

Narrator: Victor Bel (VB)

Company Affiliations: Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Canadian Grain Commission (CGC)

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Summary: Former inspector for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency Victor Bel discusses his career in the ships and grain elevators across Thunder Bay's port. He begins by recalling his father and uncle's work in the grain elevators, his first experience in the elevators on his father's night watchman shift, and his parttime job as a Canadian Grain Commission sampler. Bel surveys the Thunder Bay waterfront, recounting which elevators were open during his career and sharing some of their unique features. As an inspector for the CFIA, Bel describes a typical day of ship inspections, elevator inspections, and the occasional boxcar and winter storage inspection, ensuring no bugs or foreign material were building up. He shares memories of inspecting old war ships, fumigating extremely infested ships, encountering wildlife on the job, and inspecting in the cold, dark winter mornings. He discusses changes over the years, including vessel holds becoming smoother and less likely to form buildup, changes to service prices, and improved safety conditions in the ships and elevators. Other topics discussed include sailors deserting foreign ships, the challenge of identifying insects as an untrained entomologist, the issue of preventing invasive species outbreaks, the CFIA's reputation for integrity, the CFIA's cooperation with workers from other sectors, and the most commonly found inspection issues.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: Before you start with your uncle, we need you to introduce yourself.

VB: The name is Victor Bel, with one "L". My uncle Dominic, who is my father's twin brother, worked at the Fort William Elevator Company, just down here in Westfort, and his job was oiling the big drive wheels. They were huge wheels, maybe six feet in diameter with ropes, and they drove all the machinery in the elevator. For some reason, I believe he got hit on the head. He went in there to oil it, and I guess he wasn't paying attention, and he got hit on the head. That would be 1940 something, just after the war. I don't remember.

NP: And he was killed in that accident?

VB: Yes. He was a bachelor, so there were no children. And my father worked at the Grand Trunk Pacific Elevator, which later became the National, and then became Cargill. He worked there from the day he arrived in Canada from Italy.

NP: Do you know approximately when that was that he arrived from Italy?

VB: It was 1920 something. I don't really know the exact date.

NP: Did your dad ever talk about what it was like working at the elevators? What it was like? The interactions with the different staff?

VB: You've got to remember that he never really learned, or he wasn't comfortable with, English. And I growing up was never into the Italian language bit. So, we had a little difficulty with interrelationships, I guess you would say. I understood what he said to me, but I couldn't respond because I never spoke Italian. I spoke better Ukrainian than I did Italian, and I don't recall him saying too much about elevators. He just went to work in the morning, came back on his bicycle.

NP: What did he do in the elevator?

VB: That's a good question. I think at one time he used to bring the railroad cars in with these big winches. They pulled the cars in and the other guys, the shovellers, would unload them. And then he would shoot them out and bring them in, and as they unloaded them, he would replace a full car. That's the old days when they had the old wooden boxcars, where they would have to open up the car and break all these grain doors. Did you ever hear of grain doors? It was that era, before the tanker cars, way before hoppers.

NP: So, would all the other workers at the elevator have been, at that level, been Italian then?

VB: No, it was a mixture of Italian, Ukrainian, Poles. I was only a young kid, so I can't remember. We used to call them the bicycle brigade because they would start here in Westfort, and they'd be on their bicycles. And you'd see them all going down the road right to Chippewa with a bicycle until the snow arrived, and then they got on the buses, or streetcars.

NP: So they would take off from Frederica and James area?

VB: Yes, they would come from all that area up around Brown Street, wherever they happened to be living. And they would all be on their bicycles.

NP: Heading across the bridge.

VB: Across the bridge, yes. And then in the wintertime, the streetcar only went to Chippewa Park or one of the paper mills. So they would have to get off and they'd have to walk quite a ways into the elevators there. That's my recollection. In the later years, he ended up being a watchman in the elevator. After everybody left for the weekend, he would be the watchman. He'd go make his rounds, make sure they didn't have any fires or whatever.

NP: Did you ever go to the elevators with him when you were a young kid?

VB: Yes, I remember going during the holidays. It was the 4:00 to 12:00. He was doing the 4:00 to 12:00 shift as a watchman. And I remember going and just totally terrified of the place.

NP: What was it like?

VB: Well, it was dark. It was quiet, a lot of strange noises. But he would take me upstairs in the hoist, the elevator. And he'd go to various keys and there was dust and there was grain and pigeons flying through. But it was eerie at night for a small kid. I think I went once or twice and then I said, "No, I don't want to go anymore." Yes, that was in the summertime. I used to have to ride on the crossbar of the bicycle, which he had padded for me. That wasn't a very pleasant experience. So that's my recollection.

NP: You'd be alone then in the elevators at that time of day?

VB: Yes, it was 4:00 to 12:00. So he would start making his rounds. Everybody had gone home. It was a holiday or something, and everybody had gone home. So I guess they had watchmen 24 hours a day there. So he would go around with this little,

whatever he had, stick the key in that said that he had been to that post at a certain time, and then continue on. So I'd follow him, but it was a scary place.

NP: Would he have to go to the top of the elevator?

VB: Right to the top. You could see the open bins and the grain, and walking on the cat walks. It scared the hell out of me. It wasn't too pleasant.

NP: So they didn't have the bin covers then?

VB: No, a lot of them had open bins. Still some today have open bins.

NP: Did you get to the outside to look over the city?

VB: You'd look out through a dusty window, but that was it.

NP: Your uncle, you said worked at the Fort William Elevator. Was that in the stand, mid-Frederica?

VB: Yes, there were three or four in a row there, where the overhead walk bridge is at the foot of Brown Street. It was one of those. I think it was called the Fort William Elevator. I think it's still there today. I'm not too sure.

NP: I think there are two there.

VB: There used to be three or four. Some got knocked down. I think maybe the city owns most of them now.

NP: Did you ever know anything about that stand of elevators? Was that sort of the playground area for Westfort kids?

VB: I've been into those elevators. I used to inspect them. So I know them like the back of my hand, but as a kid, no. I don't recall going that far. See that's quite a ways from where I lived, and we didn't venture that far. You stayed around your own area.

NP: I want to talk a little bit about the elevators in that area, but before I do that I want to go back to your uncle. He had an accident that killed him, but if I recall he had an earlier accident as well.

VB: I never got too much detail of that. At the end, no. His hand was missing. I heard--. The story goes that he had a hunting accident. He was quite a hunter and I think he was going over a fence or something. Or I don't know, the gun went off, or the shotgun and they had to take his hand off, so he was missing a hand.

NP: And still doing this physical labour.

VB: Oh yes, he still drove a car.

NP: At the elevator.

VB: Yes, he lived right next [to them]. He had a house at the foot of King Street [Kingston]. The last house there. He didn't have that far to go. Yes, he still did his job.

NP: That's right beside those elevators.

VB: There's a little road goes to some of the elevators, and he had owned that last house. I never did get the story. As a young kid, you're not interested in that kind of stuff anyways. He was my father's twin brother.

NP: In spite of the fact that you didn't care for being in the elevator from 4:00 to 12:00, you ended with a career that took you into a lot of elevators. Tell us a little about how you got involved in the grain trade.

VB: How did I get involved in the grain trade? I really wasn't interested in the grain trade. That's the last place I wanted to work. Anyways, there was a posting for grain samplers, and I'd finished high school. At that time, I was having a hard time finding an apprenticeship. I wanted to be an electrician. I didn't find an apprenticeship, so there was a posting in the paper for grain samplers. So he said, "Put your name in for that, what the hell have you got to lose?" So, I got an interview, got hired for three months, got laid off because they're only temporary, just for the summer rush. The next year they called me again, and I went again, but I really wasn't interested in the grain trade.

