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Company Affiliations: Thunder Bay Grain Trimmers, International Longshoremen's Association (ILA)

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Summary: Retired grain trimmer for the Thunder Bay Grain Trimmers Ernest Contardo discusses his long career on Thunder Bay's waterfront loading grain vessels. He tells the story of being voted into the exclusive pool of grain trimmers and starting out as an hourly worker before becoming a boss trimmer at Pool 1. He explains the responsibility of grain trimmers to ensure ships are loaded correctly so they are stable for their travels through the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway. He recalls his first day on the job and the physicality of the labour in the early years, and he describes his interactions with the ship's crew, elevator workers, and the Canadian Ports Clearance Association. Contardo then surveys the Thunder Bay waterfront, describing each of the elevators that operated and the unique features of their loading equipment, and sharing stories of memorable people and events. He discusses some of the changes during his career, like automation of elevator equipment, loss of hands-on experience in ships' crews, computerization, and the decline in grain movement through Thunder Bay. Other topics discussed include grain trimmers working for icehouses and stevedore sheds, the culture of alcohol use, being a member of the International Longshoremen's Association, the UGG A collapse, intricacies of loading different grains, his pride in being a grain trimmer, and the grain trimmers' hand carved shovels.

Keywords: Thunder Bay Grain Trimmers; Grain trimming; Grain transportation—ships; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Ship loading; Lakers; Bulk carriers; Ocean-going ships; Great Lakes trade; St. Lawrence Seaway; Stevedores; Longshoremen; Canadian Ports Clearance Association (Lake Shippers Clearance Association); Grain elevators—equipment and supplies; Automation; Computerization; Alcohol use; International Longshoremen's Association (ILA); Labour unions; Elevator disasters; UGG A collapse; MPE Pool 1; Lakehead Elevator; Northwestern Elevator; SWP Pool 8; Paterson Elevator O; SWP Pool 5; Fort William Elevator F; Consolidated Elevator; Searle Elevator; National Grain Elevator (Cargill Elevator); Empire Elevator; P&H Elevator; UGG Elevator M; SWP Pool 7A and 7B; Thunder Bay Elevator; Canada Malting Elevator; UGG Elevator A; Richardson Main Elevator; MPE Pool 2; MPE Pool 6; SWP Pool 4A and 7B; AWP Pool 9

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: Start the interview today. It is April 1st, 2013, and I am interviewing our narrator at his home on Winnipeg Avenue. I'll have him introduce himself. EC: I'm Ernest Contardo with the Thunder Bay Grain Trimmers. NP: Was that your--. You started and ended your career? EC: I started periodically in 1958, and then I worked--. Well, I started steady in 1959 to two years ago, when I retired at the age of 70. NP: Oh, my goodness. So that's a good, long career. EC: Yeah. NP: In a physically demanding business. EC: Yeah, it was about 52-53 years. It was tough, tough going in those days. NP: I'm going to start way back, because I know you grew up in Westfort, is that correct? EC: No. NP: Oh okay, got that wrong. EC: The rest of my family, yeah, grew up in Westfort. My grandfather built the Wayland Hotel, and my father had an autobody shop on Gore Street. All my first cousins and aunts and uncles, most of them are from Westfort. I grew up on North Marks Street—335 North Marks Street. NP: Now because of your grandfather and your father's businesses in Westfort, were you introduced to the elevators or the grain industry at an early age?

EC: Yeah, I was working my father's body shop as a young boy, and my sister married Bill Stevenson who was with the Thunder Bay Grain Trimmers at the time. He was always getting, you know, if I needed extra work or wanted to do some shovelling or work there loading ships, I used to go down there. I liked it so much because different countries, different peoples, different worlds. It was always exciting to me in those days. That's why I stuck with it.

NP: How old were you when you did your first shovelling?

EC: 18.

NP: 18.

EC: Right.

NP: The elevators you were working at, at that time, were they mainly the ones along the Kam River?

EC: At the start they were Kam River, yeah. There was something like 10 or 11 there. The first time I ever went on the boat was on *Portadoc*, and it was at the Empire Elevator in the East End. Then there was Ogilvie's, or Pool 8, as they call it lately, then Westland D, then there was Elevator E, then Pool 5. Down the river and right beside the Great Lakes was Northwestern Elevator, and Lakehead Elevator and right beside the Kam bridge was the Paterson Elevator. That was all on the river and then there was the Grand Trunk Elevator in near Chippewa and Searle's Elevator is there.

NP: It was a really jumping place at the time.

EC: Boats day and night. Seven days and seven nights a week in those days.

NP: Oh wow.

EC: Up until the late '60s, '70s, '80s. Then it started the die out in the late '80s.

NP: What can you tell me about Mr. Stevenson?

EC: Bill? His grandfather was a grain trimmer. Then his father was a grain trimmer, then Bill, then Bill's other brother Wayne that was also a grain trimmer, and then it was in the family. So when I started, you know, I just--. Then Bill left. The day I started—well not the day but within a few months of the day I started steady—Bill left. Bill left to become the Labatt's salesman in town.

NP: [Laughs] That's quite a shift. Well not necessarily. He was shovelling barley, I would guess.

EC: Well, yeah, it was. The guys like me, they would have, in those days it was a pool, a pool of men. They all either had to be voted into this pool, and in those days, there was about 50 because there was about 26 elevators or something. Those days all the Port Arthur, Fort William, and the Current River, they would have maybe another 50-70 men that worked by the hour, were paid by the hour. They were company men, the 50. It was like a good old boys' club in those days, the 50. They formed the group, the Thunder Bay Grain Trimmers Company.

NP: Was it like a co-op or was there an owner of the company?

EC: There was no owner—all equal shareholders those 50. At the end of the year, they would split the profits after hourly wages and all expenses were paid. It was pretty exclusive club and you had to know what you were doing to get into it.

NP: Who were some of the other people in that club as you mentioned? Can you remember any of them?

EC: Oh, I remember them all. There was, I guess, the real family of all the originators was Pop Stevenson. But the McKinnons, they were very influential in the grain grade with the Thunder Bay Grain Trimmers. Tom McKinnon, Joe McKinnon, who is the elder, his son Tom, my good friend, and Tom's brother was Donny. In fact, Donny's got two boys on the job now that would be Bradley and Michael McKinnon. So it was a family affair. They were related to the Chesmores, who are also--. It was almost brothers and nephews and sons and everything that ran it. There was a Gillis family from the Current River area, the Byers, and the Camerons. There was the Pool 7, this big Jake Gunderson and Bobby Southern. The Johnson brothers and the Whitney brothers. There's the son still on from the Whitney's there, he's still on. See there used to be 50 then when it started to die down and then around. I got in the pool. I got in at 1967. I became an equal shareholder.

NP: Was there a cost involved to become a shareholder?

EC: No, no. you were voted on and the majority. If there was so many men nominated, and if they were going to take one man or two men or three men, whoever had the most votes out of the group that were voting at the time, they got on the job. When I got on, they only needed one man. I think there was eight guys up there, and I got voted on. Which is kind of a unique of a--. They

called me like--. It was all Irish, Scots, very clannish at that time. Protestant, very waspish. I was like the Jackie Robinson in the group, eh? [Laughing] And I'll tell you, an Italian-Catholic, which was unheard of at that time. [Laughs]

NP: You broke the barrier.

EC: That's what they say. But now it doesn't matter. A lot of those men are gone now. All good men, hardworking good men—real tough waterfront guys. You had to be because he had to pull those spouts out, lug your guts, ah, Jesus, work in all kinds of weather and heat and dust. Yeah, it was tough. As the years went by, it got modern, and those big spouts now they're all pushbutton. There's no more pulling, just sideways sometimes. You pull it fore and aft, but other than that, it's up, down, in, and out. It's all automatic.

NP: You were mentioning a couple of things that I wanted to follow up on and that was as you were going through the various families and people involved in the grain trimmers, you went through them as you went by the elevators, did you specialize in elevators? Were you assigned to different--.

EC: Yes, yeah. When I got on--. When I got voted into the job [inaudible] there's usually a boss trimmer at the elevator. It had nothing to do--. We don't work for the elevator. We're hired by the shipping companies. They pay our wages. The elevator, we just tell them where we want the grain, how we want it, when we want it.

We go aboard the boat, and we work with the mate. We talk to the chief officer, comes down, says, "We're going to fill you up here. You got 25,000 tonnes," and that'll use if that fills up the boat. These boats take up to anywhere close to 30,000 tonnes now. The mate will say, "Well I got so much ballast here." I said, "All right, you start pumping your ballast out of all your tanks and bring them all down at five feet. We're going 2, 3, and 5 hold first, and we'll keep your ballast. Then we'll go to 1, 4, 6." Whatever, you know? That's where the word grain trimmers come from. We keep the boat in trim while it's being loaded. You got to work with the engineers. You have to pump the ballast as you're loading, and you got to put them down to just the exact draft before it can get out of the St. Lawrence Seaway. It's got to go through the locks.

We would load a boat sometimes in cold weather. You know if it's cold weather here, we'd load it to the draft and sometimes we'd go light a little because when it goes into the canal, if the heat hits the decks, it'll sink the boat another 2 to 3 inches. If it does that, then they can't get through the canal because they've got a certain limit, before they can get through the lock system, I should say.

NP: Now let's say that were to happen. That it was loaded a little--.

EC: If it was overloaded well--.

NP: How do they take that off?

EC: Well, they'll pull up to some dock there and they'll either dip it somehow and unload it, or transfer it, or whatever and put it to the right draft before they go on and let it through.

NP: So maybe--.

EC: Doesn't happen. Very, very, very rarely does it happen because the mates are pretty good. They got great seamen on the Great Lakes here, and the trimmers are all pretty--. I would tell the mate, "Look." He'd say, "This is the first time I've loaded a boat," I'd say, "Don't worry. I've loaded it 200 times. This is what we're going to do. We're going to do this way. And this is what you do and put so much here. Do this, we keep you in trim. You see yourself getting in trouble let me know. We'll hold up back there. We'll load more up forward and keep him in trim as for loading--."

