

Narrator: Bill Boyce (BB)

Company Affiliations: Richardson International

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Summary: Retired grain handler and union shop steward for Richardson Main Elevator Bill Boyce describes his long career on Thunder Bay’s waterfront. He discusses choosing to work at Richardson’s elevator despite having a master’s degree and having responsibilities on the scale floor, distributing floor, and annex floor. He describes the elevator’s ethnic diversity, some major workplace accidents, the issue of smoking in the elevators, and the manual labour of many elevator roles. He explains the layout of the elevator, his pride in working for Richardson’s, and his interactions with other grain industry players like the railways and the Canadian Grain Commission. Boyce then discusses how he joined the union first on the safety committee and then as shop steward, and he shares some of the major contract and safety demands during his time. He recalls the major changes in the Thunder Bay industry during his career, like Saskatchewan Wheat Pool’s downsizing changing the waterfront and union dynamics, the elimination of midnight shifts, equipment improvements, automation, and computerization. Other topics discussed include the divide between supervisors and working men, women in the CGC not blending well into the male-dominated elevators, Richardson’s actually growing at a time of consolidation, Thunder Bay’s grain communities outside of the workplace, alcohol and drug use in the old days, and other stories of dangerous work situations.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative

BB: My name is Bill Boyce and I worked in the grain trade for 30 years. I was a shop steward at Richardson's Terminal. I worked my full term with Richardson's, and I graduated at the retired state in 2009 at age 58 and a half, which was my special early retirement date.

NP: Had you set that retirement date on your own?

BB: No, that was by an 85 factor where you have to have a combination of years of service and age and that is 85.

NP: You were the shop steward for part of your time at Richardson's. What was the work that you did there beyond the union shop steward work?

BB: I did whatever I was told. I worked in the tunnels, and when I came into the elevator, I already had an education, which gave me a good start. My friend John Simms had known the top guy, Jim Simpson, at that time. He was going back to school, and he put my name in the hat. I came into Richardson's Terminal with a master's degree from McGill University. They thought I would act in a mature and educated manner, but I was sent immediately up to the scale floor where I got absorbed in the culture of the scale floor. I didn't see much of the activity down in the foreman's office after that.

NP: You grew up in Thunder Bay. Did you know anything about grain elevators before you took the job with Richardson's?

BB: Not many people know what a grain elevator is in Thunder Bay before they step into it. Most people never step into one. They are a little bit secretive that way. I did not know anything about grain handling until I went into it.

NP: Did you live close to the elevators?

BB: No. When I came home from university, I was already married and my wife and I stayed at the Swanee's Cabins, which is close by. It was a romantic place for me because I had always camped on the Lakeshore, and we would always drive by Swanee's Cabin, so I thought it was cool. My wife did not think it was that cool, and we spent three weeks there when I first started at Richardson's. There was fighting and drinking, and it was a very good introduction to where we were going to go next, right within the elevator itself.

NP: When you came back you had your master's degree. How did you get working for an elevator because you would have had other choices?

BB: I could have had other choices, but I didn't even realize myself. I didn't feel entitled to that. My father sent me off to university saying, "You go to university to get an education and not a job." So I came from a very educated type of background, very persuaded with the great books of the Western World. He took the course and studied that. Are you familiar with that set of books? So that is a kind of education. He fought in the war, so he did not get a chance to get an education himself. So that was my role.

NP: He was not involved with the grain trade?

BB: Actually, he was. He introduced the belting that they use nowadays. His company was Mill Supply, and he did spend a lot of time in grain elevators, very much unbeknownst to me because I was not even aware of what he was doing as a job. He fought long and hard with the elevators owners to introduce the belting system that they have now a day's which is an integrated belt right from across the bottom of the elevator and across the top of an elevator and up an elevator. So belting is the heart of an elevator.

NP: Did his company make that belting or were they the supplier?

BB: No, they were a fabricator of culverts. There was a fabricating process, and it was tied to a company called Mills Steel at the time, which was a big steel company. They just brought in the belting from another company.

NP: There was a connection unbeknownst to you, as you say?

BB: Unbeknownst to me for sure. I was never encouraged to go and work at a grain elevator for sure.

NP: When you did start working at the grain elevator, was your Dad still alive at that time?

BB: My dad is still alive as we speak.

NP: Great. Do you know whether the belting he sold to the elevators was the belting that was used at Richardson's? Were you able to make that connection?

BB: It would have been used everywhere yes.

NP: Yes.

BB: An interesting belting story. When I first worked there, there was a guy who was caught underneath the belt. It was down in the tunnel, and it was before they had communication down there, and his full leg was worn off at this point. Richardson's sent him back to school and he became a lawyer I believe. I never saw him after that first year at the elevators. I went to his house once and I saw his stump and I heard the story of how he slipped underneath the belting, and it just worn his leg right off.

NP: That would be very painful. Did you find, sort of skipping back and forth as these injuries do--?

BB: Probably, probably passed out.

NP: Did you find that over the years that the elevator was a fairly hazardous place to work?

BB: I saw three or four people die right on the job while I was there. You didn't realize that. That was quite a shock why certain people are not talking about that. There was one young fellow that they have a memorial golf tournament in Current River still for him. He died and I remember coming on shift at 8:00, and at that time we were doing 60 cars, and we were doing a process where we ran two engines down one track so there is two tracks bringing cars at Richardson. Every elevator is very different and has different processes. We would have different techniques at Richardson to bring the cars in. This was a very fast technique, and we should not have had it. It was illegal ultimately, but that is in retrospect you realize that. So a car coming and a car going out escaped from the dumper house and this young man chased after the car running to put a brake on it, and another engine was coming down the track in the other direction and bang, like that, he was killed instantly, and it ran over top of him. That was the beginning of the shift.

Then there was an older guy, and they had a thing there, and again, this is something that my dad supplied. So, wow, for me to say that he didn't even go there, and he hated them. That thing is called a jack ladder. A jack ladder takes you straight up like a leg—takes the grain straight up. A jack ladder you walk up to it and there is a handle, and you step onto it on a footpad, and you go straight up. If you are working on the scale floor when I started working there, the first time I did it and this is an amazing experience because they don't teach you. In 1978 they don't teach you what you are going to do. So I step out of the scale floor, and we are going to make a set down on the distributing floor—that is what a spout bouncer does. He moves spouts so that he can distribute the grain. You hop on a pole the same way as a fireman pole so it's a hole with a fireman's pole. The first thing was I didn't know how to hold onto a fireman pole. I went down and hit pretty hard when I got to the "D" floor because it is two floors down.

Then I go over—and I am the type of kid who is a university kid and I know everything—and I want to go and go up a jack ladder now. It comes along and it is going around and I am thinking okay, and I didn't watch the guy ahead of me too closely, and I grabbed onto the thing that comes out that your foot is supposed to be on and that is what I am holding onto and then my feet are trying to find yet I can't remember if they found the hand holder they were that close, but anyway I went up like that and I got off. This jack ladder killed a man. It was a man on a midnight shift, an older employee who may have been drinking. He went up the jack ladder and forgot to get off. He went up through three of the holes and at any one of these you want to be inside, and you get off. He didn't get off and it came all the way down and he killed himself. Those are two deaths at the elevators when I was there.

NP: You said four?

BB: I can't remember the others.