NP: Who was this with?

VB: The Board of Grain Commissioners [Canadian Grain Commission] at that time. And I think that went for five or six--. Once you get hooked into there, I don't know, you don't get too much ambition to do anything else I guess. So anyway, I stayed there with the Grain Commission until 1965 or 1966.

NP: Always as a sampler?

VB: Yes, I really wasn't interested in being a grain inspector. Just a means to an end, I guess.

NP: Why weren't you interested in being an inspector?

VB: I don't know, I guess to sit there and count the kernels, it just wasn't my bag, I guess. And then in 1965, I've never written it down, '66, there was another posting for—what the hang did they call it then inspecting ships and elevators for bugs and stuff. So I said, “Well that might be interesting.” So I applied for that and was successful and carried on, back into the elevators again.

NP: I'd like to divide the discussion up into a couple of areas. One is, because the jobs that you had took you into the different elevators, I'd like to ask about some elevators. But I'm particularly interested in certain ones that are not here anymore. Do you recall the elevators that were up near the Great Lakes paper mill, now Bowater? Tell me what you remember about those elevators, their names, and whatever you can think of.

[0:11:35]

VB: There was one that was right next to the Great Lakes paper mill, which is now Bowater. It was the last one on that side, right next to the Great Lakes and I think it was called the Electric. I remember it was all wood, the workhouse. It was wood. I remember that. There had been so much walking on the wood over the years that the knots were up and the rest was worn out. And you had wood stairs going up. I can't remember what year it was closed. But it was shortly thereafter I started inspecting that it was gone. It was closed. But I remember going there and we were walking, and I kept seeing these larvae running around. And somebody said, “Those are mealy worms.” The guy I was with, “They're mealy worms,” he said. “You want to save them. They're good for fishing.” But all through the cracks in the lumber floor, various places where there was lumber, there were mealy worms, and they were just full of them.

NP: What size were they?

VB: Oh, they'd be about, fully grown, about that long, about an inch, yellow, and some of the guys they told me they would get as much larvae as they can. They would put them in tins with, what the hang did they feed the cattle with, what did they call it? Brand? And they would keep getting these new generations for fishing. Instead of worms, you had mealy worms. But it was an all-wood place. It eventually burnt. They were tearing it down and it caught fire.

NP: So were the bins concrete?

VB: The bins were concrete. This is where I really never kept track of that. I could picture in my mind it sitting there, but that's about it. And then next door was the Northwestern and that was all concrete and they tore that one. There were two there, but the Electric was all wood and another one that was all wood was the Empire in the East End. It again was all wood construction. And it had a big steam engine in a separate part and a big wheel. It drove all the machinery in the elevator if I recall.

NP: If I recall correctly, I had a phone call from someone, and they salvaged that steam engine.

VB: Con College, isn't it?

NP: They are holding it somewhere safely along with a little pot of money for its restoration.

VB: I thought I read someplace that it was sitting there at Con College.

NP: Out in the yard?

VB: There was one outside with the big wheel on it. Now I could be wrong. For some reason I thought that I read something about the engineering department or something, and it was a steam-driven, steam engine from one of the elevators.

NP: So the Northwestern then, down at the turning basin.

VB: Now wait a minute, was it the Western Terminal. The one at the end of Brock Street was Northwestern. My memory is gone.

NP: The names changed.

VB: You want to get an older person than me that would probably know more.

NP: So, was there anything that distinguished that elevator, the second one?

VB: The Western Terminal? No, they were all basically the same.

NP: Then moving down the river--.

VB: Paterson, right. That's the one that had the storage bin they called the pagoda, because the roof was--. I think it was the pagoda, and that was a pretty old elevator. They always tell you, "Don't park your car near the pagoda roof because of the snow in the spring. It will all just slide off." I think once they got a car that was badly damaged. And it creaked and groaned every time the wind blew. But there again, it was just an elevator. Basically, they are all the same. Paterson had a spiral staircase that went right up to the top, in the workhouse. It had a spiral staircase. My boss and I would start at the bottom and by the time we got to the top we were dizzy with this spiral staircase. We thought it was a real hoot! But I would have loved to have gotten a piece of it when they were demolishing it. I think Pat Doherty I knew from Paterson said, "If you can get it out, you can have it." And I thought, "Oh my god, I've have to get a crane to get it out!" But it was the neatest thing I ever saw.

NP: Was it quite artistic?

VB: No it was just a novelty, the spiral staircase. I'd never seen one.

NP: So where would it go in the workhouse?

VB: Well, you know when you get in a workhouse—I'll call it a workhouse—you get in this little cage, which they call the hoist. But they also had stairs. Sometimes they are right in where the hoist goes up--. [Telephone rings] **[Audio pauses]**

NP: We were talking about the spiral staircase

VB: Don't make a big deal about that.

NP: It was different, and that's what we are looking for. Where should we start up?

[A minute or so of discussing how to get back into the conversation]

NP: You were talking about the difference between the Paterson workhouse and how you go up on the hoist, but in this elevator--.

VB: They had a hoist, but they also had a circular staircase going up. All of them had stairs to get to the top of the elevator along with the hoist. In some you pulled a rope to get the hoist to go up, others you had a button. There were 26 elevators, and there was 26 different ways. Basically, they had a hoist, or you could take the stairs.

NP: If we move down the river, we have that set of three elevators I think.

VB: How many are there right now? Three? I think there's three there. I think there were four. I think one they bashed down that was right in that--. Don't quote me. Then you got to where?

NP: Chippewa.

VB: There was Cargill, which was the National, and before that was the Grand Truck Pacific elevator, and right next door was the Searle elevator, which is owned by somebody in Winnipeg.

NP: Anything that distinguished those two?

VB: They are all basically the same design. Some are bigger than others. Then the next one you got to was over here by the Jackknife Bridge. It used to be, what, Robin Hood?

NP: Ogilvie's.

VB: Ogilvie's. Now Sask Pool. And then you went along and the next one was the Empire. Then you got to the Intercity Group.

NP: Any thoughts about the Intercity group?

[0:20:52]

VB: P&H that's still going today. P&H, Parrish and Heimbecker. It's a nice small, little elevator, and then there is Pool 1. Some of the older guys would know them by different names. And then from Pool 1, you had what? Pool 3. No.

NP: UGG?

VB: Then you get Pool 1, and what was next across from Pool 1?

NP: UGG M and then Thunder Bay elevator, a little elevator beside it.

VB: Oh yes, the old Thunder Bay elevator. That`s right.

NP: Was it still operational when you were working?

VB: Yes, it was. When I first started back in `66 with the food production and marketing branch, plant quarantine, or whatever it is now, today, yes, that was operating. That`s right. It was another oldie.

NP: And then Pool 7.

VB: Pool 7, yes. And then was Pool 3. Pool 7 was the one I missed.

NP: Canada Malting was in there.

VB: Yes, Canada Malting also, yes.

NP: Any differences in the Canada Malting operation?

VB: No, again, it was a grain terminal except they had the malt house where they made the malt. And then you got to Pool 6 by itself. And then again you got the other cluster. There was Pool 2, and it was operating when I was gainfully employed. And then the rest—Richardson`s and United Grain Growers.

NP: Was there a Pool 5 there between Richardson`s, Pool 4A and B? And then there was the last one in that stand.

VB: Pool 5, Pool 5. You see one of them down here was Pool 5 at one time. So--.

NP: In Westfort.

VB: Yes, if I recall Pool 5.

NP: Pool 5 was where the 1945 explosion was.

VB: Oh, there was Sask Pool 4, Sask Pool 4A and 4B that was again--.