NP: We started this discussion with me asking whether you were assigned to a certain elevator.

EC: Oh, right, yeah. When I first got on to the job, I went to Pool 1, as second in command to Phil Hughes. He was the boss trimmer there. Every elevator has two boss trimmers, or they have a first and second. I was second at Pool 1, which, at that time, was the newest, most modern elevator in the port. You could load one hold and six hold at the same time. Most boats have six holds in it. You could span the whole boat with the spouts. Jeez, I guess, actually, Phil and I were really close friends. He's my son's godfather. That's who my son was named after is Phil.

When he passed away about three years later or something—he died a young man. He was only 47. Then I became the boss. Then as my second in command, Ralph Webb come over there. Then when he retired, I got Harry Coffey who was a boss at Pool 3 and Elevator E. They were starting to shut down those river elevators and those trimmers would come over to Port Arthur and work what we called the houses, the elevators. Then after Harry, I had Tommy Ferro there, and Tommy Ferro was there until they closed Pool 1 down. That's what happened. Then the grain got slow going through here.

Our record year was almost 20 million tonnes. That was in the days of the Russian sales and everything. I think now there's only about five working elevators now, really. I think between 5 and 7 million is probably the most you'll get out of here.

NP: The trimming staff at the elevator, you had the number one and number two guy. The other people that came on then, they just went from elevator to elevator as they were needed, and the boss people stayed?

EC: Oh yeah, if there was no boat at Pool 1 and we were busy, I went to Pool 7, or I went to Grain Growers, or I went to Richardson's, or Pool 4 in those days, or down over to the Cargill elevator. I don't know, we just went all over anywhere.

NP: Would you take your seniority with you when you went to a job or--.

EC: No, No.

NP: Did the person who was the boss one and two there lead the--.

EC: Yeah, when you got on the job, you're pretty well equal. If there was a guy there for 30 years and you were brand new, he would get the little benefit of the call or the [inaudible] but not often. It was almost like you were on an even playing field. No matter what, you're equal. You're a shareholder. He has one vote. I have one vote. That's how it went in those days.

NP: Now besides voting on who became part of the inner circle, I'll call it, what other kind of votes would you have?

EC: Votes?

NP: What other kind of decisions would you have to make as a group?

EC: We elected a committee. We have a dispatch office in the Chapple's Building and out of one of those we elect the boss. He is the one that dispatches. Lake Shippers used to come. They'd get their lineup from the Wheat Board, what boats are coming in they'd find out. They would line up where the boat is going, what grain its taking at what elevator, and they would set up a load for this ship. They would walk into our office, which is right next door, have the lineup, and say, "You got this boat," say the *Paterson*, "going to Pool 1. The CSL are going to 7. You got this," and then we'd give a lineup.

There might be four or five boats loading at the same time. Our dispatcher in the office would say, "Well, I'll call Ernie. He's the boss of Pool 1. I'll call Harry. He's the boss of Pool 7. I'll call--." And you know, Donny. He's the boss of 7B, and then he phones all our guys, and he gives us a lineup. Okay, usually maybe five to seven guys go to each boat, depending on the size of the boat and the amount of work on it. That's who he'd send—the gang. Then he'd call the gang and set it up. That's how everybody went from elevator to elevator.

Some days they'd have to go maybe to Pool 1, and then if we finished there and the boat moved over in the afternoon to go to Grain Growers, well we'd follow it. Andrew Winters was the boss there. He'd be the boss there—we'd be working for him. If he came to Pool 1, I was the boss there. If he went to Pool 7, Harry was the boss there. We'd all be working for him. Every boss had a different elevator.

NP: When you first started, you said that there was the inner circle of about 50 and then there would be the hourly labourers. Tell me about the hourly labourers.

EC: Well, we all started hourly. It was by the hour and that, and we'd just hire, and they would keep us working, like you'd have your--.

NP: Tell me exactly how that worked. Where did you show up? How do they pick?

EC: The hourly--. There's a list of all your regulars in the office. Then you have a list of hourly guys.

NP: How do you get on the list?

EC: You apply. Some guys apply, and if they're good workers then we keep them. They stay on the list. If there's enough work, they're working steady. They stay there, and they make a fair living.

Say I had a boat coming into the Pool 1. They'd send me and my second in command, and if it's really busy, they'd send five hourly guys. These five hourly guys, they have an hourly guy list there, and they'd pick five hourly guys. Then in order of seniority, they'd pick another five for another elevator or whatever. It went down that way. There was a list of maybe one to maybe thirty. Probably it's ten guys there now. I think there's only—in this pool when I got in there was fifty men—I think there's 14, 14-15. I guess it's never that busy. You might have two or three boats now loading. That's about it a day because it's really dwindled down.

NP: You talked about the 20 million tonnes a year.

EC: Tonnes, yeah.

NP: How many boats would be the most that you've ever seen come through in a day?

EC: It used to look like a city out there in the bay because there'd be 27 boats. I think the most we did in a week, ever, was close to 80 boats. 80 ships. But those ships then in those days, too, a lot of them were smaller. I think Tommy McKinnon was in the office at that time, and they said, "Tommy [inaudible] we are day and night, through the night and everything, just getting these boats off." And it was cold. I remember being cold in that time. It was a busy time. But a lot of those boats only took 5,000 tonnes, 3,000 tonnes or whatever. It takes ten of them now to fill up one of them. I think the biggest I ever saw, it was on a Sunday and there was ten big boats in, and ten big boats took full loads. They were in, started in the morning, and before the evening was out, they were all gone.

NP: And they'd be moving from elevator to elevator?

EC: They're all at one elevator, and they all had full loads. I think that was about the biggest. Tommy was in the office at that time, too. Let's see, it's almost a million tonne a boat— or a million bushels a boat. That's a lot. It was good times. Some of it wasn't so good.

NP: So what did you like best about it?

EC: The people. I worked with some great guys. Some not so great. I won't get into that, but I mean on the par, most of them are really, really good guys. I met so many people from so many different countries. The saltwater boats, they're from India, Pakistan, Croatia, Serbia, England, France, Poland, lots of Poles. They all had different crews—lots of Filipinos, East Indian crews, crews from all over the world. And they were pretty rough, too. You can imagine, saltwater sailors. And some were real gentlemen—real fine gentlemen.

NP: Not requiring you to name names, but some you liked working with and some you didn't like working with, what in your mind made--. [Telephone rings]

[Audio pauses]

EC: Yeah, where were we?

NP: We were talking about what makes a good co-worker. Or I guess another way, what do you think are the characteristics of a good grain trimmer?

EC: Oh. Some were wise, like in the way they loaded the boat, and some were just, not that bright, you know? Just some were--. It was all nepotism, and certain nepotism cases you got a couple of beauties in there but--. But they did their work and everything. I shouldn't bring this up, but off the record.

NP: Well what kinds of things would go wrong?

EC: Well… sometimes if they didn't load it right, or if they created a problem, and they put too much grain in some holds, or put the boat down by the head and you couldn't pump out water because you always have to have the boat down by the stern so the water runs free, you see—the ballast and everything. Then there was sometimes, and they'd have to--. But not too often.

NP: What would you have to do to correct that?

EC: In the worst-case scenario, you'd have to kind of unload, or add more grain back aft, if you had room for it, to put it down by the stern, or pump more ballast in and transfer some grain from the forward end to the after end, which is a big expense and a lot of trouble.

NP: If that's the kind of thing that happens then, does that get charged back to the trimmers?

EC: No, no. Most times we're only--. Sometimes it's on the saltwater's boats. It was always you have a stevedore boss. They're working for, say, Canadian Grain Timmers. They come there, and they go aboard the boat, and they work with the chief officer and the captain there and how they wanted their boat loaded and everything. Most cases like that are very, very rare.

The one I told you, if you put a boat down by the head there and cause a lot of trouble. There was some pretty obstinate saltwater people loading the boats. They'd want in and time was nothing to them. We were always in a rush to get things done and get out of there, and they were always, well, "We're just going to another country, another day, another day at sea, and we're going to take our time." If a boat could have been loaded in two days, they'd take four days sometimes because they just didn't care.

NP: And they just wouldn't be around to make decisions?

EC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And they were back and everything yeah. Well, no. They'd be there. But they'd load the boat anyway they saw fit, and they didn't care what we thought, or took our advice, or anything. [Laughs]

NP: Working with the foreign crews, was language ever a problem?

EC: No, not too often. Most of them all spoke English. East Indians, Filipinos, everyone I saw. The English was, I don't know--. I used to tell the guys, "Don't make fun of these guys. They're speaking three languages. How many do you speak?" You know? They were some really good guys, some of those. Oh, I could tell you stories forever, being there 50 years. Seen it all.

NP: What are some of the stories of the--.

EC: Oh, not too often, I can tell you there was always excitement going on there. You'd have ladies of the night visit the boat. [Laughs]

NP: I wouldn't think that was something that the ship's agent arranged. Who did?

EC: No, no, no, no, no. The crew. You'd be surprised of those crews. They'd be in town. They'd know the town better than you did. They'd know where to go and who to call, and they'd get there within an hour. [Laughs] They'd grab a cab, and they'd find out anything they wanted from the cab driver.

NP: The unofficial tourist guides?

EC: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Some of them--. Oh jeez.

NP: Who were some of your favourites of the foreign crews? Did you get to know them well enough to--.

EC: I liked the Filipinos. They're always happy, laughing, in a good mood. You'd say, "We've got to shift the boat another, say, 30 metres down the dock, you know, to get this boat in and everything." Most crews, the Polish and all that, will give you a hard time and, "No, no. We're not going to do this." Then you'd have to fight. You'd have to call the ship agent to get the stevedore out there, and he'd handle all that. He was like the liaison between the grain trimmers and the ship's crew. He would handle it—everything. Usually pretty bright guys. When it came to foreign vessels, a lot of them had foreign, ocean-going tickets.

