

Narrator: Gerald Culliton (GC)

Company Affiliations: Canadian Pacific Railway, Manitoba Pool Elevators

Interview Date: 10 March 2015

Interviewer: Nancy Perozzo (NP)

Recorder: Nancy Perozzo (NP)

Transcriber: Melanie Larson

Summary: Former assistant general manager of the Canadian Pacific Railway Gerald Culliton discusses his career in Thunder Bay's grain industry both on the railway and in the terminals. He first describes his family's connection to the elevators and railways, and his own early job with the Canadian National Railway on grain trains in Saskatchewan. He recalls his brief period of work in Pool 6 and Pool 1 before moving to the CPR after a Pool 6 explosion. He discusses his first job as a switchman, switching cars in the hump yard, exchanging cars with CNR, and pulling cars in and out of terminals. Culliton describes the work conditions on the railway, like lack of safety equipment, workplace fatalities, and working with old boxcars. He then discusses his move to yardmaster and assistant general manager, coordinating with the terminal elevators. He surveys some of the elevators CPR services in Westfort and shares remembrances of unique features and memorable events, like demolitions. Other topics discussed include where CNR and CPR rail lines are located in Thunder Bay, the issue of railcars falling into the lake at elevators, the switch to hopper cars, grain car leakages and grain theft, technological improvements, alcohol and drug use on the job, and women joining the workforce.

Keywords: Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR); Grain transportation—rail; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Switchman; Yardmaster; Grain transportation logistics; Grain elevator disasters; Grain elevator explosions; Pool 6 explosion; Rail yards; Grain elevator demolition; Hump yard; Grain pooling; Healthy & safety; Workplace fatalities; Boxcars; Hopper cars; Grain car doors; Labour unions; Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen; Women in the workplace; Alcohol and drug abuse; MPE Pool 1; MPE Pool 6; Northwestern Elevator; Lakehead Elevator; CPR Elevator D; SWP Pool 5; Fort William Elevator F; Consolidated Elevator (Elevator E); Ogilvie Elevator (Pool 8); Canadian National Railway

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: It is March 10, 2015, and this interview is taking place at the home of our narrator. I'm going to have him introduce himself and just say something very briefly about his connection to the grain trade.

GC: I started on the railway--.

NP: If you could start by just introducing yourself because I haven't said that yet. We like to have your name said by you.

GC: Oh, okay. My name is Gerry Culliton, and I worked for CP Rail [Canadian Pacific Railway] for 38 years. I started with CP in 1958 and retired in 1995. The grain industry, I imagine, has changed an awful lot since I left 20 years ago. I know the volume has decreased enormously, and that was because of Thunder Bay becoming a residual port.

NP: Before you go on too much further, you were going to give me a grain industry joke.

GC: Okay. [Laughs] Well, a lot of my family—I'm of Scottish descent—and a lot of my extended family all worked in the grain trade. A lot of people aren't aware of it, but at one time, most of the grain trade was employing Scottish people. I always laugh, and some people don't understand unless they're old enough to remember this. But Mayor Badanai—at his time when he was the mayor of Fort William—and the mayor of Fort William, Scotland became sister cities. Mayor Badanai went to Scotland to visit the mayor of Fort William, Scotland, and in reciprocation, the mayor of Fort William, Scotland came to visit Mayor Badanai in Fort William, Canada.

So, when Christmas rolled around, New Year's, Mayor Badanai thought he'd call the mayor in Scotland and wish him a Happy Hogmanay, which most of you Scottish people will know is the New Year. Well, when he got to the fellow's number, his wife answered, and she very sadly said that he had passed away. And Mayor Badanai said, "Well, he seemed okay when he was here, what caused him to pass away?" The fellow's wife said, "He died of a broken heart." And Mayor Badanai said, "Well, what would break his heart?" And the wife said, "Well, he was the only Scotsman to ever go to Fort William and never get a job in the grain elevators." It was basically all Scottish people in the beginning. I had uncles and cousins and everything. I gravitated towards the elevators, but kind of--.

NP: Before you go on—because I really am interested in the early part too—you said you had cousins and uncles and so on in the grain industry here. Can you tell us more about that?

