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Summary: In his self-taped interview, former weighman for the Canadian Grain Commission Erv Choquette discusses his career in Thunder Bay’s grain industry within several different organizations. In the first audio part, he discusses his work as a deckhand on lakers carrying grain from Thunder Bay through the St. Lawrence Seaway. He describes how grain travels from the Prairies out east and how many elevators it goes through in the process. He then discusses moving to become a switchman for the Canadian National Railway, working the dangerous job of switching boxcars in the hump yard, and shoving boxcars into elevators. Choquette then moved to the Canadian Grain Commission weigh staff, and he explains his work as a trackman and then as an assistant weighman, often travelling to do elevator audits across the country. He shares several memorable stories of pranks and workplace shenanigans, as well as shares his interactions with grain trimmers and wildlife in the elevators. In the second audio part, Choquette expands on some wildlife stories, shares a story of grain being pilfered from boxcar linings, and recalls the change in railway rolling stock from boxcars to hopper cars. He also describes an accident he had due to heavy grain dust. Choquette ends by describing his move out of the grain industry, but the continued interactions he has with grain elevator employees.

Keywords: Canadian National Railway (CNR); Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Seafarers’ International Union (SIU); Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Grain transportation—Rail; Grain transportation—ships; Bulk carrier ships; Lakers; Upper Lakes Shipping; Switchman; Hump yard; Boxcars; Hopper cars; Hand brakes; Weigh staff; Grain weighing; Grain elevator audits; Grain trimmers; Workplace accidents; Alcohol use; Grain doors; SWP Pool 5; MPE Pool 3; National Grain Elevator (GTP Elevator, Cargill Elevator); UGG Elevator M

Audio One

Time, Speaker, Narrative

EV: I was approached by Nancy Perozzo, project coordinator, and Monika McNabb, historical resources administrator, for Friends of Elevator to--. [... *audio skips*] Grain industry. The time spanned from 1960 to 1972. I shall begin now.

At the age of 18, I became interested in sailing the Great Lakes. I joined a Seafarers International Union, a.k.a. SIU, and shipped out on a grain barge on May 2, 1960. I sailed on the Great Lakes until 1963. I sailed on several ships during that time, six of which were grain carriers.

Upon entry into the port of Fort William or Port Arthur, the ships, upon arrival, were assigned to load grain at various elevators. Sometimes a ship would take on a cargo of grain from just one elevator. But more often than not, it would be necessary for a ship to go to several elevators to complete their load of specific grain. Once loaded, the ships would sail down the Great Lakes to a designated grain terminal and discharge their load. Grain shipments were designated for both Canadian and US ports. Goderich, Collingwood, Midland, Owen Sound, Port Colborne, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City, Baie Comeau, Port Cartier are Canadian ports where grain carriers unloaded their cargo.

It is interesting to note the role of the elevators in the grain trade industry. On the Prairies, farmers take their load of grain to the local grain elevator where it is unloaded and stored in the elevator and, ultimately, loaded into a boxcar and unloaded at another elevator on the West Coast or Churchill, Manitoba, or Port Arthur and Fort William. Once again, the grain is unloaded into an elevator and loaded onto a ship, which sails to another elevator. Once again, the cargo is unloaded into another elevator. So, it would seem that from the initial load to a grain elevator on the Prairies to the unloading of grain at the ultimate destination in Canada, there were three stages involving elevators. But that was not necessarily the case because when grain was unloaded in St. Lawrence ports, ocean-going vessels, which were too large for the Seaway system, would load grain for a terminal in some other part of the world. And once again, that would involve another grain elevator.

I find the process of grain movement into and out of a grain elevator a fascinating process. At the beginning of this narration, I indicated that I shipped out on a grain barge as a deckhand. The barge was named the *Bryn Barge*, owned by Upper Lakes Shipping. When the barge was fully loaded, it would be towed to another port by another ship on Lake Huron. In 1960, it was just about the end of an era for grain barges as larger ships were continually being built. The *Bryn Barge* had wooden hatches. The deckhand would remove the hatches for grain loading and then replace the wooden hatches on the hatches when the grain was loaded, when the cargo hold was full. Now, once the wooden hatches were placed back on the hatch, the deckhands would cover the hatches with tarps and tuck them into cleats on the hatches and secured them by hammering wooden wedges into the cleats to hold the tarp securely so that water could not enter the hatch during rain or heavy seas washing onto the deck.

