guy to do two towns.

EP: Yes.

JB: One guy in the morning here and then in the afternoon he would do the other town. That is the only way you could get around some of that stuff. But in the city, I guess I am trying to think if we had 10 or 12 city routes that we had. One or two or four, five,

six, seven, eight, nine, ten. We had two cake routes, 31, 32. Yeah, we had about 12 routes in the city and 15 or 16 in outlying ones. So 50 percent of our business was out of town.

EP: Sure. And then one person per route I suppose?

JB: Yeah, yeah. And the only back up you have was employ a swing person to help you out for holidays and everything.

EP: Yeah.

JB: Or if you didn't have the swing person you could use a supervisor who could do the job for you for two weeks.

EP: How large a challenge was weather over the years? Were there seasonal patterns that weather would affect you?

JB: Yes, especially winter weather was bad for transportation. Sometimes a transport should be there early in the morning and wouldn't get there until late in the afternoon. And that would affect the guys selling their loads and stuff. The next order is coming right on the heels of the other one that just got there.

EP: Yeah.

JB: So you would think, "Well they are going to buy the same amount of bread," but somehow they do without and eat something else, I believe, when they were short of bread. So that would result in the salesman phoning in a cut saying, "I don't need a thousand loaves tomorrow, all I need only is 500."

EP: Yes.

JB: So things like that. Yes, weather did affect transportation and sales that way.

EP: You mentioned of course the other seasonal pattern in terms of surges in buns in the summertime.

JB: Yeah.

EP: And so on, but that is a good one!

JB: That is a good one.

EP: Yeah, that is a good one against them.

JB: Yeah, that is a good surge yes.

EP: The weather primarily in terms of winter. What other challenges would you say that you faced on the job besides dealing with these changes that occurred over the years?

JB: Well, I think it is the people thing. A lot of it is people.

EP: Yes.

JB: Not everybody wanted to be a bread man the rest of their lives. And like I said, it involved lots of training.

EP: Yes.

JB: That was a constant challenge just to keep people interested.

EP: Right.

JB: And keeping them wanting to do that job.

EP: Right.

JB: And especially if you have got a good person that was really conscientious and did his stuff good, you'd really tried to keep them.

EP: Mmhmm.

JB: I guess Sandy does a great job, which he did. But once they wanted to move on, they moved on, and there is not much you could do, or people moved away. I guess training was probably one of the biggest things.

EP: The biggest challenges?

JB: The biggest challenges, yes.

EP: Keeping your work force?

JB: Yes. Constantly keeping your workforce in there.

EP: But you stayed with it all those years?

JB: Yeah, yeah.

EP: And you were enjoying doing it?

JB: Yeah, to my surprise I enjoyed it. Yeah. [Laughs] “I don't think I could sell bread.” “Oh, go ahead and go try it,” and then they would give you a slip and say, “Go see Mr. Walton,” was the Manager at McGavin's. I still remember him. He showed me around the bakery and indoctrination of the ovens and what is going on with the mixes. And I am walking around I guess at 21 or 22 years old with my hands in my pocket looking around. He says, “You know mister, when you get in the bakery business, you is not going to have your hands in your pocket.” He starts stomping around the bakery full of energy like you say you got to move it. I did it. I wasn't sorry for it. No. Especially out of school and I had a job and was happy with it. The railroad was the first job.

EP: Sure. Were you tempted to do something else along the way?

JB: Oh, at times I did probably. I am trying to think what it was that I applied for. Other companies like other forms of selling like a chip salesman or something like that I did try. When I got dissatisfied or something or whatever irks you, at times you just want to--. “I had enough of this!” But you get over it. [Laughs]

EP: Quite clearly yes.

JB: Yeah. [Laughs]

EP: What at the end of it all are the most vivid memories that you have of the work that you did with your job?

JB: Vivid memories? I don't know if I can answer that one. Like in what way?

EP: Any way at all. Meeting with some very bad weather once or snowstorms?

JB: Yeah, there were times when there were not enjoyable. I guess when a salesman phones in from Ignace and says, "I fell off the back of the truck and hurt my back," and it is about ten to 12:00 here, midnight. It means loading a vehicle jump in the van and go, and you go there and about the time you get there it is time to go to work.

EP: At 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning, right?

JB: Yeah. And you have to drive. Like one of his jobs was driving the mail bread to Pickle Lake this particular person. So yeah, times like that they were tough. Yeah. Hard to keep awake on the road. Things like that. You had to pull over. You would keep driving and pull over and get a 10-minute shut eye.

EP: Yes.

JB: A truck goes by and wakes you up and away you go again.