NP: Would they get on the ship in the St. Lawrence? And come up with it?

EC: No, that's the pilots.

NP: Okay.

EC: See the ship, once it hits the St. Lawrence, they de-ballast in the St. Lawrence River and come here. They de-ballast all their saltwater. Then they take on ballast on the Great Lakes—clean ballast, freshwater ballast. Then they have a pilot get aboard and take him all the way through the lock system and all the way through the Great Lakes and up to here.

If a boat comes into Pool 1 and loaded, the pilot would bring him in. Now if the boat took, say, half its load of Pool 1 and was going to Pool 7 to finish, that pilot would come aboard that boat and take it from one elevator to an elevator. Captain never touches it in here. When the boat leaves, a pilot gets aboard and takes it all the way through the locks down the canals and everything to the St. Lawrence again, where the captain takes over.

NP: Now, why would they need a stevedore then?

EC: They're the company's. You see the agent gets the boat, the stevedore company, then he picks the agent to load it. There was two here: Empire Stevedore and Canadian Grain Trimmers Stevedore. Canadian Grain Trimmer gets the bulk of the work that goes out of here. They would call our office. Lake Shippers would set up a load, same as in the lake ships. The stevedore would hire our company to load, and they were in charge of it. They were saltwater guys—the stevedores. They're saltwater people.

NP: They would just be involved if it was a saltwater ship, an ocean-going vessel?

EC: Yeah.

NP: Why would they need stevedoring services, as opposed to lakers not needing them?

EC: Well, the lakers—the mate and the captain do it. It's Canadian, you see. It's not foreign vessels. Just the foreign vessels have a stevedoring company.

NP: So let me see if I've got this right. We've got the grain trimmer with the, sort of, the lead guy and his crew. Then you'd have, on the saltwater ships, you'd have the stevedore who--.

EC: Hires the grain trimmers.

NP: Who hires the grain trimmers. He, in turn, was hired by the ship's agent?

EC: Well, the agent, yeah, sets up the loading and all that. Yeah, yeah.

NP: Okay, and then there would be someone--.

EC: And Lake Shippers would have a lot to do with hiring the agents and that.

NP: And now the Lake Shippers Clearance Association

EC: Or the stevedore.

NP: Yeah. Now the Lake Shippers isn't here.

EC: You know somebody told me, "Ernie, you got out at the right time." Because it's--. They don't know what it is. I go to our office there, and I ask, and they say they don't know what's going to happen with Lake Shippers not there anymore. Everything's up in the air. Actually, I don't even know that much about it. The guy in the office now would, I think. Our boss there and now the boss of the Grain Trimmers, Paddy Johnson. Yeah. He'd know about that. I guess they're going to lose more and more. I was also the recording secretary-treasurer for the both unions—for the Thunder Bay Grain Trimmers and the Longshoreman at the Keefer terminal.

Then I go to Florida to Tampa almost every winter or second winter or whatever to meet with all the bosses of all the harbours there—all the heads and the presidents and union guys of the harbour—harbours across the Great Lakes and the coastal ones. They'd talk about it a lot, about the Great Lakes dying down, and they're trying their best, but I mean--. At one time, about three years ago, they were losing something like three or four locals a week, because of privatization was setting in there. You would get a guy in Texas who's got all kinds of money, well they buy their own dock, and then they'd fence it. They'd hire their own trucks, their own shed, their own men, their own security, whatever, and their own trucking company, and they'd come in and that's their private property. So a longshoreman, the ILA—The International Shoremen's Association—those guys, they're trespassing if they go aboard or try to get on the property. [Laughs] Big money, like Walmart and all those box-store outfits. And everything was containers now. So they don't need the shoremen. It's a dying trade.

My best buddy's in Toledo. They're having a rough time of it, too. The bulk grain is, I guess, almost coming to an end. Well not--. There'll always be a trickle of grain going through the port of Thunder Bay, but not like the old days. It's a shadow of its former self. It really is.

NP: And a fair bit going down by railcar, through the States, straight from the Prairies.

EC: Oh, yes. Right across the border, yes. Anyways, the railroads are, I guess you could consider, the rival of the port here. They'd rather make the long haul through the Rockies to the West Coast or make it down to the East Coast and ship it. Probably three times the cost, but it's just making it rough. Old Mulroney, I think, was the guy that spearheaded that when he first got into politics there. That's when, it seemed to me, that the port just started to die down then. They opened up Prince Rupert, all those elevators on the West Coast. They got the trade of China, which was our biggest consumer then. So that went across the thing there. They raised the tolls at the Keefer. He wasn't going to do Paul Martin any favours, who owned CSL, let's put it that way. I can get into lots of this, but I won't.

NP: Are those the kind of things that come up at the union meetings then?

EC: Well, yeah, yeah.

NP: For the politics of the--.

EC: In those days, that's a long time ago, but yes. To me, that was what brought the port down. Quite a bit was him. It's all politics. [Inaudible]

NP: I'm going to take you way back, actually. We've shuffled forward to present day with the changes. but I wanted to take you right back to the first day you went on the ship as the hourly worker. How did you feel? What did you think about the work? How were you at the end of the shift?

EC: My first call when I was steady, was in 1959. I was, yeah, I was the *Portadoc*—the biggest thing I ever saw. It was just about a tenth of the size of the boats now, and it's at Empire. We had just put a little bit of grain on it to finish it off because it was finished most of its loading on the river, I think, down at Westland D. I started at noon hour. We were only there for about two hours. The two boss trimmers, they went home, and the three hourly guys, they send us to Paterson's right away, and on the old *Paterson* and loading there. So some days you'd go to four different elevators and four different boats loading in those days. I thought, "This is great, this is exciting!" You know? See those big things going back and forth.

NP: Were you a big guy or were you, you know, the usual 18-year-old?

EC: 18-year-old, skinny, about 175 lbs.

NP: It must've been hard work.

EC: Oh, it was. You pull the spouts out, then you had to move the spouts back and forth by hand to trim off the top of the hatches. At first, it's great! You pull the spouts out and you put it in an empty hold, and you stand around for two hours and watch the grain run up. But then when you had to start finishing off the hold and pulling the spouts, and plowing, and shoveling, and trimming, and moving, and yeah it was tough in those days, yeah. It was good!

NP: You got home and had a good rest?

EC: Yeah, when you're young you don't feel like just go home. Actually, when I was doing that, when we weren't busy grain trimming, they'd send the stevedoring—longshoring. We'd work at the old Shed 7 loading flour boats.

NP: Shed 7?

EC: It was beside Westland D on the river. It's next to the old International Harvesters. They're all burnt down or gone away now, but they used to have--. Stevedores used to load the saltwater boats there. You'd load them with flour, and you'd go down in the hold and hump flour bags—100 lbs flour bags—all day and all night. That work was so tough that when you did get a call back to go grain trimming, it was like a day off. [Laughing] Not too many guys hung out there. I mean it was tough work. A lot of guys, they'd work there a week or so, and then they'd be gone.

NP: Did you have much interaction at all with the elevator workers?

EC: Oh yeah. Jeez, like at Pool 1, I would always talk—with a walkie-talkie—talk to the elevator workers there, okay, to the weighmen and that. You'd order the grain, and you'd figure out what you wanted, and you'd fill up this hold, and you'd order-like--. One thing about the grain trimmers, they can take a look in a hold there about as big as that patio and they could figure out and say, "Jeez, is that going to take 25 tonne, or 30 tonne to fill that hold?" Or ten tonne or whatever. They'd usually say, "Oh give me 12 tonne." And the grain would come. The weighmen would send you 12 tonne again and run out, and it would fill it right up. The mates used to just shake their head, "How can you guys just order like that and be bang on all the time?" "Give me 10 tonne, nah, another 3 tonne, and that's it for the boat." They were experts at ordering grain.

NP: So that would've been what you learned from the old guys when you started.

EC: The old guys, yeah. Just the experience. Years and years of it. You get to learn how to load. The mate would—when you're finishing a ship—the mate used to be down on dock, and he'd be saying, "Ernie, I got 3 inches to go." And I says, "Well, 3 inches on this ship, that'll put you 30 tonne an inch, put you down 3 inches there, but that'll raise you an inch back aft, right?"

He ordered there and sure enough, yeah, back aft. We need another inch, so another 30 tonnes back there. That's it for the boat. We're finished hold. Or the mate would sit there, hold you up. Then when the grain runs out, he'd see how much he needed. If he needed a foot or six inches to get him down the trim, and then he'd over back aft. You'd work for the mate back and forth up in the dock. The mate was--. Like he's the one who calls the shots, and you help him out, if he's fairly new and that. That's where our expertise comes in because we loaded the boats that often that we work in there with the mate and try to make it as easy for him as we could.

NP: You say it so easily. That's so much weight per inch, and this boat for this size, but that's not something you know the first day you step on the ship.

EC: No, no, no, jeez. That comes and then a lot of time--.

NP: How does it come?

EC: With experience and age, and in those days, like I said, there was 25 elevators, and they were all different, and they were all really--. Some had galleries, and if you'd hold up, and you've got to figure, jeez, that's it. You get on your walkie-talkie and say, "Stop loading here." But you got to compensate because you might get another 300 tonnes. So you say to the mate, "How much more to go?" or something. He'd say, "Oh I got about a foot." Well, I'd say, "Hold up that grain!" You'd wait and wait until that 300 tonne run out. Sometimes you hit a nail and then he says, "I only got three inches to go." And that's when you'd say, "From now on we just order little bit at a time, until we get him down just to his draft."

NP: So that's the advantage of having people who specialized in one elevator?

EC: Oh yeah, yeah.

NP: Because then you got to know the elevator and you didn't have to--.

EC: You got to know the elevators. Then when you're there so long you get to know them all. Like just from one small difference to the other.