NP: Not too often that you forget?

BB: You have a lot of memories that other people don't remember. Have you ever interviewed anyone from Richardson's?

NP: I think we have one person from Richardson, but the name escapes me now.

BB: And how many deaths did he mention?

NP: None. Very few.

BB: You are not probing deeply enough, Nancy. [Laughs]

NP: We have a certain set of questions that we ask and most of the time.

BB: A lot of people are timid, and I am not timid.

NP: We ask people for memorable occasions.

BB: Did you ask me about deaths or how did that come up?

NP: I just asked whether it was dangerous.

BB: It is surprising you have not heard more about deaths. That would come under the danger category. Don't worry about my memory, as it is a lot better probably than anyone you have interviewed yet.

NP: That is true because up to this point, we have really been interviewing people who are into their eighties because we want to catch them before they passed on.

BB: That is a pretty terrible group. I was talking to them, too. By my standards that is almost the "slave" mentality. That is people who you can hardly associate with what their memories are because our society has changed so drastically, and I am a representative of maybe a little bit more progressive part of this society than most.

NP: Trying to keep some semblance of order to the interview, although I am not that worried about it, but going back to your early days and being tied to what you were just saying, you would have started then as your dad's and my dad's generation was starting to retire. So the war vets would have still been there when you were starting?

BB: When Paterson's shut down, all the old Italians came to Richardson's from there, and Paterson's was largely Italians working, and that was first generation. I learned to play Italian card games. Those little games where you had three cards which were so incredibly interesting and were a lot of fun. But on the "D" floor, which was just below my scale floor, was the Italian floor. It is all Italians on the distributing floor, and it is usually all Italians down on the deck, which is the other distributing floor. The main floor is the distributing floor also. Cleaning and distributing and the scale floors were the measuring floor to weigh the grain and it was run by a very Scottish group at Richardson's. The Italians could not even come up there. If they sent in an Italian up to work there that was not allowed. He was sent back in no uncertain terms.

NP: How does that develop and how does it continue?

BB: It develops because that is the way life works. The Scottish people took a long time to get established in the grain elevator and they were very established in the grain elevator. The Italians came in with a total different group of ideas. I don't know if you are aware of what is going on in Southern Africa today. There are Tanganyikans come in and take the jobs and threaten the South African people, and that is what that tire thing is when people are getting burned in tires is all about. So these Italians would be coming in and they would be questioning and changing the fabric of how business was done. The Scotsman knows how to do it and how to handle their bosses and they knew how to demand their rights, but the Italians didn't know. The Italians went along with whatever they were told to do.

NP: From what we have learned about the grain trade, the Italians certainly were a part of it and the Scottish people were part of it as well. But then there were Polish and--.

BB: I remember Yugoslavian people, wonderful Willie Kojansik. At my elevator it was mainly Yugoslavian and Italian immigrants there, the first generation.

NP: How big a part did language play?

BB: A huge, big part. I was taught to work on the distributing floor by an Italian-speaking guy and I didn't have much patience. I remember once there were two of us in and we were helpers. The main guys in the "D" floor were of Italian descent and first generation, so older than us, and spoke a different language and they teach us what to do. We were the helpers. We have a gala at the end of every year, and we were all getting together. I was with this other buddy of mine who was of my frame of mind, kind of a university-type guy—analytical and had a good sense of humour. I said to him, “We are probably be the smartest two guys they have ever had on the "D" floor because we don't know what is going on but nobody knows that.” And Bill Stasiuk, our boss, who is of the extraction you were talking about—he is Ukrainian, so that was the other group. We had Bill Stasiuk, was Ukrainian, and we had a couple of Trush brothers, and I worked with their dad. They were promoted largely on the coattails of what their dad had done, and they advanced. That was all. There was a Phil Zuba. That was Ukrainian people. That was another ethnic group.

NP: Where would they find themselves, on the Scottish floor or the Italian floor?

BB: You are putting me on the spot here Nancy. [Laughs] They might find themselves being booted off the deck! I say that tongue in cheek. [Laughs]

NP: Were there hard feelings or did they work together?

BB: They just were not as popular maybe as the next person. But Carl Maki also was just a patron saint of the scale floor, or one of them. They were all characters. They were all very interesting people up there, and they had a pretty free run. As long as they did their job nobody messed with them. Who were we talking about?

NP: We were talking about the language and whether people got along overall in order that things worked.

BB: They got along royally and a lot of the day-to-day stuff--. Again, we were a community, and we had a coffee pot on. We were a small group, and we use to smoke. Of course, trying to protect us from an explosion in the elevator we had these enclosed areas where everybody smoked. I was a non-smoker basically, but I was literally eating smoke all day long. We were smoking and drinking together. Did I say drinking? I meant coffee! At that point.

NP: That is something talked a lot about.

BB: Yes, there was drinking when I first started—the coffee part. I was just responding to your question about how amiable we were, and we were quite amiable. The Ukrainians tended to become bosses. Who would have guessed! In his generous spirit Carl Maki said, and he was obviously Finlander, "Never give a white hat to a Finlander because they made an exception." And they did give a white hat to a Finlander, and then he gave Carl some kind of trouble. That was the origin of that saying.

NP: Why would they say, "Never give a white hat to a Finlander?"

BB: Because he said to Carl Maki something and when the Ukrainian guys said it to him that was okay, but when blood says it to him that is a different story again. Stabbed in the back by Brutus.

NP: The smoking I find rather interesting because it was forbidden and because you guys looked out one side of your elevator you were looking at the two big explosions that took place before.

BB: Of course, we had moved on from that, and I was mentioning to Monika before the interview started how we were a federally regulated operation. These types of things are legislated by the feds, but we are a very different--. And they just said "No smoking in federal things." So if you are over at Queen's Park in a cubicle you don't smoke, but if you are working at a grain elevator and you are a working man and you are basically got this whole area and so much freedom of motion and everything, then you do smoke. A function of being working men as opposed to an office worker. Different people and different rules of behaviour. You don't stop construction workers for instance from smoking. They find a place to smoke, and they smoke.

NP: But the fact that it is in a grain elevator with grain dust makes it different.

BB: But who is going to blow up first? The moral problem there is that you are the first to die. Ergo, you are not really jeopardizing anyone more than yourself. So it is not a cowardly thing to do.

NP: Was it ever an issue with the union and management?

BB: Oh, ah. It is a story in itself. Of course, it was. They said no more smoking, and we had done it in these little cloistered areas where we could really absorb all the smoke and the second-hand smoke ourselves. There was no smoking in those closed, cloistered areas anymore, such that they realized that was very detrimental to the non-smokers' health. But people went farther afield to smoke. So groups of people--. And in one case at Richardson's, three guys were found smoking. One was a millwright and two other guys worked in the operations. One of the tenets of working at Richardson's was that after you punch your card at 8:00, you go up to your working station, and you are responsible to be in your working station for the next eight hours. These three guys had all left their workstations and were now smoking.

Just so happened that one of them was a very valuable employee, i.e. the millwright. So they decided that they would go to the safety committee to discuss it, and ultimately it is the manager who decides and they fudge the issue, and nothing happens. They knew that it was happening, but what can you do? You cannot do much. That is the way people behaved. But what it came to after that, that it was dangerous as you suggested when people are smoking in a grain elevator. These guys were actually out on the dock area. There are the bins, which are nice little hiding places—so along there—and they were in one of those. Then it developed--. And I am missing some parts of the story. Our manager decided that we were going to take them all outside to smoke and we are going to have a special shack outside for smoking. Now you have a meeting place for all the smokers, and they go there.