GC: I was pretty young, and I guess my grandmother's brother-in-law, they lived down the street from us. Gilmore was their name, another Scottish name. He was in the--. Of course, being young, you didn't know anything other than that they worked in

the grain elevator. You didn't have any idea what job they did. My mother's cousin Jack Hunter, he was, I think, a weighman. And my uncle, John Horne, he worked for the government staff. There were a few other extended relatives who were of Scottish descent that gravitated towards the elevators.

NP: Did they work for particular companies?

GC: Most of them worked for the government staff, weigh staff, inspection staff. I can remember my uncle when he came back from the war, sitting and doing studying for his exams. He had little vials of different types of grain that he had to recognize and write his test. Of course, when you're young, you don't really take much interest in it other than the fact that he's not around, be quiet, and things like that. He worked in the grain industry as well, so it kind of focused my interest. But then after I worked there for a while, I started in--. You know, I can't remember the year, but it could easily be checked because I started with Manitoba Pool 6. It had to be in the '50s. Manitoba Pool 6 became Sask Pool 6, I believe. And that was the one that was demolished down at the waterfront to make way for property at the Marina.

NP: Were you around when it was imploded?

GC: No, I wasn't. I was there when it exploded, and that's the reason why I didn't stay there.

[00:05:29]

NP: So, can we just step back a bit? When we talked on the phone, you said that your dad was in the railway industry?

GC: That's correct, yeah, he--.

NP: Tell me a bit about your dad's history.

GC: Well, he worked for the CNR [Canadian National Railway]. He was the union representative as long as I can remember. I had an opportunity to work on the CNR, which I took in Melville, Saskatchewan in 1955. I guess that's my first exposure to anything with grain. Came back a couple years later and hired on the CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] in 1958, which ten years later I found was very upsetting to my father because he said, "If I knew you were going to make railroading a career, I would have got you on the CNR instead of the CPR." But as it was, it worked out well. I mean, what I did I did on my own. Sometimes people are accused of being the recipient of nepotism, and they don't make it on their own. I felt, well, I could have probably done as well on the CN, but at least on the CP, there was no nepotism.

NP: Were you born in Thunder Bay?

GC: Oh, yes, I was in 1939.

NP: And whereabouts?

GC: Fort William, but not long after the war started, my father moved to Winnipeg to work on the Canadian National Railway there. And we came back, I guess, after the war. I came back to go to St. Stanislaus School in Grade 2, and from that time on, I've basically lived here all my life.

NP: So, did you live in the East End?

GC: No, I lived on Brodie Street, about a block away from the old Central School.

NP: Okay. Now, were you aware of elevators as a kid? Did you sort of skulk around the elevators and railway tracks when you weren't supposed to?

GC: Certainly, we all did. [Laughs] One of the things I remember is down along the Kam River—where the CP rail yard is and where I was going to work later on—there was an old elevator there. I don't know which one it was, but, I mean, it was knocked down, torn down, or burnt down. But the foundation was still there where they used to run the belts underneath the bins. And, you know, it was great fun to go down there and play games and crawl around until the CPR police came and chased you away.

Another old elevator was the one that was on the Mission Island, and I can remember with my friends, climbing up from the inside of the bin and getting to the top and crawling out and there was nothing but chicken wire holding on the ladder. I think back now and realize how silly you are when you're young. Of course, when you're young, you're immortal. Nothing's ever going to happen to you. It's only as you get older you realize you're coming to an end. But, yeah, we kind of hung around that part of the grain elevators around the downtown area.

NP: What about Ogilvie? Because that was pretty close to you too.

GC: But Ogilvie was always an operating elevator, so you didn't go near there. You got chased away pretty fast. Ogilvie became Pool 8 later on. They had the starch plant, and then, I think, Sask Pool took it over because we used to place cars on there as well.

NP: Now, the two elevators you were talking about earlier—the ones that were ruins, sort of—one was the Gillespie. That was the one that was on the Island and the other was an old CPR elevator, which would've come down. I have pictures when there were cars on Victoria Avenue, and there's this looming elevator at the end of Victoria. So, I'm not sure if it came down, but it would've been when you were a kid, if it hadn't already come down.

GC: I think it was gone even by the time I was a kid after the war. I just can't recall it. I went to St. Stan's School, which was basically close to the CPR yard, and in those days, parents weren't concerned about their kids roaming around. So, we roamed all over, looked into everything, and I pretty well had a good understanding of what was going on in that part of town. I can't remember the elevator, so that had to be '46 when we came back from Winnipeg. Could've went up prior to that, I wouldn't know.