I recall one incident at Goderich after the cargo was unloaded, the floor in one of the cargo holds was a bit wet for whatever reason. Another deckhand and I went into the elevator, unloaded the grain into burlap sacks—or grain dust I should say into burlap sacks—and carried them back to the ship to sop up the water in the cargo hold. That was probably my first experience going inside a grain elevator.

When grain was being loaded onto a ship, I was fascinated by the procedures involved. There were grain trimmers, who handled the loading spouts. There were grain samplers. And as deckhands, we had to sweep the deck once the grain was loaded.

I recall a time when, hanging around the union hall waiting to ship out, a call came into the union hall requesting men to work for a couple of days building shifting planks in a liberty ship docked at the Seaway terminal as the ship was to load grain for a foreign port. Shifting planks were erected in a square in the middle of a cargo hold. The purpose of building shifting planks is that when grain was loaded onto the ship, shifting planks would prevent the grain from shifting in heavy seas, thus preventing a disaster at sea.

Liberty ships were not designed to move grain. Over 27 liberty ships were built between 1941 and 1945 in the US to replace cargo ships that were sunk by German U-boats. Most of the liberty ships were scrapped by the mid 1960s. Only two remain afloat today, preserved for historical purposes.

[0:05:44]

In 1963, I got married and quit sailing on the Great Lakes. In fall of 1963, I hired on with the CNR [Canadian National Railway] as a switchman. In 1963 there were 27 grain elevators. There was a lot of movement of grain into and out of the elevators in those days. Sometimes it would get so busy, they would get the hump going in the CNR Neebing yard. When working the hump, many switchmen were required. An engine would shove boxcars to the hump, and at a timely moment, a switchman would pull a pin on a boxcar. Another switchman would climb on the ladder and ride the boxcar down to one of the many tracks in the railway yard. He braked the car as it approached the standing line of boxcars to reduce the impact when making contact with the end of boxcar.

But once in a while, a brake on the boxcar wouldn't work too well. When this would happen, the switchman would climb onto the catwalk on top of the boxcar—bear in mind the boxcar would be travelling at a good rate of speed because the brake was faulty. The switchman standing on the boxcar would have to estimate accurately when the boxcars were to make contact. At a point of his estimation, he would jump as high as he could so he would land on the boxcar after it made contact. It amazes me to this day that no one ever got hurt, or even killed, when I think about doing that.

I recall an instance when I, along with many other switchmen, were awaiting our turn at the hump to ride a boxcar down. We would watch other riders go down that main track to be switched onto an assigned track. On one occasion, a rider was having difficulty braking the car. He started braking too late, and the boxcar was travelling so fast that it would not make contact with the standing boxcar in time, that he couldn't place himself on top of the boxcar quickly enough. So, he hung on for dear life. The brake side of the boxcar he was riding was on the end of the boxcar to make contact. When the boxcars made contact, he'd disappeared completely out of sight. But several seconds later we could see his head emerging over the boxcar. The impact knocked his body right off the boxcar except for his hands as he gripped the brake wheel so tightly, which prevented him from falling in between the boxcars. Boy, we were sure worried that a tragedy happened at that time.

The grain industry required a lot of switchmen as most of the switching duties required shoving boxcars into the grain elevators. Some elevators were served by CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] and others by CNR. Some elevators would be served by both. When shoving boxcars into the elevator, the grain cars would be shoved through the car shed to be placed in a position on the other side of the car shed. These cars would be winched into position for unloading in the car shed. The tracks behind the car shed would hold a predetermined amount of boxcars. If the count wasn't accurate and there were too many boxcars being shoved through the car shed, boxcars would end up in the lake. Every now and again this did happen. An incident like that would result in time off for the switchman.

Shoving boxcars into the elevator would require a switchman to stand on top of one of the lead boxcars to signal the switchman standing on a boxcar near the train engine, who in turn signalled the engineman, commonly known as the engineer. Standing on top of those boxcars at the lakefront in the wintertime was one very cold job. So cold, in fact, that it was probably one of the main reasons, if not the main reason, I chose to find another job. Enter the Board of Grain Commissioners.