NP: Let me see what you remember about those elevators. This isn't a quiz. I'm just curious because our group is called Friends of Grain Elevators.

EC: Okay.

NP: When you started working, were Lakehead and Northwest still operating down at turning basin?

EC: Yeah, yup. Lakehead? Yeah. Old Gib Otway who was the boss trimmer, Lakehead. Alex Stevenson and Hermie Gammond were the boss at Northwestern, right next to it.

NP: What can you tell me about those elevators?

EC: There were old belts. Northwestern was a good elevator. If that was on the lake, it would've still been running. That was fast and it was a really good elevator to work at. Four spouts.

NP: So Lakehead wasn't so?

EC: Lakehead had a long gallery. Same as Pool 8, or Ogilvie's at that time. They had one of the ones with the belts and all that, and they were slow and tedious, a little dock. It was just--. Sailors had to run up the bank with the lines. If you had to shift the boat, there was stanchions [inaudible]. [Laughs] They'd be dragging their lines up there. Sometimes you'd load one hold at a time and then if you're going to go to the 5 hold then, now you got to shift the boat all the way for that one spout to go into that one hold, you see.

Actually, most elevators are like that except Pool 1 and Grain Growers and Cargill. They can pretty well reach anything. If they have to shift it's maybe 30 metres. But those boats are about 730 feet long, so if you're loading one hold there, and you've got to go in the back hold, you've got to shift the whole length of the boat, which is close to two blocks. [Laughs]. They were difficult elevators. They were obsolete. They were old, and they ripped them down.

NP: If somebody were to go down to where the, it was called the Electric Elevator, too, wasn't it? The Lakehead or the Electric? I've heard it called both.

EC: Yeah.

NP: Let's say, if you were to go down there, do you think on the shore you'd find those stanchions?

EC: Oh yeah. They'd have to be there. The old dock and that? I'm sure. Yeah, yeah. Northwestern, they got [inaudible] but Paterson. Their dock is still there, then next was--.

NP: What was Paterson like to load at?

EC: That was a two spouts, you know, you'd load one hold at one time. It was Jimmy Carson was the boss trimmer there. Fine gentlemen.

NP: Then you had Western.

EC: Western was no longer--.

NP: Or it's Pool 5, I guess.

EC: Pool 5, or--. Yeah. That was--. Pool 5 was next. Actually and then there was F House there, and that's still running. Mailhot's got that now. In fact, two years ago, I was working there. Just speciality seeds and grain like that is what he handles. But that was a good little elevator. That was nice. Then there was Elevator E.

NP: What about it? It's sort of two elevators built side by side.

EC: That was Pool 5 and Elevator F.

NP: Yeah.

EC: They were side-by-side. We could load--. Lot of times we'd be loading the after end of the boat at Elevator F and the other part of the boat at Pool 5.

NP: What about elevator E?

EC: That was my brother-in-law Bill Stevenson's elevator. He was boss trimmer there. That was going for quite a while, until they closed that down.

NP: Westland D?

EC: Westland D that one had a lot of spouts. Jack McCloud and Bobby Stewart and Patty Gallo were there.

NP: Was it good to have a lot of spouts?

EC: Yes. If you're loading, you didn't have to shift the boat as much. At Pool 1, there were six spouts. I could have one in each hold and three belts, but I could only load three holds at the same time, but I could load a different kind of grain in each hold. Say I was loading 1, 3, and 6 hold and I wanted to go on 2, 4, and 5, well, I had spouts in 2, 4, and 5. I'd shut off everything there and then I'd start loading it in 2, 4, and 5 without moving the boat.

NP: It's almost like being an orchestra conductor.

EC: Yes. Like you said, you know the boat, and you work with the mate. Sometimes those boats take you four, five, six hours to run up at Pool 1. You'd be sitting around and then you got busy, put your dancing shoes on, because you're moving making up all the hatches and all the holds. Some guys are way up forward, and some guys are way back aft. Some guys in the middle and you're busy.

NP: You have to keep an eye on everything.

EC: Yes.

NP: And do your estimating for the various holds.

EC: Yes, and then you'd go down the hold and say, "Okay, hold up. It's near filled." Most holds have three hatches, so when you're in the final hatch you just hold up, the grain runs out, okay drop a draft, which is close to 2,000 tonne—or yeah, 2,000 bushels whatever at the time. You just load and 50 tonne to a draft, drop 25 tonne. "Okay give me another 10," that's all for that hold, go into the next one. You fill the belts over into the--. You put another spout in another hold, and you have sometimes two spouts in a hold.

NP: When you started working, did they have walkie talkies, or did you have to have another method of communication?

EC: No, no. When we first started working there was always a guy in the elevator on the dock, and we yell at him. He'd have a phone there, and he'd phone up to the weighmen, "Okay they want us to hold up here." Then you say, "Okay, give us 100 tonne up at number one," or "Drop 100 tonne." Then he'd phone the guy, "Drop 100 tonne."

NP: So this would be like a landline.

EC: Landline, yes.

NP: On the outside of the elevator.

EC: He'd be in the little shack down on the dock in the elevator. He was the liaison between me and the weighman there.

NP: So it was good when they got walkie-talkies then.

EC: Oh yeah. Then when we were near finished, "Okay mate, there it's all run out. What do you need there?" And they'll say, "Oh, give me 60 tonne here and put me down." So I tell him to give me 60 tonne. He'd tell the weighman to give him 60 tonne, and they drop it.

NP: Now we didn't finish our little tour of the elevators. So we stopped at Westland D, and if we hop across the river then, what was it like to load at Searle?

EC: At Searle? Searle, that was a good elevator, a fast elevator. Bill Connolly was--. [Laughs] He's a colourful guy. He come out on the boat--. Better when he was drunk than when he was sober. He was a colourful guy. One of the roughest looking men you ever saw in your life.

NP: What was his background? Besides working--. Like had he come through the war or--?

EC: No, no. He was just a good friend. I guess he was just one of those Westfort type, colourful. He was good friends of the Cadue's. Bob Cadue was the boss when I started in the office, and Bill used to work for him in the icehouse when he was just a kid. Cadue hired him on, and I guess he was such a hard, good working individual that he got on the job when he was young. He

was a good guy. Rough, foulest mouth you ever seen on a man, but just such a rough exterior but he had a big heart. He was soft hearted. He was actually kind of softie.

NP: He worked--. There was an elevator manager there by the name of Mr. Irwin who I got the impression was pretty strict and severe. So how did they get along?

EC: They got along good because Bill was such a good grain trimmer that Irwin didn't mind him. Bill was--. They were such opposites, and Irwin there he was--. [Laughs] I used to just shake my head there. You just look at him. He'd have his pipe, and he'd look up, and he'd shake his head, but he'd go down the dock. But the boats they got out, yeah.

In the winter when navigation ended and then the freezing cold in those days, Cadue had the Fort William Ice Company. I used to work in the icehouse with Bob Cadue. Well Bob would hire us, and Bill was the boss in the icehouse. They cut the ice in the lake— Boulevard Lake. They'd load it on trucks there, and we'd fill in all these icehouses all along the rivers near the elevators and that. There was one behind the old Vendome. That was the toughest job I ever had in my life, working the icehouse. You worked there, you could work anywhere in the world.

NP: What made it so tough?

EC: There was--. Well you got great, big, huge blocks of ice coming there and they'd come down this skid, and one guy on each side and you'd have to push them and line them up and pile them in tiers. Oh, it's too hard to explain. You were moving steady. Needed men one time, we called the unemployment office, and they come down to take a look at this he says, "Too dangerous, too crazy." [Laughs] It was wild, hard working.

NP: So that was the ice that used to be delivered to the houses?

EC: There was no refrigerator—yeah, that—and there was no refrigeration on the railroads, so it was the railroad icehouses that we'd fill up. Then there was one in the Vickers Heights, one behind the Vendome, there was one at the roundhouse near Northern Woods, and the one near Westland D. Yeah all of them. And the odd time was Sault Lookout. Did that for five or six winters. Yeah, it was tough. But that's where Bill come, and he worked for the Cadues and everything. Then when the grain would come, they were into the grain trimming. He was just a boy. They got him. He's gone now, too. Jeez, I liked him. He was always a good man.

NP: Next door was National, probably at the time you started, and now Cargill.

EC: Yes. My Uncle Gimo, he was a shed foreman at Cargill or Grand Trunk, we called it those days. [Laughs]

NP: Did you ever visit him there?

EC: Yeah! Go down there [inaudible], he'd have the salt and pepper hat on there and he'd--. [Laughs] He never said too much. He just give you a knock on the head there, "How you doing?"

NP: And it was his brother who died in an elevator accident.

EC: Yes, that was. They were twins. It's your family, you'd know and everything.

NP: So they could be dangerous places.

EC: They were. They were. Those elevator belts, they're running down, you get caught in that and you were just, boy, you're finished. They were going so fast and hauling grain up to the galleries, oh yeah. Have you been through an elevator?

NP: Mmhmm.

EC: Well, then you know. Pool 7 had been a good elevator. Have you been to Pool 7, eh?

NP: I think that's actually where my dad took me through when I was a teenager and through to and to the of the top of--. But the last ones that I've been in were Richardson's fairly recently and Elevator F. Western Grain By-products.

EC: Western, Western, yes.

NP: Where they slow the belts down. What was it like to load at National?

EC: That had six spouts, close together, couldn't span about maybe a third of the boat. You know the six spouts would span a third about a time and then you'd have to shift. But those were the old wind up spouts. You go there in the morning, you'd start winding and winding and winding all those spouts. Connie Lindburg and Ronnie Edwards were the bosses there when I started.

NP: You wind them out how?