NP: Not around when you were--. I don't know if they rebuilt after the explosion.

VB: Yes, they did. That's Pool 4A and 4B. I don't know what they are called today. Still 4A and 4B. In fact, when I was there talking to some of the fellows, they were--. I was trying to tell them to keep the place clean. You're getting too much, dirt, dust. "Don't tell us about keeping clean and dust." And he'd pull up his shirt and there was all this scar tissue from when the elevator blew back in the '40s where he got burnt with the flash. I still remember he pulled up his shirt and "Look at that." He'd been in the explosion. So I really can't remember what the--.

NP: The series of elevators was.

VB: How quickly you forget. I do know there were 26 elevators, operating elevators, when I was working, and I've been in all of them to inspect them.

NP: Were they closing down over the time of your career?

VB: Yes. The two over here near the Bowater plant. The Empire was closed. Pool 2 was closed eventually, and one other one. That's about all I can think of.

NP: The Frederica Avenue ones?

VB: Yes, they eventually closed. They opened, they closed. They went from grain, they went to pellets, like off-board grain. They were sort of the, I don't know--. Then they got mustard seed. I don't know if today they are operating under the Board.

NP: The one we missed, and the one you were talking about when you said there were four along that stretch, Elevator D.

VB: Westland D, that's right. Yes, see there you go. Right on the curve there. Westland D was--. They were a cooperative between Richardson's, and I don't know who else. So they were just an overflow, an overflow house between two companies who ran it. So when their regular houses, grain terminals here filled up, they would transfer their cargo, their grain coming in over to the Westland D. That's right, Westland D. It's gone now, isn't it?

NP: Okay, let's switch to something specific and that's your job as the--. You were talking about being a sampler, but let's go to your job, the bug guy.

[0:26:09]

VB: With the Food Production and Marketing?

NP: What was your official title?

VB: Designation of Technical Officer, whatever that meant. That was back in '65 or '66. There was a huge grain sale to Russia at that time, and they'd complained about finding extraneous material in grain. So, agriculture—was it Food Production?—anyways they were going to hire more people to inspect the ships. I think at that time there was one fellow here at the Lakehead. I guess his biggest thing was making sure there were no insects in the ships. And he wasn't too much concerned about extraneous materials in the hulls. As far as I know.

NP: These extraneous materials would be things like--?

VB: Broken glass, nails, lumber, beer bottles. So they had this competition, and I got hired, and we started inspecting the ships. There had been somebody here all the time, as soon as the Seaway opened up. And they started coming directly in for overseas cargoes. They had a man here, and all he did was inspect the ships because Canada guaranteed that the grain they sold you was free and clear of insects and diseases. And they issued you what they called an international phytosanitary certificate.

NP: An international what--?

VB: Phytosanitary certificate. It's a world-wide certificate that countries around the world respect each other's. If you were to buy something from Finland, you would have to get a permit to import from Agriculture Canada, and you would have to meet the import requirements of whatever you are importing from Finland, say a grain of some sort. You would have to meet the Canadian requirements of a [inaudible] like no diseases, no insects. Then the Finnish agriculture would inspect the crop, and they would issue a phytosanitary certificate to the Canadian government saying, "We met all your requirements."

We guarantee that it is free and clear, whatever. So it's a cross-type of thing. So we were inspecting the ships and issuing them a permit to load the grain, because later on, after they were finished loading it, we would issue a phytosanitary certificate for that cargo which stated no extraneous material, meets the import requirements of the importing country whether it be Russia, Saudi Arabia or whatever, and that was based on the inspection of Agriculture, which later became Plant Quarantine. I think today it is called the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. So it's changed names.

NP: Does that mean then that in that job you had to know the import regulations for those various countries?

VB: We would have binders and binders full of the requirements of most countries in the world. Ottawa kept--. If some country changed their import requirements they would send out and we would get this thing. We would put it under whatever country it was, and we'd have to run right to the book.

NP: What would you say about the differences that existed among the countries, restrictions--?

VB: I haven't a clue.

NP: In general.

VB: I think they were all basically--. They didn't want your pests. Stored products bring the grain pests of stored products to be introduced into their country because what was not rampant here could be rampant, with the right conditions, over there. It could wipe out their forests, could wipe out everything. So basically, they didn't want our insects, we didn't want theirs, and that's about it.

NP: Is it possible for you to describe a typical day on the job?

VB: Well, when you say "job," basically we get ship inspection foreign ships coming to load, but when there are not any ships here to load of foreign registry, we would be inspecting the grain elevators, or people wanted to bring in nursery stock. They'd phone me up at the customs and say, "Well such and such has got a load of nursery stock from the United States, or they've got tulip bulbs from Holland." Or somebody wants to send a truckload of plants to some nursery in Duluth. We'd have to go and inspect them, make sure that there were no insects, and they were looking healthy and meet the requirements of the importing country, which would be the United States. So if we were not doing elevators, we were doing all this other little--. We were also responsible for the port of Churchill. So one of us would get sent to the port of Churchill for six weeks, then come back, and they would have to send somebody from Montreal because there's only two of us here. So when one fellow went to Churchill, the other is stuck here whether he's sick, or whatever, for six weeks. He's got to do everything, seven days a week. But normally if we get a call to do a ship, we would—whether it would be out at the anchorage or dockside—we would meet the ship, interview the captain.

NP: Who puts out the call to you?

VB: The ship's agent. There were two ship's agents here at one time. There was Lakehead Shipping and Lake Superior Shipping. They represented the ship when they pulled in. So we would go down and inspect the ship, certify whether it was okay to load.

NP: What was involved with inspecting the ship?

VB: Physically going down into the hold and start looking around in nooks and crannies and climb wherever you can and get on your hands and knees and see if you can spot insects regularly in your little travels. Make sure there is no rust, no oil, grease stains. Make sure it was clean, and right behind us would be what we called the port warden who was certifying that the ship was going to be safe to travel through the St. Lawrence Seaway and safely travel across the ocean. He was doing stability and safety of ship, where they were loading the grain. So there were two of us down there, each one doing a separate thing.

NP: Do you remember the names of the port wardens that you worked with?

VB: Oh, it's been--. Some have died, some have moved away. I don't know who's doing it now. There was quite a few. They were under steamship inspection.

NP: I wonder if you could think back to the early days on that job and what it felt like when you first went down in the ship.

[0:34:13]

VB: It was interesting. It was scary because back then, it seems like every old ship that they'd get their hands on, particularly the old—what're they called—victory ships in the Second World War, they were meant to be expendable. Anyways, they were a piece of garbage actually. They were meant to carry goods to wherever, and they weren't in very good shape. I think they might have been sitting in mothballs after the war and all of sudden they were showing up here for grain. As soon as we got aboard, we'd be looking around and say, "Oh, this is going to be a week clean-up job." So everybody was in there with getting all the rust off. And it was coming off like huge sheets of paper. It was just a massive headache to get these ships to be presentable to load grain.

NP: They would have come into port without anything in them?

VB: They would discharge goods in Montreal or Hamilton, steel or whatever, and then they would come up here to pick up a load so that they could make it both ways. It would bring cargo in and take cargo out, so they were making money both ways. And these were old clunkers from the '40s, from the Second World War. So I guess there was enough call that these ships were brought into service. Some of them were steam, if I recall. Anyways, they were in terrible shape. So, it was a real good experience to try to get these ships cleaned up.

NP: How do you get down in a hold?