[0:10:08]

I hired on with the Board of Grain Commissioners in May of 1964. I was hired as a grain sampler, and my first assignment was at Manitoba Pool 3. I was there only two days and was transferred to Sask Pool 5 on the Kam River in Westfort. I couldn't see myself becoming a grain inspector, so I applied for a transfer to the weighing staff and was accepted. In the spring of 1965, I was assigned to National grain elevator at the Mission. When one joins the weighing staff, one starts off as a trackman. The job of a trackman was to record and break the seals on the boxcars and to take a load line in each boxcar. The boxcars are opened with a pry bar and a ladder is placed against the grain door. The trackman climbs the ladder and takes a visual inspection of the quantity of grain in the boxcar. His job is to estimate the grain in the boxcar.

There are marks inside the boxcar to help him with his calculation. He also carried a load line book to help him with the calculated amount in the boxcar. Once his calculations were recorded on a sheet, the sheet was sent upstairs to the receiving weighman, and he would use them as a guide as to what to expect. If the trackman's calculations was close to the weight of the grain in the scale hopper, then all was good. But if the calculation was out too much, the trackman would have to follow the conveyor belt to see if there was a spill. Sometimes a trackman would go back to the boxcar and check the dust line. Sometimes it was necessary to recalculate.

The primary function of the weighing staff is to oversee all grain coming into and leaving the elevator to ensure there is no loss of grain, and to keep everyone honest, so to speak.

After three years and a trackman, I was promoted to the scale floor as an assistant weighman. When grain was being moved from a bin to a boxcar or a ship, the onus was on the assistant weighman to inspect the grain bin to see if it was completely empty. Checking hoppers and conveyor belts were of other duties, as well as related paperwork.

The grain elevators in Fort William and Port Arthur, Vancouver, Prince Rupert, Churchill, were all staffed with Board of Grain Commissioner personnel. Grain elevators in the eastern part of Canada were not. So, to keep everyone honest, the Board of Grain Commissioner employees would go to the eastern elevators and perform what is known as audits every one or two years. Essentially, all the grain in the elevators is weighed. In other words, it was taking inventory of grain in the elevators. Once inventory was completed, the paperwork would be sent to head office and matched against the elevator's paperwork since the last audit. Yours truly performed audits in Montreal, Goderich, Owen Sound, Quebec City, and Port-Cartier.

The shipping season in Churchill, Manitoba, is less than three months. The elevator, which is operated by the National Harbour Board, was staffed with employees from the western provinces. The Board of Grain Commissioner inspectors were from Winnipeg and the weighing staff from Port Arthur and Fort William. I spent the season of 1968 in Churchill. I enjoyed working at the elevators in Port Arthur and Fort William, as well as elevators in other parts of Canada.

One time, when I was at the National Elevator at the Mission, a weighman and an assistant weighman were dispatched for a secret assignment. The two weighmen and a supervisor of high rank went to a small elevator in southern Manitoba and paid an unannounced surprise visit to the operator of the elevator. The elevator operator was not following proper procedure in the operation of the elevator. I don't recall the specific details. This was a very unusual assignment as it was the only one that I knew of in eight years on the weighing staff.

There were 27 elevators at the Lakehead in 1964. The Empire elevator in the east end of Fort William had ceased operations before 1964. I worked at every one of the elevators except Richardson's. The job offered a lot of variety as I was never assigned to an elevator for a long duration. I would meet and get to know employees at the elevators I worked at. Occasionally, I would meet an employee or a member of the weighing staff who, when possible, made their day fun playing pranks or joking with fellow employees. It would pass the time and a lot of fun was had. I recall a lot of experiences. I'd like to share a couple of them with you anyway.

[0:15:15]

So, one particular--. On the scale floor of the National Grain Elevator, the elevator weighman, Bob Prokosh, and Board of Grain Commissioner weighman, Ralph Thatcher, were always joking with one another and sometimes playing tricks on one another. Ralph wore a hat with a full brim. Bob would get a kick out of hitting him on the head with his open hand, pressing Ralph's hat flat on his head, and the brim sliding down covering his eyes. Each day when they arrived for work on the scale floor, Bob would do this prank on almost a daily basis, and perhaps more than once during the day.