Now, these people can leave their workstations to go for a cigarette, so you are changing production process there big time. This process goes on and the belts continue to run, and these cars get dumped, and people are walking away from their positions going to have a cigarette. At one point it was the non-smokers were complaining because they were not even getting their coffee breaks, because they had to cover for the smokers when they left, and once a smoker left his workstation it was that, "You have to cover for me. I am going for a smoke break." That is what it came down to, and that was accepted policy. It became hard to take a coffee break sometimes because it was not as recognized a break.

NP: And was that how it was left by the time you retired because there seemed to be fairness issue?

BB: Yes. Definitely it was a little prejudicial to the non-smokers. I guess it's something that we have accepted for example, like the Athletic Club where there is a special area where just woman can go. But there is not just a special area where just man can go. We always discriminate in any society. We'll always discriminate. We are trying for instance to work woman into the armed forces, but we are doing it delicately. We still discriminate between a man and a woman on the battlefield and in the battle area. Yes, we discriminate.

NP: That is a nice segue into the next question. You would have been working then when woman started to work in the grain industry.

BB: We had one.

NP: One?

BB: Yes. She married Bob Kojansic, the Yugoslavian. Willie Kojansic, his dad, was my mentor and best friend working on the "D" floor with me with predominately Italian guys, and his son Bob, Silent Bob, was married to one girl that we had. She was a great lady. I did not interact with her that much. She only worked for a year or two.

NP: What section did she work in?

BB: I am not really sure about that. That is a very interesting and crucial question though, Nancy, because the reason women don't work there is because the entry-level job at a grain elevator is opening cars. So when I started, men used to go in there and they had things--. Do you know what cleaning a car out is like? It's just pure dust. You have this thing from hell in your hands that just ploughs through. You are in a dusty grain car, and you plough through with you, and it is pulled out by a crane-type thing. The ideal was that in a lot of the elevators they had an option of cleaning out 10 cars and going home. A really good worker could do that.

When I got there, they were opening tankers and they were tilting these rail cars, so I never worked in that particular job. Still what you had was a bar that weighs about 50 pounds, and it is about 6 feet long and you stick it into that thing to open it and your wrench on it like this. And if that doesn't open it, you take a thing called a crippler—and that's three quarter's inch steel and it is the same length and it weights maybe 70 or 80 pounds—and you put it in there, and it has no bend. Those other bars tend to bend so they pop out of that hole. So a lot of woman cannot do that. In fact, very few women can do that.

NP: None of those systems are used now. What is the system used right now?

BB: I am not sure none of them do. I think they still empty tankers the same way when I left.

NP: Don't they have what I call a big screwdriver?

BB: That is what they have at Sask Wheat Pool but not Richie's.

NP: So brute force!

BB: I guess so. Less mechanical, so it is on a winch system that is supposed to move cleanly, but it doesn't always.

NP: You mentioned a couple of names of people you worked with. One in particular was a character. Talk a little bit about the characters you worked for and why you would describe them as characters.

BB: By using their names?

NP: It does not matter. Whatever you feel you are comfortable with.

BB: A character is someone who is totally unfettered in his discussion of how he has lived. Probably he is unfettered in the way he lived in that he is talking about it. He told stories that people did not even believe were true about what was happening in Thunder Bay. The scale floor was always a source great story telling and it was a totally male environment, remember. It was also a totally Scottish environment! The Scottish mentality ruled. The Finlander, Carl Maki, was accepted in that group— Western European of some sort. It was great times! Jimmy Irvin, he was weighman one there forever. He could drink a couple of pots of coffee himself in a day. He used to drive around up north in Lappe until none of the tires had air in them. He was driving around one time with three tires that were all on the rims. You know where I live, Monika. I had this rattling going by my house, and it was a Native kid, and he was on a bike with no tire on the back so *bang, bang, bang* and just a terrible racket. So my kids were home at the time, and they ran out and looked at that. And 20 minutes later, he was coming back down the hill the same racket.

NP: History repeating itself.

BB: Yes.

NP: You said that when you started or most of time when people started unloading cars. Is that where you started?

BB: No, I went straight to the scale floor, and I think that because they had high hopes. I had a university education, and I knew Jim Simpson that ran the place, so I went there. It was not an iron rule that you went to the dumper house. It just tended to be a place where people would start. That is where the real physical work went on.

I spent a lot of time in the dumper house as the years lengthened and people got laid off. I moved down to the dumper house. The seniority system meant that you always held your posting as long as everybody senior could hold their postings. At the end of the season when I was a junior man, I would be down in the dumper house, and I would work there. I worked there a couple of winters. I got laid off every year right up until the year retired. I raised my kids there, and I worked till I was 58 years old. The winter I was 58 and retiring, I got laid off in the winter. I got laid off every winter except for two when they had a grain program. The Government kept people working, and they subsidized the elevators to keep working through the winter. Otherwise, everyone went off to cross-country ski. I won the Sibley Ski tour! [Laughs]

NP: Did you eventually get to work on every floor?

BB: There are three groups of activity in the grain elevator. The one is the dumper house that is a very tight group of people that hang together and do stuff together. At Richardson's we had guys who were 40-year employees who still work in the dumper house. Then you have the foreman's office and deck area. That is where the bosses hang out all the time and that is where it is another distributing floor, cleaning floor, and everybody is responsible to the bosses on that floor. Not many people go out to the dumper house. And then there is upstairs, and there are three floors upstairs. You have the scale floor, which is the highest one, then you have the D floor, which is the next, and the annex is the next. When I ended up, I was in the annex. That is the walker's floor, so you walk all day. You are definitely under your own recognisance most of the time on those three floors.

NP: Did you have a favourite?

BB: I loved the annex, and I loved the scale floor. Imagine me saying I loved my job! [Laughs] I have never said I loved my job, but I did! I had a great time on both of those floors. I worked with a guy named George Satowski, who is my age and also a Fort William guy who also rode his bike. I rode my bike from out on Grandview Beach. In the middle of the night, I would get off at the midnight shift, and I would ride 10 miles to the country where my house was. I would have to go down the white line because I could not see a thing.

NP: Did you work shift?

BB: Yes, three shifts.

NP: What did you like about the annex floor?

BB: There was a lot of walking and a lot of independence. The scale floor you are independent of bosses but at the same time you are responsible to about three different forms of activity. So there is a lot of interaction amongst the employees on the scale floor. On the annex it is just you. There are two annexes. The new annex there is just one man, and the old annex two men worked together. If you are in the new annex, you are looking right out at the Sleeping Giant in the morning and that is you. By the time I retired there was little weather station that impacted me. But the idea just being my own man. My middle son is a truck driver now, and he had every dirty job, and he loves being a long-haul truck driver. That is a lonely job. I get lonely thinking about him on that job. So that is what I had on the annex floor except I could go home to my family every night.

NP: What were the challenges on the annex floor? Did anything ever go wrong?