VB: Well, they had these little hatch covers and then the ladder, and half the time we didn't know if the ladder was safe or not because you'd look down and it looked well. But you got there, and you put your hand on it and the rail was broken. And of course, we never had any safety apparatus like a rope or any. Usually, one person went down. Things have changed now. Now they've got harnesses. There have to be two people, and they have to be attached with the harness and the whole thing. But then we just went down with a flashlight in our back pocket and a hard hat, and that was it. And some of them were in awful shape. They spent five, six, seven days to get the ship ready to--. That we would say, "Yes, it's fine to load and get the garbage out." They were in terrible shape.

NP: What were the most interesting things you found in ships' holds?

VB: What do you mean by interesting? You see by the time we got to them they were cleaned out.

NP: Cleaned out but not up?

VB: Some of them I've been into--, I remember one particular ship that came in, and it was raining out, so they didn't want to open up the hatches because it was raining. There were no lights, but I had my light on the hard hat, and I can remember something hitting my hard hat, and saying, "God love us, the hatch cover must be leaking." Anyways I took the hat off and here were weevils. It was just raining weevils. You know, you could hear them hitting the deck. They were falling off the beams. And of course, by that time I'd had it. I think I did three holds. I said, "This is a fumigation job." And I went back, and I said to the captain, "What was your last cargo?" Sometimes we have language barrier. I finally made out it was peanuts. He carried peanuts from Africa. And the thing was just raining insects because the peanuts were all stuck on the--. And I don't know, the weevils were falling down. Anyways we had to gas that thing. It's the first time I ever had raining insects on me, just loaded! That's when they bring in the methyl bromide, and everybody goes to the hotel and guards are posted, and they put the gas in and fumigate it.

NP: When I hear fumigation and foodstuffs together, I'm a little worried, just because of residues and so on. What were the considerations for residues once something like a fumigation job is done?

VB: Well, first of all, if there were residues, we'd find them. Normally it was up on the arches. It's not like the ships today. These were arches, huge arches and a big ledge on the top and the residues would get up--. And of course, they unloaded copra, peanuts, rice or whatever, and nobody would go up there. They sucked it out at some of these ports. They had buckets or whatever, how

they unloaded it in Rotterdam or wherever, and nobody went up there to sweep, sweep off these beams. So over the years, months or whatever, tropics, wherever they were going, if there were larvae eggs, they would be hatching.

By the time they got here and we started really intensifying our search, by then we were finding larvae, we were finding adult insects. So now we have to get the boys to sweep all the residue down. They would sweep it all down. And then they would put it in a pile in the bottom of the hold, and if it was warranted, and mostly it was, we would have a fumigation. The residue was sitting there with all the bugs in it. We didn't take it off. So after they fumigated then we'd go down and we'd take samples of the residue, take it back to the office, process it to make sure there is no live insects and we'd have them take the residue out. So there was no residue by the time our grain is going into the hold.

NP: But what about the residue of the chemical used or the spray used to do the fumigation?

VB: The sprays were your normal sprays that you would buy in Canadian Tire—malathion, diazinon. The gas of course is deadly, but it was pumped out by the time anybody was ready to go into the hold, which would be us. Normally the fumigator sent his son down to say it was all clear. [Laughs] Sorry! That was funny. Anyways, they would have fans going, and they would blow it out, I guess. Move the air, get the methyl bromide gas out. And we'd say to him, “What kind of test do you have to make sure there is no gas [inaudible]?” “I send my son down. If he comes back up it's okay.” We used to chuckle over that. Yes, so they would open up the hatches and they would have these fans down there to circulate this gas to make sure it penetrates everything, a very costly affair. When you think you have to put 35, 36 men in a hotel for two days and a night, and hopefully they are there the next morning when you put them back on the ship, because otherwise all points west or east in Canada, you're looking for them.

[0:41:22]

NP: Did that ever happen?

VB: Oh sure, a lot of them, they just took off. They didn't have a visa, but they were in Canada, so off they went. Of course the ship would have to post a big bond. We had that happen lots in Churchill. But in Churchill they could catch them because they either--. The railroad goes three times a week, or they'd just sit at the airport and wait because there was no road out of there. So they'd catch them at the airport. They'd say, “Oh, I'm missing a crew member” They'd notify customs and they'd be, “heck the airport.” A lot of spies at the airport, too, say, “Well, we've got this Greek sailor's bought a ticket.” “Oh, he doesn't have a visa? So back you go to the ship.”

NP: In Thunder Bay it would be a little more difficult though?

VB: In Thunder Bay, well, they could hide in whatever ethnic group they were with. They could just disappear.

NP: So the ship could still sail without them?

VB: I think it did, yes. And if they didn't catch the person, well, it was all up to the ship's company to pay for the expenses they incurred looking for this guy. And then when they caught him and deportation, or whatever it was, the ship had to pay for this. So, sometimes they were pretty choosy about who was being let off the ship. But we didn't have that many in Thunder Bay that were jumping. Things have gotten better on the ships, and I think today you don't have that problem with fumigation on the ship, because it's just a steel box. It's like the Lakers years ago, they had all these arches, and they were just a horrible mess. There was the '20s and '30s architecture of the ship. And then as it got later on, you could just see it was just one huge box. They'd turn a hose on it, pump it out, and we were ready to go, cause time is money in the ships.

NP: So let's switch to the elevator inspection. What did that entail?

VB: Well, prior to this fiasco they called it I guess, with the Russians complaining about--. I guess they got a better deal on the price, extraneous material in the grain from Montreal and all this. They said, "Well, if we are going to inspect the ships for insects and extraneous material, we're going to start really inspecting the places where we're storing the grain." So then we started going into elevator inspection.

So basically it was get in the hoist, go right to the top floor, start walking around, making notes, taking a lot of samples. We used to take a lot of--. We had a huge amount of bags, small bags, in our pocket, and we'd go around poke in corners, a lot of damp grain, whatever. Take a sample, mark where you got it, and just make notes of debris here, this has gone mouldy, this wet grain here, a lot of pigeon poop, just general cleanliness as you would do in your house, vacuuming, sweeping. Don't leave the grain laid there too long in one spot. If it's damp, keep cleaning it out, just general housekeeping. This had never been done by, I think, the federal government. They just left it up to the company and nobody ever really--. So at that time we had instituted a regular, grain elevator inspection. So by the time we got to the west end of Fort William, it was time to start again on the east end of Port Arthur. We did this--. There was just the two of us here, so we did it on a regular basis.

NP: Who was the other fellow at the time you were working?

VB: There were three fellows that worked. I stayed and they moved on so there is no point in giving their name because they are gone.

NP: So what kinds of issues did you uncover at the various elevators? Ever any--?

VB: Oh, it was just trying to keep the place tidy. Over the year they didn't really--. If they had a little bit of a spill, they would sweep it up and throw it on the belt and take it away, but nothing that really--. Not a, how shall I say, conscious effort to keep it, day-by-day.

NP: Were there some elevators that were better housekeepers than others?

VB: Yes, there were some that were really, like Canada--. To me Canada Malt stands right up. They were really right up on cleaning. They were paranoid about it, because they've got a product that they're selling for consumption, shall I say, for beer or whatever, into the United States or wherever. So they were very, very cooperative, and they were very conscious about keeping it clean. Some of the other ones, yes, they made a conscious--. But you have to remember that a lot of these elevators were pretty old and just the design of them did not make it for keeping good housekeeping, unless you put a whole crew on every day to keep it clean. The minute you start moving grain, these places got untidy with grain falling off the belts. The architecture of them was not meant for keeping things clean. Shall I say clean, or just tidy? I don't know.