One day, when Ralph was at home, he made something to go under his hat. It may have been a stiff piece of cardboard. On this piece of cardboard, he affixed a lot of pins and needles pointing towards the top of his hat. The next day when he went to work on the scale floor, Bob slammed his open hand on Ralph's hat. He let out a hell of a yell and his hand was bleeding very badly. And good old Ralph had the last laugh—and let me assure you, it was a long laugh.

One day, the employees going to the top of the scale floor would ride the hoist to get to their floor where they worked. The hoist is pretty much identical to that of an elevator in a hotel. The first stop would be the annex floor, the second stop would be the distributing floor, and then the scale floor. So, one day at the National Grain Elevator, a group of employees were in the hoist going up to the upper floors. The hoist stopped at the distributing floor for an employee to exit. The gate opened and as he was about the exit, he broke wind. The gate closed and, as he walked away, the head elevator weighman hollered, "Hey, Johnny! Get the hell back here! You forgot something!"

Then there was another time, when I was at Manitoba Pool 3, when someone tampered with the house phone in the car shed office. Someone had unscrewed the mouthpiece and put some garlic into the mouth of the mouthpiece—into the components of the mouthpiece, I should say—and screwed the mouthpiece back on. The car shed foreman picked up the phone to phone the scale floor. He sniffed garlic powder, and when the person on the scale floor answered, the car shed foreman asked, "What the hell did you have for lunch? I can smell you from here!"

And now I shall speak of an incident, which I deem a waterfront classic. The head elevator weighman was known as Crazy Paul at McCabe's. Now, Crazy Paul was a harmless guy. Paul was a talker. The head weighman is somewhat an easy job. That said, there was a lot of time for idle conversation. Paul would talk about snowmobiling, vehicles, building houses, and just about anything and everything under the sun—and often without not keeping his mind on his job.

Screenings are a residual product from the grain cleaners separating chaff from wheat, barley, oats, et cetera. The screenings are conveyed to a bin. Screenings were vulnerable to humidity and dampness, sometimes resulting in the screenings sticking to the side of the grain elevator bin. Screenings were the by-product which was loaded into the boxcars to be shipped for processing—pellets comes to mind.

It was a Friday, and screenings were being pulled from a bin, but halfway down, screenings were clinging to the side of the bin. When that would happen, an employee would have to be lowered into the bin and poke the screenings with a pole to loosen them so they would drop into the centre of the bin. The grain bin is fully enclosed. There is a hatch on top of the bin just large enough for an employee to get through. With the hatch cover open, a portable winch is placed over the hatch. An employee is lowered into the bin on a bosun's chair, secured by somewhat of a thin cable. Prior to his entry, an extension light is lowered into the bin as there are no lights inside the bin.

[0:19:59]

So, it was on a Friday afternoon when an employee was lowered halfway down into a 90-foot bin to loosen up the screenings from the wall with a pole. It is probably the worst job in the grain elevator, as it is very dusty and very uncomfortable sitting in a bosun's chair. So, five o'clock came and it was time for the employees to get off work. So, Crazy Paul was in a hurry to get off work, and he unplugged the extension light and headed to the hoist along with the other employees. Shortly after 5:00 on Friday, everyone had left the elevator to go home for the weekend. Well, not everyone. Crazy Paul had forgotten about the guy halfway down the grain bin who now didn't even have a light. This guy sat in the dark from Friday afternoon until the following Monday morning.

When the employees resumed work Monday morning, they realized the employee in the screening bin had been forgotten. On Monday morning, Crazy Paul was seen running out of the elevator along the railway track towards the parking lot, where his vehicle was parked, being chased by the forgotten employee with a chunk of lumber in his hand.

To authenticate the story, I would ask the listener to talk to someone who worked in the elevator in those days—back in the '60s—as the story is well-known. No doubt, as this story gets told, the story gets distorted by half-truths or mistruths. I have told the story as I know it.

I will now take a moment to talk about grain trimmers. They were a group whose job was to load the ships with grain. They were separated into two groups. The Grain Trimmers Association had a pool of permanent grain trimmers. They shared in the yearly profits. From what I have heard, they made a huge amount of money. There were only so many in the pool. The other group of grain trimmers were hired as casual when extra men were needed during busy times. They may have been paid hourly or by piecework—I guess I knew at the time, but I don't remember now. I guess it was the intense desire of casual grain trimmers to get accepted into the pool. As I said, they made a huge amount of money.