[00:10:08]

NP: Now, you said your first experience with the grain trade was in Melville, Saskatchewan, when you were with the railway. So, what did that entail?

GC: Well, I hired on. I think I had just turned 16 and hired on and went to Melville. I guess you could call it apprentice fireman. And I ran out of Melville, Saskatchewan. I ran east to Rivers, Manitoba, and west to Watrous and sometimes north to Hudson Bay Junction, sometimes south to Regina. But basically, east-west to Watrous and Rivers. I worked on the old steam engine, where we used to stop in the middle of the cold winter and put water in the tender and froze all over the top, and you're slipping and sliding.

As I said, I was 16 when I started and had kind of fibbed about my age. So, the CNR kept requesting that I get my birth certificate and present it to them. I was told by somebody—when you're young you don't think of these things—they said, "You know, if they find out you're lying, you'll get fired, and you'll probably never get hired back on again." So, I thought maybe the better thing to do would be to resign and come back when I was older, which I did. Only when I came back at 18, I hired on the CPR here in Thunder Bay and continued my career with the railway there. So, as far as being exposed to the grain trade, all I did was get on the engine in Melville, and haul cars one way and haul empties the other way. I had no idea what it was in there and really didn't--.

NP: You would've been familiar with the country elevators then?

GC: We did stop and pick up cars. Out of Melville was kind of a marshalling yard, so everything that left was pretty well fast freight. But I did run up into Yorkton, and we used to pick up different commodities there, and I'm sure grain was part of it. But

it's a long way back. The only thing I can remember is that one of the steam engines we had was a 6000, and somebody had told me that that was the engine that had pulled Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip when they were here in the early '50s. And when I looked at it, it had kind of a gold trim along the sides with a crown on the front. So, I had to believe the story. I don't know if it's true or not. But there was the 6000 and 6001, I think. Could be wrong because it's a long time ago, but I do remember that.

They were oil-fired. We only had one coal-fired steam engine. And I had to smile years later when I was retiring on the CPR. I was telling a lot of my associates—younger of course—I said that when I worked on steam, and they looked at me waiting for the joke. I said, “There is no joke. I worked on steam!” And they kind of looked at me like you would view a stegosaurus or a dinosaur down in the Royal Museum. [Laughs] I felt kind of proud that I had worked on steam, but very--.

NP: It was hard work.

GC: No, because with the oil burner, all you did was turn valves and stoke--. It wasn't as hard as coal. There were the odd times I fired coal and, yeah, it was difficult. You used to have what they called a butterfly door on the front of the firebox. When you got a shovelful of coal, you would turn from the tender towards the box and step on the pedal that opened the butterfly doors to throw the coal in and then when you stepped off it, the doors closed again to save the heat.

Now, sometimes on those old tracks, they were pretty rough. You're up and down and bouncing around, and the coal would be falling off the shovel, and it would, at times, get underneath the butterfly pedal so that when you stepped on the pedal, the pedal didn't go down, the doors didn't open up, and you'd hit the closed doors. It would be like Bugs Bunny in the cartoon where everything shakes through your whole body. You'd have the old-time engineer sitting there looking out the window, and he would turn around to look at you and say, “In the coal box, son. Not on the floor. In the coal box.” You know, and I always remember that. It was interesting. But my career was very short on the CNR.

[00:15:09]

NP: So, then you moved to Thunder Bay, and you did work for an elevator for a while. How did that come about?

GC: Well, when I started on the railway, and ironically, there was not a steam engine in sight, everything had been dieselized two years later. In the old days, the grain was rather sporadic, and the railway, the way that they hired and laid people off, there was no consideration for you. They'd just phone you up and say, “You're laid off today.” And because I'd had previous contacts in the grain business at Manitoba Pool 6, I got hired on at Pool 1.

NP: What were your contacts with Manitoba Pool?

GC: I knew some of the people, like the fellow that became general superintendent, Gerald Speer. He and I grew up together. I probably heard it through the grapevine that they were hiring, so I went over, and I got hired on. Of course, then Pool 6, I think, had been sold to Sask Pool. It was no longer a Manitoba Pool elevator, but my connections were with Manitoba Pool, so it was Pool 1. So, I worked there for a while, and it was an interesting thing, but--.