EP: Yeah.

JB: And you know you are on a schedule, and you have to get there.

EP: Ever had an accident?

JB: Well, no, fortunately no. Hit the shoulder a few times

EP: Which wakes you up.

JB: Which wakes you up, yeah. We used to drive at times when we didn't use the transport system to go to Geraldton. We had a five-tonne truck that would take a load up to Geraldton and Long Lac. You would leave here at 4:30 in the morning, drive it there to be there for 7:30 because the salesman is waiting for you. So you drive the load there and you work the highway all the way back picking up Jellicoe, Beardmore, things like that. And going into resorts things like that. Going into McDermott and from

different things like that. Pass Lake store and all the way back home which was quite a long day. It was 12- or 14-hour days. Yeah, those kind of stand out. [Laughs]

EP: The people part of it I suppose, you got to know an awful lot of people?

JB: Oh yeah.

EP: All over Northwestern Ontario.

JB: Pretty well. There are times when you saw people in town here and you know them, and you say--.

EP: You need a reminder of where exactly.

JB: Where you knew them from. You say Sioux Lookout and you would say, "Oh, I know now yeah." You would have to jog your memory. You would know a lot of people.

EP: Yes.

JB: Driving those loads out of town, they were hectic.

EP: I can imagine.

JB: Yeah. It really wasn't an easy job come to think of it.

EP: No.

JB: But like you say, you accepted it. And after a while you just do it.

EP: That is the way your life goes!

JB: Yeah, exactly yeah.

EP: Do you have any thoughts about the most important events that happened in the workplace during your career?

JB: Well, important for me was that I went to management, which I thought was given the opportunity. Like they were always looking for supervisors or something. When you get approached you feel pretty good about it.

EP: It is a compliment!

JB: Yeah, so.

EP: So your abilities have been recognized.

JB: They know that you are hardworking and trying and want to do the job.

EP: Was it a pretty happy place to be working?

JB: Pretty well.

EP: It was a family business.

JB: Yes, it was a family business. Yeah.

EP: Yes.

JB: But sometimes a national company is a lot easier to work for, you know.

EP: With the bosses far away?

JB: Way and on top of that, you know what your job is. You have got to meet the numbers and things like that. If you are not meeting them, you do something to get them up, and you did all that, and I think they accept you that way. But here you are really right in their face, especially a family business.

EP: Oh very. [Laughs]

JB: Exactly. Yeah, oh yeah. That was not necessarily a bad thing that is for sure.

EP: No, just different.

JB: It is different.

EP: Definitely different.

JB: It is a different way, yes.

EP: Yeah. Well, I don't know whether to ask you whether you think it is important for us to preserve and share Thunder Bay's grain trade history or not?

JB: Not much we can do about it now, can we?

EP: Sad to say this is not all history yet, thank goodness, but there are times.

JB: Yeah.

EP: But we have, of course, taken a long step into and beyond the industry in a way in terms of talking about moving bread but it seemed like a good idea to do that.

JB: Mmhmm.

EP: Are there any thoughts you would have about? Well maybe are there any questions that we should have asked which you could provide and answer? [Laughs]

JB: I don't know. You have got a sheet load of them there. [Laughs]

EP: Well, I do have a sheet here yes.

JB: You do bring memories back when you start talking about it. Things do come back to you and things you never thought about after you left work.

EP: We come to an understanding that Owen often has a question that arises in his mind as he is listening and watching the recorder.

OM: I think Ernie and you have covered it very well. But I lived in Westfort, and I was brought up in the '50s, and they still had the horse drawn wagons, and I think Purity bread and they had Harvest bread too.

JB: Yeah Five Star Harvests.

OM: Is that right?

JB: I think that was Five Start Harvest. Or Harvest Bread, might have been Magazines.

OM: Okay, it was right off of May Street.

JB: Yeah 402 North May Street. Same place we were in. They started there and I think maybe McGavin's bought that from them.

OM: And our corner store was Nelson. They were on Syndicate and Walsh I guess so.

JB: Nelson, Walsh and Brock.

OM: Yes, in that area. Syndicate, Franklin.

JB: Franklin, there you go yes.

OM: It was a little family store.

JB: Thornboroughs, Wallberg's.

OM: Wallberg's I guess was there. But a lot of them.

JB: There are a lot of independents.

OM: A lot of independents. I can recall that we had milk and bread delivered then by horses and horse draw carriages in the '50s. At least well into the '50's I believe, in response to the question that was asked. Now I assume that Shaw's had its own fleet of vehicles. And were they kept and maintained right on the property?

JB: The horses yes.

OM: There would be stables there?