There's so much movement. There's belts above you, belts on the side of you, and it's just moving grain all the time, so there's going to be--. But at the end they were very good. When we started, it was a fight to say, "Look, you got to keep it clean, just for explosion sake. You've got to keep it clean." Back in the '90s when I retired, anyway, they were doing a very good job at trying to keep it clean with what they were working with, you know, the architecture, the design of the elevators. I don't know what it is like today. But we had good cooperation. We'd do our report. We'd test all the samples, and if we did find insects or whatever, we would send them a report, tell them and they would get right on it. They would hire somebody to spray the area, clean it up. They were very good about that. But there were 26 elevators, only two of us, plus all the other duties, so that sometimes a month would go by before we got back to some of these places. It just was an impossible thing to really keep on a daily basis, but when time permitted, we did the inspections.

NP: When you are talking about and thinking about the connection between the grain inspectors and your group, so is it fair to say that the grain inspectors would be the ones looking for the bugs and whatever as the shipments came in, bugs and diseases--?

VB: You mean, as far as the grain coming from the west? Yes, they would be picking up if there were insects in the grain because they're handling the product. We didn't do that. They were handling the product coming into the grain elevator.

NP: So if they found a problem they--.

VB: They would treat it.

NP: They would treat it.

VB: They would notify the grain elevator company that they had to treat that, and they would treat it.

NP: So your group wouldn't get involved in that then or in the elevator as a prevention?

VB: Right. Yes, so when the product is being loaded, that again that was up to the Grain Commission to make sure that it was clear. When we did inspections of the elevator, we would pick at random. We'd pick one set of bins, you know the big silos, and we'd go down the whole length and take a little sample of each one, just on a regular basis and take it back and check for insects. We'd just impossible to check everything. So they were the first hand. They were taking the sample as the ship is being loaded, so they would have the sample, and they would look at it.

NP: I asked you earlier when you were talking about the inspection of the ship, what unusual things did you find in the elevators? Any things that stick out in your mind as memorable findings?

VB: Memorable findings? A few times we were on ships and this person would come out and say, "What are you doing?" And we'd say, "Well, we're looking for insects." And he'd grab us by the arm, and he said, "If you find insects, what do you do?" And we'd say, "Well, we'd fumigate the ship." Well, he said, "Please, do the galley. We'd like to fumigate the galley. We have cockroaches." "It's not up to me. It's not up to me. It's up to the Department of Health." Who was it? Health and Welfare Canada? Then there was another inspector that came around and checked for--. He checked for rodents. He checked for--. He came along with this ultraviolet light to see if he could see any droppings of rats or--. I didn't have too much to do with him, but I come across him once or twice unless they had a report for rats. But if we found rats, we would report it. Other than that, no. It was interesting but after a while it got to be boredom, too.

NP: Routine.

VB: Routine.

NP: I've often wondered about the wildlife, not people, of the elevators. But maybe you have stories of people wildlife, too.

VB: Rats.

NP: Is that it?

VB: I've never really seen that many rats in the elevator, or even mice, because they had a program of keeping the rodents down, but not outside because that is totally impossible because over the years they used to take all the damp, wet grain and just dump it out in their fields, eh? So that's just a nice spot for breeding of mice and rats. One time we ran into a man at Westland, the boys had caught a muskrat—as it a muskrat?—and had him in a cage. A vicious-looking animal, and they were all taunting it. They thought it was great fun. And once we were in Intercity—was it Intercity?—and some guy, we were in the tunnels, and somebody says, “You got to be careful, there's a bear roaming around here.” And we said, “Yeah, sure, a bear roaming around.” So we're going along taking our samples and all of a sudden this black thing crosses one of the belts and we said, “Oh!” and we ran out of there pretty quick. There was a bear had gotten in there. I think they eventually got him out. But other than that, there was no wildlife.

NP: Deer, they can come into--.

VB: No, I didn't see any deer. No, can't remember anyway.

NP: This is more a general, philosophical question, when you think about your job, did you ever think of its connection to Canada's success as a grain exporter?

[0:53:20]

VB: Oh, definitely, yes.

NP: Tell me about that.

VB: Well, as far as I knew, Canada guaranteed that when you got the grain, it was free and clear of insects and extraneous material as much as humanly possible. They inspected the grain coming from the west. It was inspected when it was stored, cleaned. It was inspected prior to loading and the conveyance of the grain to Europe, wherever, was also inspected. So they had a fantastic reputation as far as grain. What you paid for was what you got. As far as the weight goes, they had certificates guaranteeing that if you bought X thousands of bushels or tonnes, that's what you got, and if you bought this standard grade, that's what you got. So they had a very good reputation. And it's because of all this work they put into guaranteeing it that that's what you got.

NP: Did you ever have any connection with the railways?

VB: No. Sometimes we would ask permission, and we would go and check a railroad car, take the residue sample inside the car, tanker car.

NP: Why?

VB: Just to see if there were any insects in the railroad car. The tanker, the same thing. But the tanker, again, was like a big box of steel that the ships got to be. But the old railroad cars, they were lined inside, so if you broke a broken board, sometimes the grain got behind. We just wanted to see if insects were there, and you would keep contaminating grain if you didn't get that cleaned up.

NP: Was that done regularly as well, then?

VB: Not that much because it was just again two people. You can't do too much. You can't. You know, it would take an awful lot of people, just look at all the rail, and if they're unloading 1,000 boxcars a day, you just couldn't keep up. So we did it as time permitted.

NP: Was there any connection between your job and the research that was done to keep grains clean? Did you see that change over time? Techniques?

VB: We had no connection with that.

NP: What would you describe as the major changes that you saw in the industry, particularly your work? You went from '65 to--?

VB: '92. I would say that the design of ships dramatically changed. By that time, I think the tanker car was already here. But even the lake vessels--. We'll go back to the lake vessels now. When I started, they were still doing what they called winter storage inspections of lake vessels. What that meant was that soon as the shipping season was over, they would fill these lake vessels up and either park them at these elevators here, or they would go down to Montreal and park with the grain in there for all winter. They of course, too, would get storage fees, right? Like, the elevator gets paid. So they had this winter storage. This I think was instituted right after or during the war years, winter storage. So we had to do that September—not September—starting late November, December, doing winter storage inspection.

So sometimes we'd get a phone call at 3:00 in the afternoon saying, "Tomorrow morning we're going to have five lake vessels at various elevators for winter storage." Now there's only two of us. So off we'd go at ten to 7:00 in the morning, dark. Go down and start inspecting the lake vessel and make sure it's clean and no insects. That was another one of our duties. That was not a happy occasion because if you got rain or they came in off the lake and it's full of ice, you are trying to get from one hull to another on a skating rink. And then there was this man they called. Was he the port warden, or was he the steamship inspection guy? He was out there, and he would have them put down their hatch covers, make sure they're tight and then he would have them turn the hose on them, water hose.

Now we're talking at that time 15-20 below zero, Fahrenheit. Of course, you've got this guy with the hose, and of course it hits steel and it's frozen, and of course you're slipping and sliding. That was another part that we didn't really look forward to. And of course, they've got hatch covers on, so it's dark. So all you've got is your big flashlight or whatever big light you can carry, and you start on your hands and knees looking at--. The newer ones weren't bad because they were just a steel box. But the older ones you'd walk on top of these what they call side tanks where they could fill with water to bring the ship down. They were up, I don't know, 10-15 feet off the deck or 20 feet, and then you'd walk on these tanks. Then with the arches, and you'd walk over these arches, and you'd be checking around make sure there is no old grain around. And this is all total darkness. And you'd go from one hold to the next hold. That's six holds, normally, they had. Then they had the self-unloaders that had the hoppers. The hoppers were lined with what's this white Teflon, white Teflon. You're trying to get up with chains to get to the next belt, to the next belt, and they were just another one big hold. Again, winter storage. If they were carrying iron ore pellets, or whatever, coal, you'd have to make a note of that and have somebody come down and clean it up. That was a lot of fun. I forgot about the winter storage. But I think that disappeared. I think that stopped now.