BB: Oh yes. The shit would hit the fan. What happens on the annex is that you kind of get lulled to sleep. My most unfavourite product in the world is canola because you can't see it on a grain belt. It is black, the same color as the belt. You have a lot of visual signs of what is going on, and it also very quiet, canola, so that if it is spilling, you don't hear it. So, I had a couple of canola spills, and they were very memorable ones. I was the union steward, and there was a couple of guys and of all people from the dumper house, and they were up there on my floor, and I was talking like I am now about everything, like I know everything and the world revolves around the way I see it, and this canola was spilling all of a sudden, and we realized that. What it is, just a big mountain. What your job is in the annex to set these trips onto the bin and make sure that you are dropping the right product into the right bin, and then monitor so that you don't over fill it.

The thing that goes wrong in the annex is that you will overfill the bins. These guys go running out of my shack and they wanted to know nothing about it because they are from the dumper house. These guys are like Cosa Nostra, nobody says anything. I am the shop steward and I have a big mouth, so I mentioned, "Well I was talking to some guys, and we got distracted by what happened." They were just up doing some work, so the dumper house would have been shut and this would have been the only times these guys would ever go up there. They stay in their dumper house unless there are no cars coming in, and then they will be stationed around the elevator to clean up. One of them became a white hat.

NP: What happens when you have that spill?

BB: It goes from one end of that belt to the other end of the belt. The bin fills up and then once it piles up enough right there, then it starts taking grain right out to the far end of the belt and then it will get piled there. So, you get piles everywhere. Now you have all these bins that are supposed to be segregated for specific grains and you have got some canola on top of all of them. Now you have to figure out how do we--. And it is a judgment call how much of this canola can we get back into a

canola bin, and how much we can put into these other bins. Grains elevators notoriously mix their products to some extent. We are trying to sell it. That is why we have so many government employees. We have ten government employees to do the same check that one or two elevator employees do.

NP: We will come back to that. I was thinking about when you were talking about the scale floor. You would have certain tolerances that you could leave in bins holding other product, but what about in cases where you can't? Is it just a question of wheel barrowing and shovelling?

BB: Yes. Then a whole gang will go up there. Sometimes the whole elevator will shut down for a good spill. We would all have to wheelbarrow. A lot of physical work.

NP: You are the most popular person in the elevator!

BB: Oh yes. It is not all that bad because elevators workers just realize we are all just working men and all working by the hour. Some of them don't even help but they are up there. There was a funny guy—and I won't mention his name—but his dad was chief of police at one time, and he just was bigger than life, and he was a big tough guy who'd throw a bowie knife. He didn't work much, but his favourite saying was, "The men are responsible for everything getting done in this plant." Everybody does what they want to do and what they have to do. There is not a lot of monitoring of work. I am sure it is the same in a lot of offices. Some people do a lot of work, and some people just hide in their cubicle.

NP: You mentioned a couple of people that were managers at the time. Can you name names in situations where you--? Like especially if you are saying nice things about them?

BB: I won't mention names then. [Laughing]

NP: What do you like about the differences in the managers that you have worked for? What kind of managers and what do you think is the ideal manager?

BB: Ok that is a very interesting question! Managers are not a big deal there. When I started it was Jim Simpson, and there was a fellow named Johnson. It was just like a school where you had the principal and vice principal. We had our manager and then superintendent. The superintendent did most of the physical activities. The manager is just sitting back like the old days' principal used to do. You never really even saw that guy. He is dealing with Winnipeg, and he is staying at work until 5:00

because it is a different time zone than Winnipeg. We all get off at 4:00, and he would have left to go home at 4:00, but it is not 4:00 in Winnipeg yet. So he has to stay an extra hour just in case the powers-that-be deem it necessary to phone him.

My original thread of idea when you said that was there was a big change just when I started there in '78. It had been kind of a "wild west show" up until then by today's standards. We had a midnight shift with no supervision. That is where a lot of the drinking and card playing and crazy stuff took place. This superintendent was an ace of a man, and he was able to absorb some of the irregularities that surfaced from all this drinking and carrying on.

Then we had a merger with the Paterson group, and there was an influx of new blood, and we got a new manager from Paterson's who didn't have the same tactics. And things changed. This is mainly people up on the scale floor telling me that things changed when the Paterson group came in, new boss and things changed a lot. So there was a little more supervision. Supervisors—I try not to say anything crude because there were some funny crude things said—they are not a big part of the grain industry. They are just there, the lower superintendents and the managers to the extent that I know of them, for instance, to shoulder the responsibility of meeting with the safety committee meeting modern standards. Now you are talking to the workingmen. You are meeting the government's criteria for how we should run an elevator and you are representing of course the west. Jim Simpson—who ran for Parliament here and was the boss when I went in there, the manager who was the boss locally—was a western guy. The guy we have got there now is also a western guy. So they bring in western people to rule over the locals, the local yokels.

NP: Does that work?

BB: As much as any industrial system that I have ever viewed. It is difficult. Although I am a student of industrial process, which was my economics degree really was in industrial processes, my dad was a manager if you are interested in that. But I haven't experienced a lot of other ones, so what do you say. It worked pretty well.

NP: What were your thoughts about the western operation?

BB: The fact that a western guy came in?

NP: No not necessarily, just Richardson grain group who was with Winnipeg.

BB: That is a top-notch operation. Richardson's family is wonderful! After 25 years they take everybody out there, and everyone on their 25th year with their wives—or in my case my daughter who was already studying in Winnipeg—and they

treat us like royalty. One of the things that were said in that meeting was that in the Richardson's family they are encouraged to go out and get an education, make a life of their own, but if they don't there is always a job. And yet it hasn't had that narcissism. Is that the right word, narcissism, when you just have family? It doesn't have that flavour of a family operation. It is always excellence first.

NP: Nepotism.

BB: Nepotism, you are right.

NP: Sometimes there is narcissism too. [Laughs] No, narcissism is what I am struggling with now. Nepotism is that. [Laughing] You were proud of the company you worked for it sounds like?

BB: Yes, it was a good operation!

NP: Did you ever think of the farmers, y,our connection to the farmers?

BB: They did not like us. That was the story always that they didn't like us. We were city folk who had it too easy and we are taking big a chunk of their profits. That was the story and I think there was a lot of truth to it. I saw some farmers come through, and I guess I am about as far from a farmer as you can get. I don't even have a green thumb, and I am a city boy and big cities sometimes.

NP: Did you think much about where the grain went?

BB: That is a good point. We didn't talk about that, no. We didn't talk about that at all. I have this background and am always thinking about the world in other ways. I studied development and economics ,and I was very interested in Latin America, but I didn't really care where my grain went. I knew it was going somewhere to feed people, but I didn't care if it went to Russia and one time it went to China. The Chinese have refused to take our canola and that is right from the elevators right after I retired.

NP: Why was that?

BB: [Inaudible] told me because of the genetic modification, GMOs. China will not take our grain, so imagine that. The world has changed so much. We have got such blinders on. Canada is aware of everything, and we are on top of all this stuff. Well, we are not. China is way ahead. Do you know that most of the people in the Politburo, I heard all nine—and this was the *Globe*

and Mail's description—are engineers, top members of the Politburo? So they have a society that advances according to a meritorious society. We've got lawyers and liars—what a bunch.

NP: A couple of things that I want to come back to. One was interaction with the Canadian Grain Commission [CGC] people.