EC: You wind the spouts up. They'd be on the dock, and you'd wind them all the way up to get them on the boat and work them and by the time you were finishing the boat, you'd have to keep winding them down so that they could reach the inside of the hatch. So when you finished the boat, you throw the spouts off, the next boat come in, you wind them all the way up. So that was the same. So was Westland D. Every single elevator, there was no power spouts when I started, except Searle's. There was an elevator guy working on the dock with two levers to raise it up and down and in and out and that's--. You'd yell orders to him until they put buttons on them, and then we controlled everything.

NP: Over the time you worked, were any of the Kam River ones retrofitted to automatic ones or were they torn down before they were--.

EC: They were all torn down.

NP: Or closed down.

EC: Yes, Pool 5, Westland D, Ogilvie's—Pool 8 I should say—and they were all ripped and torn down. All of them. Except for that Elevator F there, or Western.

NP: Does it still have the wind-up spouts, Western Grain?

EC: No, no, no. They have the two automatics. Searle has the two automatics. Cargill, they got three, but three great big square spouts that spans the whole length of the boat. That's really a nice elevator to work at. Richardson's, they have four.

NP: Oh, don't skip across, we're making our way there. [Laughs]

EC: Right, oh yeah.

NP: Little by little, I'm finding out things about the different elevators. So now we're at Ogilvie's.

EC: Ogilvie's is gone. Westland D--.

NP: What was Ogilvie's like when it was operating?

EC: That had a gallery just like Lakehead. They had the dock, right on the bank of the river. The boat pulled up and they had two small sprouts—they were the pullout kinds and winding them up. We'd load there and--. Places like that the grain trimmers would say, "Just run the grain in." Because when it comes to Port Arthur they had all the--. "We'll do all this. We'll do all the finishing stuff, don't because it's too hard to work." So they were just run up houses, unless they had to finish it. So we would just run it up and the boat would come to Port Arthur and then we'd get the push buttons and knock off the spouts— or knock off the hatches—they're doing all the tough work there.

NP: Empire was at the end of the run there on the river.

EC: When they closed that, that was one of the first ones they shut down years and years—wow— before any of the others. It's in the East End there.

NP: Were you around for when it went up in smoke?

EC: Oh yes. I was around for all of them since. Yeah. Well, we move on to P&H [Parrish & Heimbecker]. P&H that's still a busy little elevator. That's got one spout, one hold at one time, and it does about 1,100 tonne an hour. You can set your watch to it. They've done some repairs. It's kind of shabby, but it's a money earner. Then, Pool 1, which has since been shut down. Who bought that? The Harbour Commission bought that.

NP: Yes.

EC: Then we went to McCabe's. Now McCabe's is really--. That was fairly new. They spent a lot of money refurbishing that elevator. Then just closed it down.

NP: And what was it like to load?

EC: It was the identical elevator as Cargill, and McCabe's and Pool 6 were identical elevators. They had some tough spouts and everything but that was a good elevator load. It was right across the slip from Pool 1.

NP: Now you mentioned a certain speed at P&H. What is the fastest loading speed?

EC: Oh 7A. Boy, they're something. When they get straight load of grain—just one kind of grain, one load and everything—oh, nobody can touch them. Jeez. Pool 1 in its heyday could maybe—in its heyday when it first opened, before they automated it with

automatic scale, and that slowed it down quite a bit. But they could get quite a bit of grain out of there. But 7A there, they could take a boat like the *Paterson*, I think they started it one morning at quarter after 8:00, and I think it was 5 after 4:00 it was finished. That was the largest ship on the lakes at the time. It took the record load there in eight hours. They can do up to 500,000 tonne in an hour sometimes. Or not an hour, but let's see. It's been two years, and I forget quite a bit on that. But they were great. One time we were doing 3,500-4,000 tonne an hour at that place. Unbelievable.

NP: Was the Thunder Bay Elevator still operating when you were working?

EC: Yes, Frank Murphy was the boss there. [Laughs] Old Bug Eyes.

NP: What was it like to--.

EC: That was a small. Had to wind up and had the three little spouts there and everything. It used to--. It was pretty tough. Then there was 7B, and that was Stewart's Elevator at the time. That's good. They're still operating.

NP: And the Canada Malting or Bawlf.

EC: Canada Malting, yes.

NP: So it's just the mirror image of Stewart's?

EC: Yes. That is. Canada Malt is the same elevator. Last time I worked there was about 2 years--. Just before I retirement I worked there. They'd have maybe--. Sometimes we wouldn't have a boat for 5 years, and then they'd have one or two or three boats the next year or something like that but that's--. At one time we used to--. You will see the CSL package freighter the *Fort York* used to come in there, and those double-deckers. Oh, I hated that boat. The malt would burn your eyes out, and you'd be down in the hold loading. Oh, you'd have to go tween decks and make sure it was loaded right, have to have big box boats, and divert the grain into these holds down in tween decks and oh--.

NP: So it was bulk?

EC: Oh yes, we'd be loading bulk malt, and you'd have to be careful there because malt is so expensive! We did a lot of that.

NP: Now why would the malt create difficulty with your eyes?

EC: I guess it's the way they process it. It's barley malt, and they've got be just so for the beer and that.

NP: Something about it though--.

EC: The dust, the dust and everything would just get in your eyes and you'd just--. Three or four days after--. Well, all grain gets in your eyes, but malting plant, boy, you'd wake up in the middle of the night, and you'd just scratch all that stuff out of you. Water, yeah--.

NP: Did a lot of people have to give up their careers because of their reaction to the grain dust?

EC: No, they usually found a pretty--. See we'd have some hourly guys working there and they'd break--. You know, new guys, and all of a sudden they were getting rashes and itchy and everything. So they'd quit right away. They couldn't--. They were allergic to the grain dust. Some of them had asthma, got asthma really bad.

Might mention one of the most colourful grain trimmers I ever worked with was Ray Tennent. He was the boss of McCabe's. He was quite a guy. Hoodlum type of guy, but a good guy, tough as they come. Bolt Tennant they called him. He was a good friend of mine. He was one of my mentors, you might say.

NP: What was his history that he got a reputation of--?

EC: Oh, he was just tough. Every one of them, old Percy Gilles there, they're all huge, big, heavy drinking, brawling, rough, rough men. They were so rough and--. Oh they were nothing.

NP: How did anyone manage to not fall into the same--.

EC: Most of them did but--. [Laughing] Hey, you finish a boat, and you'd be at the end of the dock, and there's always a couple of bottles, and they'd pass it around. And all the captains used to send--. Their stores load at the end of the year and they'd say, "Here, here." And they'd send down a couple of bottles for the grain trimmers. They were notorious for their drinking.

NP: Well, I think the whole grain elevator crowd from what I've been able to gather--.

EC: All the elevator--. You know what? It was everywhere! Everywhere! In fact, in those days, at the Pool 1 shack years back, the Molson salesman, that was one of his calls, was some of the shacks—the grain trimmers' shack— because they were such heavy beer drinkers. And the elevator guys. Go to the millwright shop and everybody had a bottle there or something like that. And then it just stopped. I think it was late '70s, '80s, and then there was just an iron curtain came down and nobody drank anymore. At noon hour they'd go for a beer or after work or something of course. But I don't know, it just seemed there was no drinking anymore. On the job you--.

NP: What caused it do you think?

EC: I got no idea. Oh, there was the occasional guys who were guys who would drink and everything. You'd go up and visit with the captain, have a couple. But then after a while the captains and nobody had it. I guess it was just a taboo. I guess the companies got, you know, "This is it boys. No more. Party's over."

NP: Saved some lives probably.

EC: Yeah.

NP: From alcohol abuse.

EC: Yeah. I don't think I've ever seen anybody get killed or anything because of the alcohol abuse. It's a miracle. It's a miracle because, oh wow--. Some guys--. I remember one time when I first started, I says, "What am I doing here?" They had to tie a guy. He was so round and chubby we couldn't carry him off the boat, and it had a ladder—there was no gangways in those days. They had all the mechanic spouts at Pool 4, at the B House. They had to tie him up to the spout, and the guy up there, "Okay, take it up." [Laughs] The spout would go up, we pushed the spout off and everything, and they'd drop him down and put him on the dock, and then they untied it. Yeah. Holy Christ. Trying to think of what his name was. Was it Swaney? Or Tubby Stevenson. Tubby Stevenson or something like that. No relation to the other Stevenson in this part, yeah. Frank! Frankie Stevenson. That's, yeah--.

NP: We got as far as the Thunder Bay Elevator. No, we didn't. We got further. We didn't get to Pool 3.

EC: Oh, Martin Johnson. Charlie Laplant and Martin Johnson were there. I think the last bosses was Dwight Winter and Harry Coffey were there. Pool 3 was a--. That was one of the better elevators for being fast and efficient, always in good shape. I liked working there. And the Manitoba--. Best guys I ever worked with in the elevator staff were the Mallons, Billy Mallon and Brian

Mallon. They were twins. They were great guys. Great superintendents, great foremen. Always there to give me a hand and help you out when you're loading a boat. They were also--. Because that was a Manitoba, Pool 3 was Manitoba, Pool 1 was Manitoba—, and the staff there were always great guys. Grain trimmers got along great with those guys, beautiful guys.

NP: What do you think made the difference? Because I've done enough interviews now that there do seem to be almost like company personalities.

EC: Yes. You're talking like--.

NP: Like Sask Wheat Pool.

EC: Sask Wheat Pool, yes. Well, you don't notice. Years back when it was Joe Pino and all those guys and the grain trimmers, they used to mix and drink together and go out together. Then it just dissipated. They got new staff. Some of the staff that they hire now have no knowledge. Like the Mallon brothers, their father was the superintendent at Pool 1 at the time, but he had them starting at basement, working when they were boys, into the cleaner decks, everything. They knew that elevator like the back of their hands, because they had experience. Now they'll hire guys—the superintendent of the elevator—and he's been in an office all his life, has no idea what's going on, but creates a lot of problems that way too. "Why can't you do this? Why can't you do that?" Well, it's not so. It's not feasible. It's all the economics. Cut this, cut this, cut that, cut down, cut here, take this guy out, move him out, you retire.