NP: Why was he having them hose down the--.

VB: To make sure that they weren't leaking water. You see if he was sitting at an elevator, maybe they wouldn't unload that ship until, I don't know, May or April. In the meantime, you're getting nice warm, sunny conditions, a pile of snow on top of the ship and it's melting. They didn't want the grain to get wet. When you're winter storage, you have to make sure the grain is in mint condition on these lakers. So they would fasten these. They would batten down these hatch covers and make sure they were watertight. And he'd come along with a very thin little putty knife, and he would see if he could stick his putty knife between the gasket and the hatch cover. And that's when he'd have them turn the hose on if he suspected it, or he would get down underneath to see if he could see any light come penetrating through. In the meantime, we're trying to go down each hold to make sure they were clean and no insects.

NP: How would you even get the hatch off if they were frozen ice?

VB: Well, they would lift the hatch off because they had their little cranes that ran up and down. They'd put a hook and lift it off. But it's the case of them throwing water all over the place that immediately hit the deck, it was frozen. So you're, you know, you are afraid of breaking your legs.

[1:01:16]

NP: Were you ever injured on the job?

VB: Once I fell off--. There's the engine room, and then there's this big tunnel that goes right to the propeller. Of course, again, it was dark, and we shouldn't be doing things in the dark, but we did it. Came down this ladder, and I thought I was on the deck, and I wasn't. I was on the engine cover or the propeller shaft, and I fell. I think it was eight feet down. I think then I injured my Achilles tendon, which snapped about four years ago. Anyways. That's the only one.

But there was no safety as we know it today. I think today they've got harnesses. They've got ropes because most of the time you didn't know the condition of the stupid ladder. Some were bashed. They were right up against the wall. You could hardly get your hands--. Until one day the port warden said, there were three of us then, he says, "You know, this is stupid. We're risking our lives to go down that stupid hold. Look at the condition of that ladder." It was just bashed up against the bulkhead of the next hold, and you could hardly get your toes in. And he said, "This is not right." And we said, "No, but--." He said, "You know what, we are not going to do anymore inspections until the ladders are fixed." So he would order the ladders--. So all of a sudden it's panic.

So they would have to fix the ladder to our standard. Then you could see the change in the ships. In Australia, they had a law that said you could not go down a vertical ladder more than, I think, ten feet. So all of a sudden you see staircases coming, which was beautiful because you went down the staircase like a civilized person with hand rails. Or if they had a ladder, they had the big safety ring around it. But some of the ones that we used to go down, it's amazing that we didn't kill ourselves. They were just rungs welded in, and of course, when the buckets come to load, they would bash them all, and we would still try to get our toes in and go down. But I think today the safety features have vastly improved.

NP: Speaking of safety, was it during your time on the job that they started to put in the air filters, filters for grain dust?

VB: Yes, I think they were evolving by even, yes. As far as I can recall, yes. Prior to that, they didn't have any dust control. You'd look at the city, and all you saw was one big cloud of grain dust. Yes, I think it was an ongoing--.

NP: Were you working in those days in the elevators?

VB: Yes, sure, yes. Sometimes, depending what they were unloading, you couldn't see past your arm. They'd open the windows, they'd open the doors, but that didn't help. They had no dust control and--.

NP: No masks or anything?

VB: Yes, they didn't have masks. See the old days, they had the fellows shovelling the grain cars, the old wooden cars, and they were just a square. They would hold it, and the pulley would pull it out. And they had the masks, but there was no dust control. And most of those old fellows all ended up with a--. You could hear them in the bar if you were sitting there. You'd say, "He works in an elevator." The cough, they all developed a horrible cough.

NP: Did you see that in your dad at all?

VB: Oh yes, he'd cough. Sure, you could hear him in the morning before he even got to work, coughing his guts out. And off they went peddling their bike.

NP: Did they die early then?

VB: I never kept track. [Laughs]

NP: Major changes over time then--.

VB: Dust control.

NP: Was obviously the safety.

VB: Filters, safety. Sure.

NP: That would be it in your line of work?

VB: Safety came after, much after I retired. As far as in our business--.

NP: The fall protection?

VB: Yes, we would go out sometimes—stupidity—12:00 at night to do a ship because they wanted it done first thing in the morning. Well, how do you inspect a ship at night when all you have is a little flashlight? But you got on your hands and knees and looked around the best you could. But it was dangerous, and it was stupid. We were just doing it for the ship owners to make a better profit. That's all because he--.

NP: And your pride to get a job done?

VB: Yes, no. I don't think it was pride at the end. It was just stupidity. But you see a lot of those ships that came here were charters. And say you're chartering the ship from me, and you'd say to me, "I will pay the daily expense of the ship the minute Agriculture gives you the certificate saying the ship is ready to load." Okay, so, as the owner comes up here, he wants to get the ship off his hands right away, as fast as he can because it's at that time, maybe \$6 or 8 or 10,000 a day to run that ship with fees and everything, fuel. So if he could get the inspector out at 2:00 AM in the morning to pass this ship and give this--. The minute I put the time down at 11:00 at night, the owner says, "None of the bills are mine now. They're all yours. You pay for the fuel. You pay for everything." So, they didn't care what time they called us whether it's Saturday, Sunday, Monday or holidays or Christmas Day.

Then they got so panicky they would have to hire a tug to take us out to the anchorage where the ship was anchored and do the inspection. So now we had anchorage—free. This was all free. So I guess all of a sudden the federal government says, "This is kind of crazy that we're providing all this service, and we're not making any money here. It's costing us money." So then they came up with this cost-recovery plan. So now if we go to inspect a hold, one or two holds, you pay so much. You pay so much for a weekend. You pay so much for anchorage. Now they've got a real scheme where--. And you also pay for the phytosanitary certificate.

NP: Did that make any difference in your work?

VB: No. It just made them say, "Well, we want you now. We're paying. We didn't care if it's \$1,000. We want you to come and inspect the ship." So that has changed. Before it was all free. You as a homeowner wanted to send plants to your aunt in California, but California says, "We want--." The United States says, "We want a phytosanitary certificate from your Department of Ag." Because saying, "Blah, blah, blah." Well, you'd come to the office with your plants. We'd check them over and say, "Well that's fine." We'd make out the phytosanitary certificate, and off you went. Now we're being driven nuts by people doing this. You

know, either way. So now I think it's a \$50 fee if you want to send your plants to California to your Aunt Helen. You have to pay for that certificate. So that cut all that out.

NP: Did the charging cut down on any inspections?

VB: No. No. As far as shipping goes, no.

NP: Because the cost of not having it done was greater?

VB: You're talking big dollars. It was a beautiful thing before because they got it all for free.

NP: What would you describe as your major challenges on the job?

VB: My major challenge was trying to identify some of these insects that I picked up. I'm not a trained entomologist. I just picked it up with books and diagrams in the office. And we would boil up the larvae and use the microscope and try to follow some of the books with their various stages of identification. That was a real challenge a lot of times, is putting a name to the insect. Is it an injurious insect? It is a stored product insect? I don't know. Or is it something that's out in the field here? That was the biggest challenge.

NP: If you weren't able to identify it locally were--.

VB: We'd send it away to Ottawa. Well by the time Ottawa got it, I mean, the ship is sitting there. They want to know. What are we doing? So I always, always erred on the safe side. "Spray it!" You know if it was insects, depending on how many I found. But some of them, like if you found one or two insects, you didn't do anything about it, but if you found them regular in your inspection then you'd say, "Whoa, there's a problem here." But the biggest challenge for me was identifying the insect.