BB: That is good because I was thinking about that too as we talked about the one woman that actually worked. The Grain Commission was probably 50 percent women or maybe even more.

NP: By the time you left?

BB: Even when I started there were women.

NP: Yes, but 50 percent is a real stretch. It may have seemed like it! [Laughs]

BB: Yes. They were a dynamic group, and they were at the end too. The woman were in power. Seeing as my Marxian revolution didn't work, the women's revolution just quietly surrounded us and took over! There was a women's revolution. They were a part of it and were much empowered and very interesting in the male dominated environment, to see one particular government employee dominate the males totally.

NP: In what way?

BB: In just about every way you can imagine. I still would not say she was intellectually stronger. A lot of what happens is that men have a lot of unspoken rules amongst themselves. So, in a grain elevator you can imagine there are more unspoken rules because it is a totally male dominated field, and it is a lot of physical activities. We are divided, and we are not talking in the sense of the physical process. We are in different places—a lot of unwritten rules. And this particular woman did not understand the unwritten rules. Politeness, really, was one of the biggest ones. She was not very polite. Men are all very polite in the grain elevators.

NP: They are?

BB: Yes. Oh, they swear, but not as much as some women do. But they swear a lot. But they are polite to each other. There is a male hierarchal structure. We will talk behind the back maybe, et cetera. Rudeness is when you say those things that other people are saying behind the back right to somebody's face. That is when it becomes rude.

NP: Leaving aside for the moment the fact that a lot of women were working at the Canadian Grain Commission, let us just talk about the work that the Canadian Grain Commission did and how you saw that kind of interaction playing out at the elevator.

BB: There was a saying in the elevators that we were having sex with dogs. Have you heard that saying? It's screwing the canine? It involves the "f" word. Our opinion of the Grain Commission was that they were doing it even more aggressively than we were. And the term just refers to not doing too much, just dogging it. You could say a dogger is somebody who is not working very hard. It is an industry where it is not constant work.

The whole seniority process is one in which you advance to ever less hard-working jobs. Actually, it is misunderstood a lot because the job becomes--. There is a lot more tension. It took me a long time to realize this in a grain elevator. Some jobs were with a lot of responsibility. Even what I was describing in the annex, that doesn't have to happen as long as you have got your head screwed on and you are doing your job. The thing that happens in a grain elevator is that you do let down your guard, and you do a little too much socializing once in a while, and then things can go wrong.

With the Grain Commission, the work they were doing was all intellectual. And the whole scale floor took a hit when they automated the scaling process. They used to have to go out, and every car that came in they would go and measure just like you were weighing yourself on a scale. They would put the weights on the scale, and then weigh this hopper full of grain. They had to do it three or four times for every car, so it was a huge physical process. Then you had to go in and write it up. There was a lot more work done at that point in time.

As it became more and more automated, the grain employees of the government were automated out of any physical responsibility at all. So, they were just checking on what we were doing. In most capitalist companies, we have to check on ourselves or that particular buyer won't come back. So, you don't have the government going into, like a paper mill, and saying, "You know what? We don't trust you guys because the paper you put out may not be the right quality." The reason is that in a capitalist system if they don't produce the right paper, then the Chicago Sun won't buy it next week. And to some extent that happens in the grain industry also.

But we had a lot of people checking on us at the end. It had something to do with farmers are dissociated, and Sask Wheat Pool was by far it was the biggest deal on this waterfront. They were 50 percent of the waterfront until we downsized. They were most of the downsizing was also Sask Wheat Pool. They really didn't move ahead even though they had that little drill thing that you were talking about. So, they automated, but they automated too rapidly. And they didn't react to the market forces

properly, so they over-automated and had terrible relationships with the men within Sask Wheat Pool. They disappeared and Richardson's continued to grow and grow. Cargill moved in a big, modern American well-managed, MIT better managed.

NP: You were talking about Sask Wheat Pool and the interaction of the management staff with their rank and file. How did you know that?

BB: Because I was a member of the union, and they ran the union. So being educated the way I was into the type of milieu, I realized as soon as I went to union meetings who were running it. It was this Sask Wheat Pool group. It was the way they were running their elevator was transposed onto the union as a whole, because they dominated it, it would happen in any political organization. They were like the Liberal party of grain handling BRAC 650.

NP: How did you get involved in the union?

BB: I was a very political person. I started off in the safety committee, and then being shy, I didn't graduate to it right away. But then eventually, once I decided to do it, it was easy for me to do it. I understood everything about it. I was born and raised to do that.

NP: Categorize the main issues that you dealt with over your time. How long were you the shop steward?

BB: Maybe six years, and as a result of it, I was pretty active. I was on the safety committee for quite a few years, and those are very closely associated.

NP: Categorize the main kind of main issues that you dealt with over your time.

BB: Here is a big issue, and again the feds said, again, we should have a fall-release device attached to us at all times. Again, it was the same across-the-board legislation that you get with no smoking. So, the feds say something like, "No smoking anywhere," and then you have got all these diverse areas. They said fall relief, or is it--?

NP: Protection?

BB: Now we are out on our dumper cars, and we have a wire running along, and it catches once in a while. We had more accidents with the fall release than we have ever had. The guys just couldn't respond to it. It didn't work well in the environment that we were in. So, a fall relief if you are on the edge of a grain elevator doing some work or you're roofing, it is

a wonderful thing to have, as it catches you. But we were on top of these dumper hopper cars, and you would only drop maybe five or six feet. In that period of time there had to be some slack, and then you would swing back and forth like a bell thing. The thing inside a bell. We had a lot of accidents with that. That was an issue.

NP: Were they requiring it on the annex floor? It sounds like you had open bins as opposed to closed bins?

BB: Only if you were cleaning out a bin. Then it was contracted out to special people. Clara came in and they went down into the bins. You go down into a bin. You can't come up into it because, again, I am sure they have lost some lives there. I don't know if you have heard about it yet, but I am sure that they did in the past years. What can happen is that you have stuff hung up along the roof, and if somebody is not there to pull you out and that stuff comes down, you suffocate very rapidly. You cannot go up the hole at the bottom. What they do if that happens, there is a guy at the bottom, and you are trying to communicate up top what is happening. Then you have to shoot out there with the grain and hope. Basically, it is a very haywire situation, and you do not want to be doing it.

NP: I think other people have talked about that and that is being lowered down like a bosun's chair.

BB: That is about a four-man operation and lots of walkie-talkies. That dumper-house group I talked about, they would often do it because they were a close-knit group of guys who were still young and physical enough to take responsibility for those things.

NP: Hard physical work doing that cleaning?

BB: Cleaning it up inside a bin is what you are talking about? Yes. Ultimately, they contracted it out, so they had new residents of Canada doing it.

NP: Yes.

BB: As an entry-level job.

NP: We were talking about your union.

BB: A lot of it impacted where you deal with let's say a safety committee-type venue with the boss. The manager is a really strong force in the safety committee. He runs it. He's the chairman. The next most important person is the union shop steward.

You get a lot of lower-management people in that meeting, because they know it is an important meeting of men and employees. It is difficult for the men to stand up for their position because they have jobs. Whenever you have a job, that comes first. There was one guy, he used to always wake me up. We were actually friends. I would fall asleep in the union meeting, and I think the boss was actually very happy that I was asleep because I was kind of argumentative if I wasn't. This guy would always kick me. He ended up becoming a white hat at the elevator. Those sorts of activities.