They made all those guys retire, give them packages at 7A. Why? And that's why at Searle's was closed down for about 15 years. There was water in the basement, all these guys are in their fifties, and they got rid of them, kind of forced most of them into retirement. Gave them packages. Paul Kennedy who was at the--. Took over there, he used to work at the--.

NP: Port Authority.

EC: Port Authority, yes. So he went over there and he says, "I've got a wealth of experience." All they did was hire these guys. They're in their fifties. Each one of them has got 25-30 years' experience, and they had that elevator humming in a month. It was starting to ship grain now. They figured it was good for nothing, hat it was finished. You let go of your best experience and then the troubles began. Well, I guess the newer guys, after a while there was a period there where it was rough getting accustomed to--. They picked up.

NP: The UGG was another big operator.

EC: Well, you see UGG, they're Grain Grower's, that was an identical elevator to Pool 1. They got the 6 spouts, identical elevator to Pool 1. That's a little bit slower, but they do about 1,500 tonne an hour. Pool 1 used to do about 2,000 tonne an hour which was a lot slower than what they used to do. This automated stuff.

NP: I was going to ask you that because I noticed you mentioned that earlier on, that the automation made it slower. How'd that happen? Not supposed to be the case.

EC: You get these automatic samplers and everything like that now, and you get the automatic scales and everything. Okay, so it's automatic now, but you need two men to a shift for each one. They're gone.

NP: Now I don't understand that.

EC: Well, I mean before, guys were operating the scales and stuff like that. Now it's automatic, you don't need those guys. So you got two guys on each shift so there's six guys less than you need in an elevator and take their wages for a year because it's all automated.

NP: But why would it make it slower?

EC: It slows it down because those guys used to operate those scales and boom, bang, they were right there. Now it's slow—*click, click*—automatic stop, come up.

NP: So you can't speed it up, when before you could.

EC: No, yes. Before you could, yes.

NP: Okay that's interesting. We're moving our way along to Pool 6, which was there for most of your career.

EC: The Whitneys, yes. Allen and Wilson Whitney. They were contrary to the rest of the grain trimmers. They were like churchgoing, very pious, really nice gentleman. Pleasure to work with. [Laughing] They were real gentlemen. In fact, Allen was a part-time preacher. He was a good guy. I miss him. He's gone now—a few years back—and Wilson, he's gone.

NP: So what was the elevator like to--.

EC: That was the same as Grand Trunk, or McCabe's, and Pool 6. Those three were identical. That was a good elevator, had the old spouts. Then after awhile they got three big spouts. They were one of the first ones to convert. That was Sask Pool.

NP: Then little Pool 2.

EC: Pool 2, that was Allen Byers was the boss there sometime. I remember Byers there. That was same as Lakehead Elevator—had the big gallery there, two spouts—maybe once a month they would get a boat, or something. It was mostly oats. It was just like an oat house. A boat would come in, needed oats and everything. We'd go there. Actually, the last boat loaded there was the *Canadoc.* It took the last load out of there. I was there with Al and Donny McKinnon, Bob Joss, and myself. There was four of us loaded that. It was the very last boat, and they closed it. That was a Manitoba Pool boat.

NP: Did you get a picture of that?

EC: Oh jeez, I don't know. I could have. I was going to look up some pictures there, and if I find some--. I'll talk to Donny. He's got a lot of pictures and stuff like that. The McKinnons are really--. Their whole history is in the grain trimming. They'd have a lot of that.

Then after Pool 2, we go onto Richardson's. Al Byers was the boss there with Roy Byers. Really good guys, really gentlemen, comical. They're from Current River. This group there, they're all from Current River. See Current River had their trimmers, the south end, we called it here. Port Arthur had their trimmers. Fort William had their trimmers. There was three different gangs. Never had a picnic because if they got together, it'd be nothing but a brawl. "You sent that boat over there. You did nothing on it, and we had to fix your mess." And blah, blah, blah. They'd start and a few more drinks and then bingo!

NP: The party's on.

EC: I actually have a picture somewhere, I'll dig it up, of the trimmers in early 1900s at the McKellar Park. It's a copy of a picture. I bet you Donny has that. See, we're about 130 years old our company. Never, ever a strike in our history. Never, ever a strike in our history—130 years of it. Never reached for the moon, and when we got older and everything, and we'd sit there and we'd look at the economics of the country at the time and figure, "Well alright, we'll settle for this and this, but remember us next negotiation," and a handshake. They'd [inaudible] everything, no trouble with the shipping companies.

NP: Who were your union bosses here?

EC: I was there for about 40 years, and Danny Garbet, he was the ILA for the grain trimmers. He was the boss, president of the union, and then Donny McKinnon and then myself as recording secretary. Then at the Keefer Terminal for the longshoremen I was also the--. Jim Martinson and myself were the head guys. There's two ILA unions.

NP: ILA?

EC: International Longshoremen's Association. The grain trimmers belong to the ILA. There's the two unions, two ILA unions, and so we were all members of each to look after the ports. So, that's why.

NP: What is the situation then between that union and the one that the elevator workers belong to?

EC: Well, that's general cargo over at the Keefer Terminal. They handled the steel and stuff like that—grain trimmers just bulk grain, that's all they handled, was the grain.

NP: And what about the elevator workers themselves? They're a different union.

EC: They're a different union, yes. Herbie Daniher heads that. He looks after that. They're a completely different union. That's the railroads and something. I forget what the name of it is.

NP: Richardson's, what was it like to--?

EC: Richardson's, actually, that's the best elevator to work at now. They got the four spouts, and it goes up, down, sideways, everything! One guy can load the boat, you know, a whole hold by himself. Say you were loading three holds or something like that you just—everything—those spouts are so high they can reach, jeez, Summit Avenue from here. I'd say that's the best elevator in the port, right now, and fast, good elevator. Then there was Pool 4 behind Richardson's.

NP: Yes.

EC: The Gillis, old Cy Gillis, Frankie Gillis. That was a good elevator I worked at too. It was fast. It was Elevator B and A and the old elevator was Elevator A. They used to be like Grand Trunk, but they had the two big, high spouts put in early and Elevator B, they had the six small spouts—well they were smaller, not as high—but they were automatic, too, and the guy in the gallery used

to operate that. We used to have to tell him up, down, whatever, and he would be sitting there operating those. But that was a good elevator.

NP: Which is A, and which is--? Which is closest to the slip? Or are they both sort of on the slip?

EC: That's B. B is closest to the shore. A would be the one that was on the outshore.

NP: Oh, okay.

EC: Two elevators. Well, supposedly two elevators loading at the same dock, but it was all one. And then there was Pool 9.

NP: Yes. What happened to Pool 9?

EC: That was a flax house. I guess Grain Growers took over there, but that was Tommy Jacobson and Norm Johnson were the grain trimmers there. I remember when I first started it was--. Oh, I'm trying to think of his name—crabby old guy, but a good guy. He was comical. It'll come to me. Anyways, Tommy Jacobson, he's one of the best men I ever worked with. I saw Tommy about a week ago. He looks great! Comical, is he. All it handled was flax. Boat come in, same as Manitoba Pool 2—handled just oats or whatever—that handled flax.

NP: Why did that elevator come down?

EC: I guess I think Grain Growers bought it, or something like that. They put the--. One tenth of their elevator would handle all the flax that handled. Then you didn't have to have another whole gang of men there.

NP: When did it come down, do you remember?

EC: Oh.

NP: Generally? I know that's really tough.

EC: I remember when I first started in '59, I remember that's when Pool 4 blew up for the second time. Pool 9 was across the slip. Pool 9 come down 40 years ago, I guess, or close to that.

NP: ‘60s?

EC: Yes. No, late ‘60s. It was there in ‘67, ‘68, ’70. Maybe late ‘60s, early ‘70s they shut her down, and then they just knocked her down.

NP: I just came across some photos from a couple of women who had family members working at the elevators—Frowen was one of the women’s names—anyways, they had pictures of the Union Terminal, which used to be where Pool 9 was, but there was an explosion there I never knew of that. I knew of two of the explosions at Pool 4, but here was 1932, an explosion at--.

EC: Pool 9, yes, the dust in those days. Jack Brown was one of the second time it blew up, he was there. Luckily there was grain hold, blew him right into the hold.

NP: There was a ship loading at the time?

EC: Yes, oh yes. No, not the second time, the first time I think it was loading there.

NP: ‘45?

EC: Yes, I think it was ‘45.

NP: And then ‘52 was the second.

EC: Yes, ‘52. Was the second one ‘52?

NP: Yes.

EC: It wasn’t that--. I remember when Grain Growers fell in the drink it was ‘59, not Pool 9. Yes, I’m getting my elevators mixed up. I drove in from camp, and I was driving down, and I always look over to see what boats are like because we’re going to start Monday morning. It was on a Sunday, and I drove by, and I looked around and—I’m sure that was in ‘67—I looked over, there’s no boat here, there no boat here, and, oh, there’s a boat at Pool 4, whatever. I got home and my brother-in-law Bill called me and says, “Did you see Grain Growers?” I says, “What?” He says, “It fell into the slip!” I says, “I didn’t even notice the elevator wasn’t there.” Half of it was, but I didn’t notice the other half had fallen into the slip. Wow.

NP: Yes, that was ‘59.

EC: Lucky they weren’t loading a boat. Holy jeez that was something. [Laughs] I got some pictures, around. I can dig them up for you later, if you want. You can take a look at it.

NP: Now, UGG, then A, you said it was similar to--.

EC: Identical to Pool 1.

NP: Okay, so about the same kind of operating system?

EC: Same operating system, yes.

NP: Over the years, the lake level has changed. What has that done to trimming?