NP: If you looked at all the insects that you found over your career, did they come from far and wide?

VB: Yeah, I think when I was poking through what they call donnage. When they load steel they put raw wood, rough wood. Anyways I'd pick up some of this wood and there were holes in it, and I took it back to the office and got this bug out of it, and I couldn't identify it. So I sent it to Ottawa, and of course they have entomologists on staff, and they came back and said, "Oh, that's a real dandy! We've never seen that one before." And they'd written it up in one of the journals, "Found in Thunder Bay, this insect." There was another, capra beetle, was it? Yes. They had this thing about capra beetles and it was--. Bells went off all over

the place. And anyways the ship came from Duluth, and we found a capra beetle on it and again we fumigated it. But other than that, nothing sticks out in my mind.

[1:11:09]

NP: In a sense, not only were you protecting Canada's grain—because we're obviously interested in the grain—protecting Canada's grain from being infested and then being opened up at the delivery and having this problem it didn't start out with, but you're also protecting Canada from these things being transferred from the ships into the country.

VB: Yes, yes. And at the end we were even doing, what was it, the garbage? No that was Health [inaudible]. The veterinarian would go, and he would make sure that the garbage was disposed of properly from the ships, the garbage. If a ship came from Montreal and didn't have a bill that showed that he had had garbage taken off and came here and had no garbage, say, “Well where is the garbage?” So there was an awful big fine if you dumped your garbage in the Great Lakes. Similarly, when they'd pull into Montreal and these ships did not have any meat from approved countries, they had to have the meat lockers, freezers sealed up. They would have to buy Canadian meat. They didn't want hoof-and-mouth going all over the world. So in the end, the veterinarian wasn't here, so we were looking at making sure the seals were on the ships' freezers and garbage and stuff of that nature. We were also looking at the rabies stuff, but we won't go into that.

NP: Why not?

VB: Well, you don't want to go there.

NP: Tell me about rabies.

VB: Well, no. Again, the veterinarian, one had retired, and they hadn't filled the position so if you called and said, “I was bitten by a squirrel, and I got the squirrel or a bat.” Then we'd have to go and pick up this article and send it away for rabies tests, or a dog bit you or something, we'd have to take the head off, or a wolf or whatever. Yes, just cut the head off. We were doing that.

NP: Hm, interesting job!

VB: Yes, we were doing a lot of different things. It was interesting.

NP: Any other challenges? You talked about the challenges of identifying bugs. Any challenges of just working in that type of job?

VB: People would go across the border and bring hay back and they weren't supposed to bring hay back and bring lumber and stuff, all--. They don't think. Once you cross the line, you've got rules and regulations that you cannot do, you know? You can't even bring blueberries from that side of the line. I mean they're growing but again you get all these calls from Canada Customs, eh? "This person brought all these acorns from California because they are going to do craftwork." Well, you can't have acorns from California come here unless you have had them checked over by their Department of Agriculture and given a phyto sani. "Well, what will we do with them?" "Burn them, throw them away, get rid of them, send them back."

NP: Speaking of challenges, I'm wondering about this is actually going back to something you said earlier about that big price that the shippers had to pay in order to just to keep the ship running and therefore they want to work very fast to get things done.

VB: That's if they're a charter.

NP: I just wondered about, especially--. You don't have to answer. You may not even have an answer to it. How can I put this? Were bribes ever an issue from--.

VB: I never came across one. Like somebody bribing me to look the other way. No, I never come across that. And we were talking in the office one time, and we were saying, "Well, we never had this occasion." And I think the word got out that we were fair, but we weren't buyable. So even before they got to the Lakehead, like, the drums were beating that don't even bother, that it might do you more harm than good if you try this. So we were never offered money to look the other way, if there's a big clean-up job. We heard that from, I think it was a German captain. He said, "You know, we heard about you people." I said, "Oh, pretty bad, eh?" "No," he said, "you're fair but don't try to bribe." So he said, "Oh, that's nice to know." And even the port wardens that were here, he said, "Yes." He said, "In the Lakehead, you have a reputation that don't try it." So, that's all I can say.

NP: Were other places--?

VB: I can't say. I don't know. I imagine around the world it's--. Depending--.

NP: In your mind, what were the most significant events that occurred in your work career?

VB: I can't think of any. I'd say opening the Seaway was a big event but that was before I even started.

NP: I think you've talked a lot about your memories, but I am going to ask this question anyway in case there is something that you want to add. What are your most vivid memories about your work life—the people that you encountered, the stories?

VB: I think it was the people. Yes, right from the elevator worker to the stevedore, all the people involved in this trade were all first-rate people. I remember being told we're going to inspect the lakers when the grain is up in the hold, we are going to look underneath the deck. Again, I'm telling you about arches. I said, "We're going to jump in the grain?" "Yes," he said, "we'll try it." And I said, "Well, won't we sink to the bottom?" "No, I don't think so." So anyways, we would say to the grain trimmers, "When the grain gets about two foot from the upper deck, could you move the spout, and we want to--." And they said, "Sure." And they would pull the, you know, that big spout for loading, and we would jump onto the grain. We'd go underneath and take a look. We even made videos for training purposes. But then as soon as we showed up on a laker and they were loading the grain, they'd say, "Yeah, where'd you want to go, Vic? You want to go over there?" "Yep." They would put the spout, they would just drive the grain down there, and then they'd pull it back, and they'd watch out for you. They'd say, "Keep an eye on this guy underneath there." So, we had great cooperation.

NP: Where did you go under?

VB: Well, there's the hatch, and there's a big steel frame around the hatch, okay? It's open and they're pouring the grain. But you have to get under that little frame, and to go underneath and look underneath where they're walking because they had this wide arch. When I'm saying an arch, it's maybe that wide with the steel in the middle of it, like an I-beam sort of thing. So, we'd go under there and take samples, scrape it off. It's the only way you can get up there unless you want to get these long ladders from the bottom. But we were doing that on a regular basis, going underneath. And we'd go there alone sometimes, one guy. And we would say to the boss trimmer, "We're going to go underneath." And he said, "Yea, okay, go ahead." And they'd be all watching for you and wait until you got out. And if you couldn't get out, they'd say, "Back off!" And they'd make a pile of grain for you walk on top to get out. So that was nice.

NP: I guess you wouldn't be doing that with flax?

VB: I think I did!

NP: Because I've heard of people actually drowning in flax.

VB: You know, I can't remember. I don't think I ever--. I don't know, I don't know. It's slippery, isn't it? I don't think there was that much traffic in flax here for some reason or other or even rapeseed. No, we can't say rapeseed anymore. We've got to say canola, canola seed and mustard seed. Yeah, you're right, I can't remember flax seed. Well, you didn't sink that much. It was hard. It was like walking in snow that deep, eh.

[1:20:41]

NP: I think I've asked most of my questions. Are there any questions you think I could have asked you? Things you wanted to say that you haven't had a chance to say?

VB: No, not really. When you talk to people around that are loading ships, they knew the routine when a ship pulled in. They would say, they'd be tying up the ship and they'd say, "Ready to load?" "Can't load until the bug man comes." So they knew the bug man, and they didn't do anything until the bug man came and said it was clear. That was funny how they called us the bug man. So you'd talk to any one of them and they'd say, "The bug man hasn't been here. We're not doing anything yet." Even the elevator guy said, "Not until the bug man comes." So that's we were called, the bug man.

NP: You wore that name with pride?