NP: By white hat you mean managers or supervisors?

BB: Supervisors.

NP: When did you move from the safety committee to the union--?

BB: Back to the union? Because I am always in the union.

NP: Into the working section of the union. What did you learn about the union that you did not know? At the time that you were the union steward, what kinds of issues were happening over the waterfront essentially, not just at Richardson's?

BB: As a union steward, you are a fulltime employee. So, the steward's job is just on top of that.

NP: You would be going to more union meetings?

BB: Yes.

NP: Was the shop steward Richardson's representative on the local?

BB: Yes. Then they would elect somebody to be on the bargaining committee. Steward was not necessarily on the bargaining committee, but I did both roles. I had read all three volumes of Das Capital by 25, so I wasn't learning anything about politics from these people. I already knew everything, all the background for it. When I was a member of the shop committee and stuff, I knew all about politics.

NP: What kind of politics was there within the union itself? I think you referred a little bit by saying that Sask Wheat Pool sort of ran the show.

BB: Yes, and it was very orientated to the working man—the betterment of the working man. The elevating of wages basically was their main issue. Protection and safety were probably secondary. But there would always be a whole raft of demands at a union bargaining. There would be concessions made and concession promised. It is probably the same process that all these people go through. But in the grain industry, it was very structured. We had some people come from out west to lead it, and at times it was our top guy from Richardson's. He became the top guy at Richardson's here because he became the top guy at Richardson's in Winnipeg. He would come in for that negotiation.

NP: That answers the question, I think. Did any of your jobs connect you with the railway guys?

BB: Yes. They came running into our dumper house one time. Then we had a very interesting safety committee meeting with them on that issue, that was one of their cars getting away. It would be something like this Megantic thing, but on a much smaller scale. It was interesting because it was not really a political thing. They played hardball. They all argued that this had happened, and it was very unsatisfactory, the way it finally worked out. But it didn't happen again. I think what happens in a lot of industrial situations is that you have to eat a little crow, and by at least addressing the problem, you alleviate and reduce the chances that it will happen again. That is what happened there.

NP: Before I forget to ask the question, you said, even to your own amazement, that you actually loved your job, and yet your dad encouraged you to get book learning. Did you ever regret going into a physical job?

BB: No. I was a student of John Maynard Keynes and Karl Marx and a few of the great economists. I never saw anyone come along in our generation that really matched up to them. Economists have made some amazing computer stuff. It is a fabulous education I got. I am glad to have it. But I don't think within the bounds of being economists.

I don't regret not being a lawyer. I find myself critiquing seriously our whole advocacy program in law. I talk to lawyers, and they kill me. I just think, "How stupid can you be to actually think that because you know a bit about Canadian law or whatever, that you can understand what the common law is, the way I can, having read all of Charles Dickens or read deeply in Russian literature and everything else?" And some lawyer is going to tell me, "This you can do and this you can't do." I feel sorry for them, and that is for professionals in general, although I admire the heck out of them for doing it, because I couldn't.

NP: What appealed to you about that job where you spent a lot of time? What appealed to you about it, given your educational background?

BB: I got to ride my bike every day to and from work! I got to raise my family, which is so much over and above anything I could have wanted to do with an education. It was such a learning experience. Two of my kids are on their way today. My middle son is a trucker. My daughter is in her sixth year at the University of Manitoba, but she hopped into her truck. They are coming here. And one of his best friends is five years difference in age is marrying one of her best friends. You can't get that out of books. I have still got all my books and knowledge of it. I know Ken Boshcoff, and I know Michael Gravelle very closely. I can't talk politics with them. They followed the world that they wanted to go into, the political world. Those guys are dead from here up and just talk platitudes. Oh, it bores me. I would rather be on Facebook with my woman friends that are not educated, and they are talking women's politics. I can respond to that and have a hoot, rather than talk to those two stiffs! They've got nothing to tell me.

NP: Would it be fair to say, and this is just my biased wrap-up of what you are saying, that the job that you had at Richardson's allowed you the freedom to enjoy your education in the off hours and even while you were there?

BB: Yes. I think I would have enjoyed my education because it was such a good one. I often say about people who get a BA, probably 95 percent of them don't read 10 books outside of the curriculum in that period when they get their BA. I bet the shoes on my feet that they don't. They are so busy putting those yellow lines across their textbooks. I was the opposite of that. I scanned that textbook and then I tried to tear it apart. That education is so different than, I guess, just getting a BA.

NP: I'll shift gears a little bit. Changes that occurred from 1978 to 2009, what would you describe as the major changes in the job, in the work, and in the industry?

BB: For me in particular, I wandered up into this spot called the annex where I probably was meant to be, because I like to do a lot of walking and a lot of independence there. You could do a lot of reading. I defended the right of an employee to read. That was one of my shop steward's missions. I got very upset at one particular meeting when they said they might take our reading material away, because we had time to read, and the physical nature of our job didn't demand that we sat there like morons and did nothing when we were not working. I am a strong believer that you should not pretend that you are working. When you are working, it is dynamic and healthy, and when you are pretending you are working, it is the very opposite.

NP: The other kinds of changes in the industry or the way the elevator operated, was there much change or did it remain much the same?

BB: Yes, there was a bit of that old French saying, "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose.*"

NP: We are always looking for a bilingual element to this program. Thank you. [laughs]

BB: The union changed, I think, because obviously Sask Wheat Pool lost its influence, so we had a less militant union, far and away less militant. It was a more cooperative, I guess you would say, type of thing. Now there were not a lot of union rhetoric and a lot of people, just like in our own society, were very apathetic. In the grain elevators they became more apathetic. There was more integration. For instance, when I told you that the Italians could not come up to the scale floor, Eddy Roberto ran the scale floor when I left. So that had all changed for sure.

NP: The numbers of people, did that change or had that already changed when you came in?

BB: We did not work any midnight shifts anymore. That was gone. It was the early 1980's, and you would walk down the dock and pass the same guy and just a constant flow of people in and out of the workplace. And that was gone. Now we would have 4:00 to 12:00 on sometimes and other times just a day shift. Of course, you can move more grain, and the economies of size and technology were dynamic at that point. You didn't need as many employees to move the same amount of grain.

NP: Did anything change on the annex floor from technology? I would say it was pretty basic.

BB: Yes, and it was. That is a good observation. It stayed the same. The belts got longer. What we had is that I would jump from one belt to the other. So as I was leaving, they were integrating. The numbers were out of order, but we had one out in the lake. That was the new annex they called it, but it was actually the third oldest. Then the others were 1, 2, 4 in the old annex, and they jumped across. That was the development, with bigger belts moving more grain across. The fourth annex had an automated track system, so that is called a trip. The trip is the thing that you move and put over the hole, which was done automatically in the fourth annex, the newest annex in Richardson. Everything else you did manually, and it was very old-fashioned equipment. The belt moves it. So you put it into gear, and the belt is already moving, and you use the power of the belt to move this trip over the hole, and it shoots down into the hole. It has not changed much.

NP: With the one that was automated, was it controlled from that foreman's floor you were talking about?

BB: No. We controlled it from the annex, and we moved it there. It would tell us that it was on the hole, and we would believe it. It was pretty good! [Laughs]

NP: Did it ever lie?