EC: When the water's low, and most of these boats—or elevators—the boats, they go to a certain draft. I know at Pool 1, just up forward there, when the lake was down almost a foot more, we had a hell of a time finishing a boat because most boats go maybe, 26--. Now they go 26.7 back aft, 26.5--. Between 5 and 6 or 7 back aft, enough forward 26.3 or whatever. I noticed when I’d be loading it--. And you’d be stuck in the mud, and you’d have to stop loading because then they’d try to work stuck in the mud. Then we’d have to get the boat back, and it would probably drop down some. So, yeah, it caused a lot of trouble.

Or we’d have to have to boat—the lines—let go and have the boat sticking way out in the middle of the slip, or about 20 feet off the dock to finish it. We couldn’t get them because the mud was there. Sooner or later the elevator would get some dredging done and have it taken out. When lake water’s down, that creates a problem. But now I think everything’s pretty well dredged out. The odd time here and there we’d get stuck in the mud, and you’d shift the boat backwards. I used to use two or three spout to finish one hold and have the ass-end of the boat sticking way out from the end of the dock there.

NP: You mentioned the difficulty, especially with the packet putting the malt on, much difference in loading flax verses oats versus wheat?

EC: Flax is always great to load because it was no dust hardly in it. It was so clean and nice. Wheat? Eh, wheat is good. Barley, any barley is dusty and dirty. Oats, itchy, gets down the back of your neck all the dust. I hated it, especially on a hot day. And then when we’d load pellets, that was just like mud. There was sometime when we’d be loading pellets and they’d be so dirty I

couldn't--. I'd have the buttons. I'd be standing on the hatch, and I'd have to put my foot down, just to feel the grain to see where it was. I couldn't even see from down where my feet were how high it was. That's how much dust was out there.

The old days, when the saltwater boats come in, we had something known as--. We'd have to machine them. They had these two-, three-layered decks. The hold was in the middle. Then they'd have all these first and second decks on them. We used to have to lower machines down. It was like a big machine about 8-10 feet high. It would come down like a funnel, and it would go onto an automatic belt, and the grain would run on that. It would shoot the grain maybe 30, maybe 40 feet underneath the decking and fill up the lower hold and then do the same on the next level. They were all those liberty ships. Now they're all bulk carriers.

NP: Yes, we interviewed Victor Bel, who had to inspect those ships.

EC: Oh, my cousin, yes, yes.

NP: He--.

EC: Captain Bugs. [Laughing]

NP: He talked about how good it was working with you guys when you would load the holds up and then it would be high enough for him to be able to get in and stand on the wheat.

EC: Yes, tried to bury him a couple of times. [Laughing] He was a pain in the ass! "Stop loading" "What for?" "Got to go check." And he'd get in there and take all--. [Laughs] Oh Victor. How's he doing?

NP: Great!

EC: I guess Enzo's the elder of us cousins. He'd be, what, 80 something now?

NP: Yes. No, Victor has a great sense of humour.

EC: Oh! Dry, very dry, yes.

NP: Yes. [Laughs]

EC: Yes, he's a good guy.

NP: We finished our tour of the waterfront. Thank you very much for that information, but I have some sort of more specific questions that I'll ask.

EC: Okay, yes.

NP: Did you want to take a little bit of a break? We've been at for an hour and a half.

EC: I'm going to get some water would you like--.

[Audio pauses]

NP: This next question I'm going to ask, actually, two of them together are sometimes not that easy to answer, but we'll see if anything pops into your mind. What would you like people to know most about the work you did?

EC: What people?

NP: What would you like people to know most about the work you did? So if you were standing up in front of a group and said, "Well, this is what I did," what would you tell them?

EC: Well, I was proud of being a member of the grain trimmers. I was proud of being able to get the grain out in all kinds of weather, and we did a good job. We actually really did a good job. We have probably one of the best reputations in Canada—probably North America—as being one of the finest longshoremen outfits.

NP: How do you get that reputation?

EC: By knowing your stuff, and they were all good, capable men. Most guys. That's why they go through a system to be voted on. They're quite capable. Most mates and captains say, when you're talking, "This is the best port we've ever loaded at. You're the best guys we've ever worked with." We did our job, and we did it well. Some weather a dog wouldn't go out in, we were out there, and we got the job done. We did it well.

NP: And you've actually answered the next question, which was what are you most proud of?

EC: Oh, proud. Yes, I guess I was pretty proud of being a part of the group because they were a special group of guys, and you were accepted, and you were a member. You should feel proud because they're real men, most of them. Most of them were real men. If you got along with them, and you did your job well--.

NP: Now what do you mean by real men?

EC: They were hard working. They were men's men. They had no room for softies in that job. You had to know what you were doing. If you stood amongst the men, you did your job, and you did it well. You were respected for it. Being part of it, at that time—maybe it wouldn't mean much to anybody else—but at that time you're doing it.

NP: I think you've answered this, but I'll ask you to expand on it, if you wanted to. One thing I've learned a lot about the grain trade—I knew nothing before we started this project—and I'm really quite amazed at how much Canada has accomplished, the reputation it has, how the grain comes from so far away in a cold, cold climate, and we became world-renowned grain suppliers. Do you think that the work you did contributed to Canada's success as an international grain trader?

EC: Oh definitely. The work we did in this port--.

NP: No, just your work.

EC: It was the largest grain port in the world at the time. Yeah, I did. I did my job, and I did it well, I think. Maybe somebody might not agree with that, but I know I did it well. I got along with everybody I worked with. I'm talking about the captains, mates, whatever. Actually, I had some great relations, and I met a lot of union guys from all over the ports in North America. I get along with them all. I'm quite pleased with my achievement.

NP: And it's helped Canada?

EC: And the friends--. And yeah, I'm not shy in saying that I did my job good.

NP: If the job is not done well, if you don't have a cohesive group of workers, what happens? What's the downside of not working well as a team?

EC: The job has to be done, no matter what you do. You get it done, whether they don't like it, or you didn't like the way you handled it, or I didn't like the way they handled it, the end result is the job is done. It's done to the specifications of the chief officer and the captain, and if they're happy, or the boat won't sail. I don't think a boat has ever left a port without it being pretty well done.

NP: So it would eventually get done.

EC: You might have arguments. You might have differences on the way the boats being loaded, but in the end result the job is done—done well—or else that boat doesn't sail.

NP: So it's a question of efficiency then.

EC: Yes, that's right. Sometimes the way I would do it would make it a lot faster, but so it costs a few hours, or an hour, or half an hour longer. The end result is our group has always done a great job. Still do, I hope. I'm not there.

NP: You're not there to watch out. You mentioned, just in passing, not specifically dealing with the question but some of the changes. Now I'll ask that specific question. What major changes did you see in your job and the industry over the years? Either duties and procedures, technology and equipment, working conditions and responsibilities--.

EC: Like technology, the way the--. From the day I started, it became all automated. It's a lot simpler and easier to operate and load a ship. Just a few throwbacks, when you're out there, some of the older ships might be a little bit more difficult. What we've lost is the old mates that had that experience. They didn't have the education, but they had the experience, so they could tell from a blink of an eye if the boat was out of kilter or whatever. They just had that knowhow. I miss those old guys.

See then when they started the marine schools and all these new mates come up, and they're all like cadets, and they're on the computer system and everything. They never learned in the, per se, school of the jungle sort of way. These guys were—the old mates—they were good. They were good to work with. "Ah, do this. Okay, stop, that's it for the boat. We're out of here." Now the new guys are just with the computers punching it in. An inch is an inch, a tonne is a tonne. That's the way they operated then, and it doesn't operate now. They got to go up in their room, some of them, and go on the computer and figure out this, and they say, "Jeez, mate. You're killing time here. The boat needs 30 tonne up there. Just drop the 30 tonne." Nope, he'll drop ten, then he'll drop 5, then get his little pocket calculator out. And he'll go on and on and drag it out and everything. In the end result, he'll take the 30 tonne. But those old time mates, boy they were good.

NP: So a lot of it had to do with experience.

EC: Yeah.

NP: And these young guys, 20 years from now--. Although they don't have the same volume to--.

EC: Those old mates there, they could tell, "This is the way we did the last trip here. This is the weight it should end up, and that's it." They go out and say, "Okay, drop so much here, drop so much there, drop so much here, and that's it. We're out of here boys. Throw the lines off. We're done." They were good, they were good.

NP: Because you might have a ship coming in here twice a year, whereas before they might be coming in regularly.

EC: Well, the regular ships will make about at least 18 trips a year. The bulk carriers that are hauling grain out here, at least 18 trips a year. Sometimes you'll be on them all the time or every second time you come in. Sometimes they'd be at a different elevator than you were, but I mean you loaded those boats regular.

NP: And the guys would still be using their calculators?

EC: No. [Laughs] These newer ones--. What's happening now is they're changing--. There'll be a different mate every second month or something on a boat. They change them all over. Then the guy is, "I got to figure out my boat here boys. It's going to take me awhile." But I mean that's not all of it, it's just some of it. It's just some cases like that. I miss when I—later on in my years, working on the ships—I miss a lot of the old mates. They were pretty good guys.

NP: Yes, I guess a whole generation came and went.

EC: They were colourful. Everybody was a character. They weren't guys, they were characters. Everybody was a different type of--. You know you'd have French Canadians, all different kind of people there. I noticed lake boats are hiring a lot of these saltwater sailors. Like captains, they have the tickets, but they haven't got the knowledge of loading a lake boat. They still think they're on a saltwater boat, and they'll drag a boat out four hours longer than they should be for loading because they do it their way, and they're just--.

NP: Was there much difference between the different lines of ships? Or was it mainly the captains that made a difference? For example, would DeGagne have--. Remember we talked about the Sask Pool versus the Man Wheat Pool, managerial philosophy, were the shipping lines noticeably different, too, or was it mainly captain by captain?