JB: There was a barn right there and stables. Same with Co-op Dairy, that's where Tim Horton's is now and the Royal Bank. They build there on Miles. That was a Co-op Dairy I believe.

OM: Right ok.

JB: Thunder Bay Co-op or whatever it is called. And their stables were right there too.

OM: And then they must have moved in mechanized delivery in the '60s I would think?

JB: Into vehicles.

OM: Did they maintain their own fleet as well?

JB: We did. I know we did. We had a mechanic on staff, and they maintained the trucks and things like that.

OM: At the height of its business, how many staff would they have had including your route salesmen in the various districts?

JB: Oh, we had probably 50 or 60 full-time employees.

OM: So it was a big business?

JB: Probably 35 or 40 part-timers. They were probably pushing the 100 mark. Probably for sure. I think Sandy could tell you way better exactly because he was involved with all the cheques and stuff that he had to sign. But I think it was in that neighbourhood close to 100 people that Shaw's employed.

OM: Well, I remember as a kid driving by the big bread [inaudible] and smell the baking of bread.

JB: Yeah.

OM: Did you ever get tired of that?

JB: No, no it just tickles your buds. Fresh bread. [Laughs]

OM: Thank you.

JB: I guess when I was in, I guess the guys that did the horse and buggy deliveries. The horse knew the route as good as the man did. And when that last call came the horse was heading for the barn, and you had better be on that wagon because he is gone. He is gone and he is hungry, and he wants his oats or he wants to eat.

OM: At a pretty good clip. [Laughs]

JB: The old fellow that I worked with, Sandy Gibson, he lived just here over on Aylmer Avenue. He said, "If you didn't get on that wagon, my God that horse is gone." Because they use to drop at each stop something from the horse's mouth like a stone or something on the ground. So he would not move until you lifted that.

OM: I see.

JB: But there were times when he was doing house calls, he would fill his basket full of bread and the horse would go along with him.

OM: Sure.

JB: He didn't have to get back to the wagon until he sold out his basket of bread.

EP: The horse just followed him along the street.

JB: Yeah, yeah. But when the last call came, the horse knew it was the last call. He is heading for the barn. [Laughs] And you had better get on that wagon.

EP: Yeah, they are not stupid.

JB: No definitely not a dumb animal, that is for sure.

EP: Well, if I get into reminiscing myself a little bit. I grew up in the country in Manitoba and of course my mother baked bread on the farm. I remember, these days it seems kind of crazy, or maybe I shouldn't say that in your presence, the extent to which the bread that had being purchased from the store was a treat when you were at the neighbours. I guess that would be the homemade baked bread tended to be kind of crusty. I think that was the main thing about it.

JB: You could eat a whole loaf of that, coming out of the oven, yourself.

EP: Well, the crustiness I suppose it maybe the difference between the oven or whatever sort maybe is on the farm or in your home as against the industrial process the bread is made.

JB: Yeah, I think how they did it in big major ovens is that they would spray it or like steam it with a shot of steam and it would crust and the sugar gave it the brown colour.

EP: Yeah.

JB: Sometimes when you use to burn bread in a toaster you know it has got pretty good sugar in it.

EP: I see. So that is another of the inducements.

JB: Yeah.

EP: If you go into the history of wholesale trade 125 years of course, sugar was a very important part of wholesale trade.

JB: Oh yeah.

EP: It gets used in so many ways as we are being told these days, salt is being used as well to an excessive instead we are being told.

JB: Yes, we are trying to stay away from salt as much as we can.

EP: Yes.

JB: Other than the natural salt that is in the foods that you eat.

EP: Right. I never put salt on anything I eat.

JB: I used to salt it until my arm was sore.

EP: Yeah. [Laughs] You can get addicted to it.

JB: Yeah, you like the taste of salt. That is the only reason you did it. Kind of make the little lady a little mad about her cooking.
[Laughing]

EP: Yes. Well, let me see. I don't suppose we need to worry about memorabilia? You don't have anything with the grain trade nor did you carry anything away from Shaw's Bakery when you left?

JB: Oh, I got a shirt.

EP: Oh yeah.

JB: Do you want to see it?

EP: Sure, we can take a look at it. Are there any other persons we should interview? We can talk about that actually. Thanks very much, Joe, for giving us a very interesting interview. It is going on two hours actually imagine that.

JB: Well, you said it would be closer to two hours.

EP: You have earned your keep again. [Laughs]

JB: I hope I was able to provide an interesting conversation for you.

EP: You really filled in a lot, and certainly sketched some more interesting word pictures and so forth. Thanks again.

End of interview.