I know of only one case, personally, where this happened, where a casual got into the pool. His name was Benny Voit. Benny Voit was a former NHL player who played with the Detroit Red Wings during the Stanley Cup years of 1952, '54, and '55. After that, he played one year with the Chicago Black Hawks. From that point on it was downhill from there for Benny. He eventually hired on as a casual grain trimmer. If memory serves me correctly, he worked many years as a casual grain trimmer and finally got accepted into the pool.

The grain trimmers were notorious boozers I think it must have been part of the job description to become a grain trimmer. Sometimes some of them became very drunk and would pass out somewhere. I was on the scale floor at the National Grain Elevator when all of us on the scale floor looked down at the ship being loaded. There, on a wheelbarrow on the ship's deck, was a passed-out grain trimmer, with his arms and legs dangling from the wheelbarrow. This was not a serious matter. It was a laughable matter as you could see the people on the ship's deck laughing. For the grain trimmers, it was all in a day's work. Ask anyone from that era, and anyone will attest to the boozing grain trimmers. They were known for two things: heavy drinking, and an annual tug-of-war event with local firefighters.

I enjoyed going to work. Friends of Grain Elevators are people from all walks of life. Metaphorically speaking, there were animals which are friends of grain elevators. When I was switching for the CNR in the Mission yard, there was an abundance of Hungarian partridge. Hungarian partridge are not native to the area. There is an abundance of Hungarian partridge in southwestern Manitoba. Somehow, Hungarian partridge got transplanted into the Mission yard. In my mind, they would have arrived by boxcar. There was an abundance of grain to feed on, as the grain leaking from boxcars was a common thing, and often there would be a lot on the ground. I would guess that some of them—the Hungarian partridge that is—got to the dinner table of some of the local people. Normally Hungarian partridge are difficult to get close to, but in the Mission yard one could get very

close to them. It seems they had become somewhat domesticated in the Mission yard, and that was so cool. Today, grain cars are covered hopper cars. Whether there are Hungarian partridge in the Mission yard today, I do not know.

[0:25:24]

Once when I was working at Manitoba Pool 3, I was climbing the ladder to take a load line when I saw a skunk ambling on top of the grain. I quickly got down from the ladder and alerted the car shed employees. When it came time to break open the grain door, it was done quickly with the employees quickly exiting the area and keeping their distance. The skunk sauntered out of the boxcar and went on its merry way. Then it was back to work.

Now, the incident with the skunk at the National Grain Elevator had a totally different outcome. A boxcar with a skunk in it was not noticed by the trackman when a load line was taken. When the boxcar was opened over the hopper, the skunk sprayed. That caused problems and a commotion, needless to say.

When shovelling grain from a boxcar, it requires two men. Now, production had to continue. The foreman called for volunteers. Someone--. Whether there was extra money offered, or merely quick--. I don't know. Anyway, the grain in the car had to be shovelled out. Now, I'm not sure if it took one or two shovellers, but I only recall one. One person, if necessary, could shovel a grain car. Well, this one volunteer, he did get the job done, but it wasn't without taking breaks to vomit. That was unbelievable.

Also, at the National Grain Elevator, there was another incident with an animal. I think it may have been in December when the slip is frozen over, but ice wasn't real thick; however, it was thick enough for a deer to go on. I was on the scale floor and all of the employees were watching the poor deer trying to walk on the ice. Unfortunately, my memory is vague on this incident. I know people went along the slip to try and help the deer, but the deer was nervous of the people compounded by the fact that it was being traumatized when trying to walk on the ice. So, as I said, my memory is vague on this incident, and I do not recall how the deer got off the ice. So, as I said, not only people are friends of the grain elevators, so are animals.

There were various businesses--.

Audio Two

Time, Speaker, Narrative

EC: Also at the National elevator, there was another incident with an animal. I think it may have been in December when the shipping had finished for the season. The slip was frozen over, but the ice wasn't real thick. However, it was thick enough for a deer to go on. I was on the scale floor and all the employees were watching the poor deer in trying to walk on the ice. Unfortunately, my memory is vague on this issue. I know people went along the slip to try and help the deer, but the deer was nervous of the people compounded by the fact that it was traumatized by not getting it's footing on the ice. As I said, my memory is vague on this incident and I do not recall how the deer got off the ice.