EC: You know, some shipping companies you go back and--. Like the grain trimmers are always welcome back aft. We get the spouts running around 8:30, okay. Well, let's go back for a coffee, and the cooks would always give us coffee or whatever you want. You want a muffin or something like that, they were always good. You'd notice in the back some ships were really good with the food. The crew ate well, and then you'd see some shipping lines where'd it'd look like an orphanage back there. [Laughs] Misener was a good line before they went under, and Upper Lakes and CSL, eh, pretty well all the same now.

NP: Any difference with Paterson's because they're here?

EC: Paterson's was great. And those boys, those Paterson boys, they did more for this city--. They were like the rest of their clan. They're pioneers. I think Donald, Alexander, and Robert, I'd be loading one of their ships in Pool 1, and they'd walk on a boat, and they're all, "Hi, Ernie, how are you?" Walk across there to talk to you and that. They were just real gentlemen. They were good. And they were good crew. I was sorry to see them let their company go because I always enjoyed it.

NP: You talked about the downsizing just because of—within your organization—because of the volume of grain that changed. So was it a question of people left by attrition, or did it become so bad that people had to be let go from that sort of inner-circle group?

EC: No, no, no, that was just attrition. They'd die off or retire or something like that. Like I said, at one time there was usually two bosses at an elevator, and when there was between 25-27 spots, that was 50 guys, and like I said, I think the most--. I think at one time there was 18 boats loading on a Monday morning, so you need a lot of men to go there. Shed 7 needed a lot of guys. As it started dying out and guys retired or died or died off or something like that, you didn't have to replace them because the elevators were closing down and now there's, what, five really working elevators. There be Cargill--.

NP: Mission.

EC: Mission. There's Pool 7, there's Richardson, and that's--.

NP: Viterra—well Pool 7.

EC: Yes, Pool 7, yes.

NP: Canada Malting, but as you said, not too much.

EC: No, not Canada Malting. 7B would get a boat. P H might get the off boat. But there's actually four because they closed Grain Growers down two years ago, and I just shake my head. Those two good houses was Grain Growers and Pool 1. That was the mates' and captains' best. That was their favourite. They'd pull straight into it and there was hardly any shifting, the grain was--. And they says, "You closed down the two best elevators to load at! What's going on?" Well, I guess with Viterra and Richardson, the power struggle within them all had taken over.

NP: Quite a massive, massive change. I think of--.

EC: Like I said, I couldn't believe it. I worked through it, from day one.

NP: Because with each of those elevators there was a staff there. They weren't all just—like in your case—retiring.

EC: I hope there's a day they don't never need this port. You know what I mean? Some day they might, if sales go to Africa or Europe again, they really need this port. I guess they can always open up an elevator and that but--.

NP: Well, it becomes less and less likely because they strip the elevators as they close them.

EC: Yes, oh, they're gone.

NP: Any major challenges that you faced over the years?

EC: Every boat was a challenge. With saltwater boats, some of them come so high that you can't even get the spouts in them.

NP: What do you do then?

EC: Well, you just have to have the mate talk to the engineer and pump ballast back into them and get it down, you know. At Pool 1, or Grain Growers, that was the case. Get the boat down with ballast, and as we load make sure you don't pump any ballast until we get you down enough to--. Yeah, there was some difficult times.

NP: Such as?

EC: Those little board boats, sometimes they'd have these--.

NP: The little board boats?

EC: Board boats.

NP: What are they?

EC: They're built—very tiny saltwater boats—they're built to go through the canals and everything in Europe and Holland. Sometimes the bulkheads—they can set up their bulkheads anywhere—and sometimes they'll leak or collapse, and grain will go into the next part of the boat, and then you'd have to unload it. All kinds of headaches. Little things. But everything, nothing that hasn't been solved, or done.

NP: So we'll switch over to the newest versions of ships, especially the lakers, from the earlier ones you mentioned with the two decks and the--. Is a real improvement?

EC: Oh, it's a piece of cake. You don't have to worry about machining these holds, sending men down there, steering it around, dust. You'd have to get two guys on the machine, steering it around, one guy tween decks signaling to the guy on the top deck because it was so dusty, and dirty, and noisy you couldn't see to signal to you. Oh, they were terrible. Sunflower seeds, now at Pool 1 there, they were--. The spout would go so high that--. They were so bulky that they would run so slow, and they would block up on the spout, and they wouldn't run because they were just like a--.

NP: Like a piece of sponge or something caught in the--.

EC: Cow shit. Cow shit, if I may be so bold.

NP: [Laughs]

EC: But anyway, they would just plop out the end of the spout, and they would block all the way back up into the gallery. You'd have to lower the spout, shut it off, and let it empty so it had elevation. So what we would have to do it shovel the hold outside on

the top of a hold and you're talking as big as this yard, and get the grain out there, and they'd have these plows that try to shoot it out, but we couldn't fill the outside of the boat, so we'd have to shovel it. It was terrible.

NP: Now most trimmers had shovels, and I'm wondering, why did they have shovels if they used spouts?

EC: In the old days they had the wooden shovel. The old timers used to carve them out and--. You know what? I got one down in the basement.

[Audio pauses]

NP: Hey, are you going to have a seat or?

EC: Yeah. The shovel belonged to old Murdo Nicholson. He was--.

NP: Murdo?

EC: Murdo. He was a Scots guy. He was the actual boss of Pool 1 when I started. He and Phil--. He was second in command. Murdo passed away and Phil became the boss. I got him the job, and I went over there with Phil. But Murdo had given this to Phil. It was kind of an heirloom. And then when Phil passed away, he had it given to me. His wife gave it to me. Anyway, you can see where what they would do is they'd make it out of a piece of--. I don't know what that wood is. Pine? Or birch? And they would do is hand carve it. See how it's all hand carved all down there? And then, for the--. They would cut it straight, and then apparently they used glass, some sharp glass. They would sit there for days, just carving out the part of the shovel. The reason they did it, they had these wooden shovels, because they didn't create sparks because they used to have to go underneath the forward peak of the boat and pour grain there, and they'd have to shovel it up forward, and these shovels were like paddles.

NP: Ah.

EC: And they would slide through the grain like nothing because they were wood, and they were just the right size and whatever. It was--.

NP: Do you want to do that paddling motion again?

EC: Yeah, it was just like a paddle, like this. You'd be on your knees there. Okay, I don't want to hit the table.

NP: [Laughs]

EC: And you'd paddle, just like on a canoe. Then you'd change the arm and paddle that way for a while, then you paddle this way, and it just skims into the grain nice, especially wheat. It just flows through the shovel, contrary to those great big, heavy, steel things. And if you're in that dust down in the hold, well that dust hits, and you hit one of the beams and the sparks start to fly, kapow! So that's why they had all wooden shovels in those days.

NP: So if we think, how old was the guy when he died and gave it to you?

EC: Murdo Nicholson, oh, he was a comical guy. Grumpy, but he played the bagpipes. Every now and then he'd get half in the bag, he'd pull out those bagpipes and the worst thing you ever heard in your life. But a real Scotsman, eh? Murdo was in his late sixties or something like that. I mean none of those old timers, they didn't live too long.

NP: So that's probably around the early 1900s. So that was--.

EC: Yes, probably, something around that. Early 1900s. Got to be close to 100 years old now. I don't think of them--. The McKinnons would have one because Tommy and Donny, I'm sure, they'd have--. Their father was a grain trimmer and the Chesmores. That's Donny's grandfather's.

NP: We actually have a picture of a bunch of grain trimmers. I can't recall now where it came from, but I probably have it somewhere, and they're all standing in front of an elevator. They all have their wooden shovels, so that would be something I would try to find again and maybe Donny might--.

EC: Jeez, I'd love to see that.

NP: The McKinnons might know some of the names of--. Likely one of the McKinnons were there.

EC: Tommy would. They're really into the history of the grain trimmers. I mean, it's their life.

NP: It's almost like a family.

EC: Yes, their family's got deep roots in there. I guess, as I said, I was a Jackie Robinson.

NP: [Laughs] That's good.

EC: But they're my good friends.

NP: When you were hired on, did it open up a flood of people of different nationalities or were you just--?

EC: Oh, well Benny Woit there, he's a Slovak, and then Tommy Ferro, he's an Italian. He's on there and not too much though. Only Tommy and I and Benny. We're different. Beaver Stranes, he's German, but there was a pile of German. It was all old Irish, Scots, protestant, in the early days.

NP: Are there any--. What are your most vivid memories that you have not already talked about?

EC: Oh jeez. I've already taken the time to think about this. There's so many I just can't narrow in on one. Like on the ship or--?

NP: Doesn't matter.

EC: Lot of them you can't even say. [Laughing]

NP: Why not?

EC: There's--. I don't know. Working with those guys, everything was a memory. Everything. You think back, there were so many of us guys there it was--.

[Woman]: You're still at it?

EC: Having a good time and it was good. It was a good time. I got no regrets.

NP: Good. Any questions that I should've asked that I didn't?

EC: No. If I think--. I'll tell you what though, if I do think of something, I will contact you and everything. I'll gather some more information and hand it out to you and everything.

NP: It would be nice to have--. If you have photographs what we do is—this particular oral history projects founded by the Paterson Foundation—and one of the things we bought was a scanner, so we can scan photographs and give them back to you.

EC: Oh yeah.

NP: We'll say goodbye, and then I'll shut it off.

EC: Actually, I made a collage up, just a cutout of a pile of pictures, and it's hanging in the Thunder Bay Grain Trimmers office if you ever want to go over and take a look at it. Just call Patty Johnson ahead and tell him to peek at it. In fact, I was going to make another one shortly, pictures that I had a lot of the old grain trimmers. It kind of shows you the type of characters and ships.

NP: Maybe that's what we should do for a follow up is when you gather those pictures together, we'll look through the pictures, and we'll number them, and you'll give me a little commentary on each of them so that we have it for our history.

EC: Yes! Oh, it'll be fantastic.

NP: So I'm just going to say thank you and goodbye for now, and I'm going to sign off.

EC: Okay good, until next time. Great.

End of interview.