BB: It must have lied sometimes. Employees lie, and there is always that he-said-she-said or in this case the trip can't talk. The annex did not change much. The D floor changed a lot. I told you when I first came into the D floor, we went down a fireman's pole, moved our spout—and it was difficult to move, as they are big heavy spouts—and the grain was distributed on the floor. It was pretty dirty. It was on a wheel. Two guys are moving the spout. One, it's on a spin wheel, and it is a huge, heavy spout. You lift it up onto the wheel and the one guy on the wheel pushes it, and the other guy has ropes, and he pulls it on the rope. They will go up to a tower or something, and he will pull it this way, and the two of you move that spout onto the hole. That is when I started. They got right away from moving the belts. The floors were kept cleaner due to a lot of different processes, including the men who were cleaning up more. It was just a different show.

The other thing they had was cleaner legs, which extended out like this. They were a backbreaking thing. It is the same kind of big, heavy leg but it telescopes. You would physically pull it and you try to hit the hole with it. If you didn't hit the hole—it was on three coaster wheels like chairs might be—and it would go into the hole. Then it was all you were worth to get it out of the hole. That was a dangerous thing to have to do. That all got better on the D floor. The scale floor changed from actually physically weighing the product to having it weighed downstairs. So what happened, they weighed it in the dumper house. As soon as that car came in it was weighed. We did not have to weigh it up on the scale floor. That made their job a lot easier.

NP: And the computers came in?

BB: The computers came in, and they were doing both. On the scale floor, you have a weighman one who is responsible for shipping the grain out. Weighman two is responsible for bringing it in. There is one other guy, too. When I started, there were five men on the scale floor, and when I left there were really only two. There were at least five because there were the two spout bouncers. That is what they were called “spout bouncers.”

NP: The downsizing because Thunder Bay started shipping less, was that felt much by Richardson's?

BB: Not at all. We took a bigger quotient, a percentage of the grain as the downsizing took place. When I started, Richardson's might have had 15 percent, and when I left maybe 30 percent. They got bigger. Don't forget the downsizing was in men. It wasn't necessarily in bulk of product going through. You might know that better than I do what the exact statistics are, but a lot of grain goes through Thunder Bay still. It is just handled by fewer men. They always threatened us in the negotiations that it would go down to the States or they would go straight through to Montreal on rail cars. They could never do that. They could never go straight through on the rail cars. From Winnipeg to here is 400 miles, and they just had the rail cars to do that. Now they are threatening to go another 1,500 miles over a rail system, which is notoriously going over Northwestern Ontario muskeg. They did not have the potential to do that. They pretended, they threatened and said, “Oh we can bypass you guys.”

Boats are very efficient. The poor Patersons didn't keep up with what was going on, so there has been downsizing there. We have twice as many salties coming in. Their line didn't succeed. CSL [Canada Steamship Lines], our famous Paul Martin's company, succeeded. That is a fabulously efficient way to ship grain, by boat compared to rail. They were really, I think, pretending that they could bypass that system.

NP: Any stories that you have not had a chance to tell us that you would like to be sure to be part of your record, vivid memories of your work life?

BB: Wow, I have probably said a few of those in passing.

NP: Just to highlight, when you were telling the stories, you talked a lot about what happened to other people and how things had changed. But from your own history, what we're sort of the highlights as you moved through your career?

BB: I continued to wake up in the morning, usually about 15 minutes before I had to be at work. I would get there just in time to participate in the morning's festivities. That seemed to hold constant throughout my career. I raised my family with some grain-handling friends. I started playing hockey because my kids were playing hockey. My friends at the grain elevator had kids, so they all played hockey. I became an integral part of the Current River society after we moved in from the Lakeshore. That was healthy for me.

NP: Did a lot of people who worked for UGG [United Grain Growers], or Agricore by the time you left, live in Current River? Was there some sort of grain industry community there?

BB: I think there was. There was a mill community. Yes, there was a grain community for sure. Those are working-class neighbourhoods. Again, when we joined with Paterson's, we got this entire Westfort group—again, working-class community. A lot of them came across town. There was one famous guy who rode his bike before George Letowski. George Letowski is another Fort William guy who rode his bike all the time to the elevators. There was a Westfort guy who used to come, and we were working the three shifts then, so you never knew when he was on his bike. He would ride right across town from Westfort. I am a ten-speed rider. I ride pretty fast. This guy was old fashioned, one-speed bike. Just one pedal after the other. We mentioned the fact that there was some drinking and card playing in the first years of the elevators. I think because I lived through that, that was always an experience for me.

NP: What made the change there? A lot of people have spoken of that, that there was just sort of a real ethic.

BB: I think it were deaths in the industry of course that motivates people, just like on our roads. Then they realized, for instance, that they would have to have supervision on the midnight shift. They could not just put a midnight shift on without supervision. The men are working by the hour. Why should they monitor themselves outside of that activity? They wanted to defend their jobs. Obviously, they felt threatened. Times changed.

NP: Did everybody make the transition pretty well?

BB: We had a couple of people that were grandfathered in. They were alcoholics that had been created by the industry. There was a blind eye turned towards that. That was okay. They could do their jobs. There are a lot of people who take methadone nowadays. A lot of people take methadone. A lot of them are doing jobs. It is an amazing world that we live in. I don't know how much you want to have your horizons broadened. There is a place called Shambhala in BC. I was just talking to a guy who is going there. Fifteen thousand people go and it is all people maybe younger than us. They have brought back all the exotic drugs of the 1960s, and there is no alcohol in this thing. Three venues of music. We have to accept these things in the perspective in which we live. There are a lot more people addicted today to some serious drugs and walking around. Marijuana is another serious addiction that lots of people continue to partake of in the grain electors. Marijuana smoking was very common and, again, another get-together-thing, like smoking cigarettes.

NP: I understand they had a grow op on top of UGG M.

BB: That would be the place it happened, of all places. There were a lot of old hippies that worked there. [Laughs]

NP: We have to put some of them on our list. Do you have names?

BB: I would not allow that in my annex, no sir. That would not go on. No weeds.

NP: No weeds? [Laughs] It would infect the grains?

BB: Exactly. That was my point. [Laughs]

NP: We are in the process of our project, and we ultimately are hoping that we can get an interpretation centre set up here run by Parks Canada as a national historic interpretive centre. If we had luck in doing that, what part of your story and stories from people like you do you think should be represented in this centre?

BB: I think my stories and the stories like that. We have enough nonsense in books, and we have enough from Peter Mansbridge of doctored information in our society. If you want to have a centre with more doctored information, cleansed of all impurities, et cetera, then I think you will be just avoiding the truth. No one will give a shit about what happened in a bloody grain elevator except for interesting stories of human beings acting as human beings, lived as human beings, and did some stuff. Most people and some of your interviews if I spent the time to go through it—and I am not blaming you as an interviewer, I am impressed by your grasp of the process—but I wouldn't want to hear from somebody that was trying to have a doctored and cleansed version of what happened. I wouldn't want to hear it. It is almost like I am lying, and they are telling the truth. You know more about what the others are.