Of course, everyone knows that pigeons are friends of elevators. One particular pigeon comes to mind. It was in the fall of 1971 when the shipping season was so busy that a few elevators had to put on a second shift. I was dispatched as temporary weighman in charge of the 4:00 to 12:00 shift at Manitoba Pool 3. Some of the elevators had kitchen appliances in the scale office. Pool 3 was equipped with cooking facilities. One evening, an Italian immigrant who was working on the scale floor went onto the rooftop and grabbed a pigeon. He plucked it, then cleaned it, cut it up, and fried it on the stove. When it was put on the plate, he offered to share it with whoever wanted some. No one accepted his offer, as it didn't appeal to us. The Italian said it was delicious; being grain-fed, it probably was. One thing I do know is that when the pigeon was in the stomach, which a half hour earlier was pecking grain off the elevator roof. Well, I must say meat doesn't get any fresher than that. So, as I said, not only are people friends of grain elevators, so are animals.

Times have changed for a lot of businesses over the years. Northland Machinery and its successors comes to mind. They manufactured metal buckets for the conveyor belts that go to the scale floor. A personal friend of mine has probably manufactured thousands and thousands of these metal buckets, but today they have been replaced by resin-molded buckets. As I said, times have changed for some businesses.

Another change that comes to mind is the grain door department. Once the grain has been removed from the boxcars, the grain doors are thrown back into the boxcar to be handled by grain door men. The grain door man would remove the nails and arrange the doors to be recycled. Grain door men were not employed by the elevator. I am not sure whether they were employed by the railway or a company contracted by railway companies for the recycling of grain doors. Someone once said that half of the houses in the east end were built from grain doors. That statement, of course, would be highly exaggerated, but there is no doubt in my mind that a lot of grain doors found their way to private residences, not only in the East End, but in Westfort and other parts of the city as well. Given the economic climate of the 1930s, I would think a lot of grain doors were used in construction in private homes. Grain doors no longer exist, but merely a memory in the minds of people, like myself, who remember them from back in the day.

Covered hopper cars are the rolling stock in today's world. When the boxcars were unloaded and shoved out to a holding area to be picked up by the train crew, the grain door men would go to work on the grain doors. Part of the trackman's duties was to inspect

the liner of the boxcar for grain still caught behind the liner. The boxcars were lined with boards to prevent grain sticking to the boxcar's walls in damp and cold weather. I don't recall the dimensions of the boards that lined the boxcars, but I would guess the dimensions to be about one by four or one by six inches in width. Through wear and tear, some would be missing, thus allowing grain to be caught in between the liners of the boxcar wall. The trackman's job was to report that there was grain behind the liner, as all grain moved into and out of the elevator had to be accounted for. Sometimes the liners would contain an insignificant amount of grain, other times several hundred pounds.

[0:04:55]

With regard to grain in the liners, I have an interesting story to share. During the sixties at the Current River elevator, there was a person who was removing the leftover grain into burlap sacks and carrying them to his vehicle, subsequently bootlegging the grain. This was against the law. This person would sometimes hire a helper. As the Board of Grain Commissioner's employee, we had the authority to tell him not to remove the grain, which we did. But we couldn't always be out in the outbound area where the grain cars waited to be shunted.

But his guy could be seen running to his vehicle with a bag weighing over 100 pounds on his shoulder. I would describe him to be about 180 pounds and under six feet. Boy, was he in shape! It is a small world. One of his helpers for a brief period was a guy named Tony. I will call him by his first name only, as I knew him from sailing with him on the *Fortwilldoc* in 1960.

I told Tony that what he was doing was illegal and that he will ultimately get in trouble if he continued to remove grain from the boxcars. He just smiled and didn't have much to say on the matter. He clearly wanted to avoid talking about it. The trackmen were very frustrated because these guys wouldn't listen to us and kept on removing grain. A fellow trackman, Jim Vecchio, was relentless in his pursuit of this ringleader—for lack of a better word—so relentless, in fact, that he repeatedly yelled and was very vociferous towards this man.