VB: Oh sure! Yeah. Mr. Clean, we had white coveralls and a white hard hat and a light on the top of it. First time we come out with the white hard hat and the light, they all started to laugh. But after a while you were accepted, and they knew who you were. "There's the bug man. Can't do anything until he's finished."

NP: You had mentioned that you had done a training video at one time. Where would that be housed, if it even still exists?

VB: I don't know. I have no idea.

NP: Where was your office?

VB: Our office, we started out at the Syndicate Avenue post office. Then we went to 430 Waterloo, right next to the Mounties. Then we went to Euclid Avenue, behind Robin's there by the Canadian Tire gas bar. And I think that's where I retired from. I think they're over here at the UIC building Intercity. You know, where you get your passports? There's a mall in there. I don't think it's there. You mean, looking for the video? I don't think it's there. It was somebody came--. They hired somebody locally to do it. In fact, the fellow that was in the video with me, he was here for supper on Thursday, but he left yesterday for parts--. Next time he

phones me. He travels. He just gets on planes, and he travels. I'll ask him where that video ended up. It was sort of a training video for doing lakers.

NP: Would that have been out of Ottawa, Food Inspection? Would that have been their initiative?

VB: I think so, yeah.

NP: So they might have it?

VB: They might. He might have got a copy of it. I don't know. We had a lot of photographs. I don't know what happened to them. He, we had a whole bunch of photographs. They were building the grain storage, during the war. During the war, I forget, at Cargill where they were building those, remember a lot of them had the old wooden grain storage? I don't know whatever happened to those.

NP: Who had those?

VB: I'll have to ask this fellow. He had a copy of them. He had the negatives from--. They were done by the Fryer Studio. Did you ever hear of the Fryer Studio? They were the old 8x10 negatives, you know, from the old--. But he had the actual black and whites and the negatives. So I don't know whatever happened to them. Somebody gave them to him. I don't know what happened to them.

NP: Who was this person?

VB: Bill Hunt. He's my friend who has the maze. You've heard of the maze?

NP: Did he work in the same job as you?

VB: Yes, he was the officer in charge.

NP: Would he be a good person to interview if you can catch him in between flights?

VB: Well, he was the last guy that worked on the job. The first fellow was Gordie Powell and he's retired. He's down at the coast. And there was John Van Loon and I think he went to the Grain Commission. I don't know where he would be now. But, I think Bill could probably--. I'll have to ask Bill the next time he calls me or sends me an email.

NP: Ian Dew is sitting in on this interview. Are there questions that you have that I didn't touch on?

ID: No, they've probably all been dealt with in different ways. What was the most common problem you encountered?

VB: In the shipping, the elevators or what?

ID: In either.

VB: In the ships, mostly extraneous material that they'd unloaded steel or whatever they had. They hadn't cleaned it up properly. They were in a big rush, or they had bad weather. They couldn't do it between wherever they had unloaded the steel to when they got to the lake ports. In the earlier years it was rust, everything. But in later years the shipping, ships just changed completely, better design, less maintenance.

NP: Most frequent problem in the elevators?

VB: Just spillage. They wouldn't get at it right away. The ships we used to get, believe it or not, oil tankers in here that would carry crude oil. Now if you know crude oil, it's like molasses. And I don't know how they ever cleaned those ships up. We'd just say no there not suitable to carry the grain and they would spend weeks. I don't know what they did. They would clean out the crude oil. It was like molasses.

ID: I think that's a very important question for people interested in environment. How did they get those things clean?

NP: Well, I can tell you--.

VB: Ron worked on one once.

NP: My husband, Ron, had his summer job was to go in and clean out the hold of the ship that had oil of some sort in it. And they just used rags.

VB: I think he was on a tanker, I think. Rags, yeah. Wiped it down.

NP: Lots of cheap student labour. I don't even know if it was that cheap.

VB: No, they were paid pretty good. But I think what they did--. You know, they have an awful lot of dust in the elevators, they collect. It's from--. I think what they did, I suspect what they did is they'd give it a couple of good shots of dust in these tanks and let it settle on all the raw oil and then loaded the grain.

NP: So you never, when you had an order to have it cleaned, did you go back--?

VB: Oh, yes, when you--.

NP: So would you catch something like that?

VB: You know, I can't remember, because it was early in my career and that doesn't--. I remember being on the tanker and saying, "Holy, I've got to throw these clothes away." You know, just molasses stuck all over, or the coveralls. But I can't recall what the hang we ended up doing. I can't.

NP: If it was molasses, no big deal, right? But if it was oil--.

VB: Crude oil is like molasses. That consistency. Now, whether they heated it up and--. Normally, they have a system that they call butter-worthing where they put a hot, like a big propeller that shoots out water, but it's boiling hot water. And they start at the top and this thing spins and they put it down and they wash all the crude oil down until they get it down in the hold and then they pump it out. They extrude the crude oil and just pump the water out. It's called butter-worthing, if I recall. But that's really boiling water that they had under pressure. And it just spun around like a big prop, and they put it in every hold and got the--. Because to move crude oil it has to be warm, otherwise it doesn't move. I'm not too sure, though.

ID: And then it would be pumped into the lake?

VB: Probably at that time, yes. No, not this area of the lake. I would say this was done either out at sea or at a port where they could take the--. Separate it, and then all that you've got is hot water. When the Seaway opened, you couldn't pump your ballasts, or is it now you can't pump your ballasts out in the lakes, that's because now we've got the eel, is it?

ID: We've got all kinds of things.

NP: Lamprey.

VB: Lamprey, yeah. But I think now they're pretty choosy about what you pump out. Pretty late, though.

NP: As you know we're trying to get a centre established in Thunder Bay to preserve the history of the grain trade in Thunder Bay. If such a centre were to come into being, what part of the work that you did do you think would be the most important to preserve, so that the public could know your work's part in it?

VB: Do you think they'd really be interested?

NP: Let's say they are.

VB: Okay, I would say if you had a display of the various stored product insects that are found in grain. That sort of thing.

NP: And where they originated from, sort of bugs of the world?

VB: No, I would say bugs you'd pick up in the Prairies that are Canadian that would be in the grain because what originates here we can control. But you've got to excuse me, I'm getting dry. **[Audio pauses]**

NP: Okay, I'll start up again. Just let me know., are there any questions you'd like to ask before we end the interview?

ID: These are more general. On our tour, we discovered temporary storage left over from the war, which apparently where grain was just dumped on these stages outside. Did you ever see anything like that?

VB: Let me think now. Yes, well Paterson had what they called the pagoda, and it was just huge tanks that the grain was in. Ah, where else? Manitoba Pool 3 had--. Theirs was steel. Just big steel tanks. But some of them were, I think, were made out of wood. But I think by the time I got around to them, they were all taken down. But I do remember Paterson's. They called it the pagoda and it was off to the side by itself. Pool 3, I think they're still standing at Pool 3, the first tanks you come--. Yeah. That's all I can remember at this stage.

ID: I'm getting a picture from all the people I'm listening to from all over the business that the grain business was a tough business in terms of labour relations. Did you see anything of that?

VB: I don't think we had that many strikes in the grain business. I think what you got to keep in mind that a lot of these people were immigrants, and they were so grateful to have a job that they never complained as far as you know about the work conditions. They were happy to have a job, and I don't think there was that much as far as my recollection. I'm well, I'm old but not that old.

NP: Would your dad have ever said anything about those kinds of things?

VB: No, no. As I said, a lot of these people were just happy to have a job and the working conditions to them, well, it's grain. You're going to have dusty conditions. But yeah, a lot of immigrant workers in there that they were happy to have a job.

NP: That's it then?

ID: That's it.

End of interview.