I think the human interest's stories would be a huge part of it and maybe other people being as intelligent as us, you can catch their interest like you might with a comic with younger children. You can catch their interest. You might be able to disseminate some stories and see some social trends and who knows what in the process that's worthwhile. But I can't see them going into a grain thing just to hear the grain went up, then it went across, and then it came down. It took me a long time to see that process even, and I like that, the way it does it. Still, I mean, somebody who doesn't work there? The thought that you go into these primordial locations, the first time I went into a grain elevator. And then you are assigned to go upstairs—upstairs and I get into an elevator. I don't know where I am going or what I am doing. The first time I go down that pole, I am just following a guy who already knows how to go down. That is the way we learned it at that time. It is a nice process.

NP: What about your first time you climbed down the stairs on the outside?

BB: I slept on those stairs. Midnight shift and I would be sleeping on this rickety old thing. I have nightmares of it. I have nightmares after the fact. At that time, I was young, and I was tired, and it was midnight shift. I was right on the fire escape just sleeping. I took it naturally. It does resonate in your physic. I would have dreams of having a job somewhere and would be hanging on to the elevator and having to go places. My recurring dream is that I know my assignment, and I am supposed to go towards the foreman's office. I hate it with a passion. I never wanted to go there. Then I get my assignment to go to the dumper house. And I can't find any of these places. Really in the true world situation, I did hide and take time to get to places. I didn't abuse the process. That was just part of the process, and now I'm haunted by those.

NP: You had no fear of heights?

BB: I would not say that at all. I have a healthy respect for heights. I am not fearful. I don't like to walk to the edge of a grain elevator, but I am not like George Letowski. He will not. He goes outside that door and his back is against the wall. Some people have more fear of heights than I do.

NP: Climbing the stairs on the inside to me is almost as bad as standing on top. Not on the outside, but we were climbing up the stairs in Pool 3.

BB: On the inside?

NP: Yes.

BB: I run up and down those stairs. That is just exercise for me. There was the catwalk from the workhouse to the annex. It was a little catwalk and it had bars on either side. My exercise used to be, on an angle, I was able to walk up that catwalk just with my hands without my feet touching it.

NP: What was over the edge?

BB: There is a little bounce, which was where the grain would run through, and then you would go the rest of the way.
[Laughs]

NP: How amusing!

BB: I had no fear. Then after a while, they abandoned that little catwalk because I think one of the millwrights abused it. He tried to carry too much heavy equipment down this same little thing. It was meant for people to pass. So, then they blocked it off after a while and you couldn't even use it. That was terrible.

NP: Did you ride on belts?

BB: I did not do any belt surfing, no. That was a little before my time. Slower belts, I think. I hope. Allan Saxberg, may he rest in peace, was a belt surfer.

NP: Tell me about belt surfing.

BB: The guy I met right off, and he wasn't belt surfing but that is what can happen—I saw a guy with his leg chewed off by a belt. With belts you can kill yourself pretty quick doing that. If you are still on it when you get to the trip, the trip goes up. I don't think I have to explain to you what would happen on a belt like that.

NP: They used to use it as a quick way to get to place to place?

BB: I have never seen anybody belt riding myself, but I have heard of it. The belts were going too fast when I was there.

NP: Any other stories we have missed?

BB: Yes, a million stories in the naked elevator! [Laughing]

NP: For those of you who are younger, that will mean nothing to you! [Laughs]

BB: We did not take clothes off for that. [Laughs]

NP: Nobody dove off the top of Richardson's?

BB: No, that was the guy, the bugger. My son should have been on a triple A hockey team except for his kid making it. He was famous for that one jump. A one-jump hero.

NP: Actually, there are two things because you're right next door to Pool 4—or 4 and 5—depending on what year you had your disaster, were there any guys around when you first started who remembered?

BB: Yes. All the guys on the scale floor were there when that happened. I think. What year was it in?

NP: There was 1945 and 1952.

BB: Maybe there wasn't anybody. I always thought that those guys as being there. It was that long ago.

NP: Did you play hockey for the elevator hockey league?

BB: No. Current River Old Timers though.

NP: Ok. We are trying to find information on the hockey league. Brian Mallon I am told has--.

BB: I think Todd Donaldson who just retired from Richardson's. He played on that team. He would be fun to interview.

NP: Any other people that you mentioned that are still around? Are any of them managers or they long gone?

BB: Stasiuk is gone. We have a new guy from out west. Bill Stasiuk his name was.

NP: Simpson?

BB: Simpson is long gone.

NP: Okay.

BB: He was there when I started. He ran for office here. He was a political. He ran for the Conservative Party. The same bosses there as when I was there, but he and his superintendent are both guys from out west. He is an interesting character, but I wouldn't want to tell stories about him except that he drove his truck out into the lake to see how far he could get before he would drop off the edge. There was a little promontory and with the ebb and flow of the lake sometimes this promontory, just out from the elevator, was visible and sometimes it would get more visible. For some reason he wanted to find that out with his half-ton truck what that was all about.

NP: There was no alcohol involved?

BB: No. He was a big man with big-man ambitions. That was one of his ambitions to find out how far on the edge that he could get with his truck.

NP: What was the result?

BB: I think he survived. He was able to extricate his truck. I don't think they had to help him with that. [Laughs]

NP: Monika, you have been sitting there dutifully taking notes. Are there any questions I should have asked that you want to ask?

MM: I know you have lots more stories Bill, so I would ask you to go into those.

NP: One last chance to tell stories for the benefit of history.

BB: I am a counter puncher. I need an impetus because if I let my tongue run wild, I would just tell stories that might not be as structured as they should be. It was a very interesting place. Almost instantly I just sold my house. Everybody says, "Where are you going to next?" I have not planned that far ahead. When you said I have got all this education and what was it like to be in a grain elevator, well actually it was a wonderful place to spend as an educated person. It was a way of letting go of the responsibilities that would have been involved with following a career in political economy that was not even recognized. They didn't even want to give me a master's degree in political economy at McGill University. It was the cold war going on. They were just the bad guys.

NP: Thank you very much it has been a wonderful interview.

BB: Thank you very much. You did a very good interview, I thought.

NP: We sort of did things backwards having stories first and the boring stuff later. We are trying to get a nice balance because 50 years from now people will not necessarily know how an elevator operated in our times.

BB: Can you see the Aboriginal people going back to their elders to hear the stories.

NP: You will be one of our elders.

BB: People like Barry Cuko and Carl Maki and Jimmy Irvine, those are the three mentors at Richardson's on the scale floor. People will not believe their stories down the road. So their stories are just as extreme as mine. If you could interview any of them. Jimmy is still alive, and he would be a good guy to interview.

NP: Jimmy?

BB: Jim Irvine. He would be a wonderful man to interview.

NP: Where does he live?

BB: He is in Current River on Strathcona. As far as I know he is still there. He is 10 years older than me anyways. He will give you a depth perspective. And with him, I would say just talk about the scale floor. Talk about his stories. He is a storyteller. He

knows lots of jokes. If you could interweave his joking and his perspective into your whole thing that you are doing, it is to me that at tapestry which is our salt-of-the-earth people in the world. That is all there really is. There is a group of people floating up above them, but they don't really matter very much. It is what that working people who really believe in what they are doing. Jim believes in what he did. Those people are what make the world go around. He didn't need to have a white hat, a manager, anything like that. The physical part of the business, he could handle it. There was a job for a manager, but it wouldn't be up on the scale floor.

NP: Thank you.

End of interview.