Well, guess what happened? When Jim got off work one day and went to his car, he found his tires slashed. The incident was obviously reported to the supervisors. Consequently, the order came for us to back off and not to confront these bootleggers any further. The ringleader and his helper of the day continued to remove grain. If I recall, he eventually stopped removing grain. I can't recall the details of this matter, but I think the law may have got involved.

I have a lot of fond memories of my sailing days and my years at the grain elevator, but there was a time when my life may have had a tragic ending. Earlier I outlined the description of a trackman and what he does. One of the duties I neglected to state was that he was required to go on the car shed roof to check the cyclones to see if they were functioning properly.

It was a day at Pool 3 when I went to the car shed roof. The car shed roof had not been cleaned off for a long time. It was heavily dust laden, and my feet would sink in the grain dust. I was walking towards the cyclone, and in doing so I jumped on a skylight, clearly without thought to what I was doing. All the glass went crashing to the boxcar below, and the cement floor and steel railing below me. I was hanging only on by my elbows on each side of the skylight flanges, supporting my weight.

Had the boxcar been directly below me, I would have jumped. But just the very edge of the boxcar was below me, with three feet of cement floor separating the boxcar and steel railings that were on the floor. Car shed employees were looking up with panic in their eyes and scrambling to see how they could save me. One such employee did. There was a staircase leading to the car shed roof. He ran up as fast as he could, and he got behind me. He clutched me under my arms and pulled me to safety. I can't recall his name, but I clearly remember what he looked like; he was a young, red-headed guy.

I went into the weigh office shortly afterwards. A supervisor from the weighing staff came to see me. He suggested that I go home for the rest of the day. I told him I was okay and that I wanted to finish my shift. He said, "That is a near tragedy. It plays on a person's mind, affecting his job." I told him I was okay and that reflecting on a near tragedy was not going to affect my work. Shortly after he and I spoke, he left. Then the superintendent of Pool 3 came to see me. He asked me if I was okay, I replied that I was. He then said, "You knew the skylight was there. It was clearly your fault." And then he walked out of the elevator weigh office. Oh, well. At least he didn't make me pay for the skylight.

As I've said, I have enjoyed working at the elevators. I have a lot of fond memories, both of my sailing days and the grain elevators. But a point came in my life when I decided that I did not want to do this for the rest of my life. I believe that everyone in life has a niche. Working at the grain elevators would not be mine. I resigned early in 1972. I furthered my education at Confederation College, did a short stint in real estate, and then into bus driving. I retired from Greyhound April 1, 2002. Once I became a bus driver, I guess one could say I became alienated from the grain elevators. In a manner of speaking, remnants did exist.

[0:10:22]

In the mid '70s, a supervisor for the inspection staff was on my bus en route to an NHL game in Minneapolis. Occasionally somebody—supervisors from the weighing staff—would come to the bus depot restaurant for coffee. One day when I was on the Dryden run, Moe Sawchuk, who was at Manitoba Pool 1 at the time, came to the bus depot with his teenage daughter and asked me to keep an eye on her to her destination, which was Ignace. I would also run into Board of Grain Commissioner employees in the years that followed my resignation with the Board of Grain Commissioners.

From 1995 to 2005, my youngest daughter, who had just graduated as an RN, moved to Florida. So, every winter for about ten years, my wife and I would go to her place for three weeks. During that timeframe, Thunder Bay Days were held at Anderson Park in Tarpon Springs. It was a yearly one-day event. One year I met Bobby Scheer and Frank Kovac and their wives. They were from the weighing staff. They were accompanied by a man named David Cook and his wife. Dave was from Manitoba Pool. Another year I met Jack Pert, who was a former Ogilvie elevator worker. And then another year I met Ab Cava and his wife there. Ab and I worked together occasionally when we were on the weighing staff. But Ab, like myself, resigned, found his niche in life in the brick business—not as in the furniture store, but as in a brickyard.

And just three months ago in December, I ran into Gary Rentz. He and his wife were working a table at a flea market as my wife and I were. We were at the flea market for a few hours; that gave us a lot of time to talk. I worked with Gary when we were both trackmen over 40 years ago. Yes, it was over 40 years since I saw Gary, and what did we talk about? Elevator shoptalk, of course. Now, take a moment, if you will, and think about that. Over 40 years ago since we saw each other, and here we were, engaging in elevator shoptalk.

Well, I guess that is why I am a friend of grain elevators.

End of interview