NP: What were you hired on as?

GC: Oh, I don't know, but I worked on the scale floor. I know I worked on the scale floor at Pool 6, when I first worked for them.

NP: So, you didn't have to shovel grain out of boxcars?

GC: No, I never did that. After being on the railway, most people are too lazy to ever do that. [Laughs] In fact, I think it was a great factor in me going back to the railway. When I was called back it was a choice of either, "You've got to stay here and give up the railway," or vice versa. I chose the railway. It seemed to me a much easier job—more interesting job—because when you worked in the elevator, you basically came in and did the same job every day. I can remember working on the cleaners at Pool 1. It was a very boring job. So, I used to walk around and pick out the wild peas as they were screening the grain, which came along, you know, very infrequently until at the end of the week, I think I'd have a half a paper bag that I could make split pea soup with. That's how exciting that job was. [Laughs]

So, rather than go through that monotonous, monotonous job--. On the railway, it was a little different because every time you come into work, there was something different to do, or you could change jobs. You could go from one switching position in Current River to one in Westfort to one at Intercity, and it exposed you to more and different things so that you didn't get bored. So, my choice was made. I stayed with the railway and lasted—like I said—for 38 years.

NP: Now, before we leave the elevators--. But we won't leave the elevators because I'll come back to delivering grain to the various elevators. When you started working in an elevator, did you have any--? Can you think of the sights, sounds, smells that struck you when you actually started working in them?

GC: The first thing that struck me--. Being at that age, not too many things bother you, but in Pool 6 they had flat-bottom bins, which meant that you had to have a harness tied about your waist, and you went down 90 feet on the side of the bin, holding onto

iron rungs. You and another employee would, what they call, banjo out the bottom of the bin. That meant bringing all the grain to the hole as there was no funnel bottom in Pool 6.

Of course, we were always cautioned not to smoke because of the explosive nature of the dust. The odd time you'd get down there--. At this time, there were a lot of individuals that had come to North America from Europe after the war and had a different approach to life, and some of them--. I've never smoked in my life. I've never had a cigarette. But they would light up a cigarette in the bottom, and I'd say, "Don't do that!" And then, "Oh, don't worry. It's okay." To me, it was like looking up, and you're in a gun barrel, and all you were waiting for was the discharge.

[00:20:06]

So, that always played on the back of my mind. Then one night, fortunately, I was off. My friends were working the afternoon shift. I don't recall now whether it's day shift I worked, or I was off or something. But the whole floor blew out. The whole scale floor blew out at Pool 6. Four of my friends were injured, some more than others. I remember Paddy Perrier—that's P-E-R-R-I-E-R—was burnt quite bad. His fingers were, it almost looked like they were webbed later.

Another individual by the name of Billy Hurd, who was working on the scale floor where I had been working, was blown out the window and landed on the top of the bins two storeys down. Had he gone a couple of feet over, he would have gone right down to the dock right into the water. Another friend, he had been working on the transfer floor, and that included pulling a lot of ropes and changing chutes around and putting stuff in the different bins. He had just made a transfer into another bin and was walking back to the small office when tonnes of concrete came down where he had been.

So, I said, "That's it," and I packed it up, and I left. Then I went to the railway. But then for economical reasons, when I was laid off at the railway, I was still looking for employment and took the opportunity to hire on at Pool 1. But things had changed then. There was a lot more cleaners, and it was more comfortable and more safety. Safety was of the importance.

NP: Do you recall what year that explosion was approximately?

GC: It had to be '55, '56. Maybe even earlier, '54.

NP: Are any of these people still around? Your friends that would have been--.

GC: Paddy Perrier's passed on. Johnny Nielsen's passed on. Billy Hurd, I don't know if he's still alive, but I always remember his main claim to fame. He left the elevator. I think he worked in the liquor store, LCBO. But I remember seeing his picture in the paper, they had triplets, and at that time, there were not too many triplets born in the area. I lost touch with him. He could still be alive, but I doubt it.

NP: How is his name spelled?

GC: H-U-R-D. I think his father worked in the grain industry too.

NP: That would be quite frightening to--.

GC: It was. I thought, "No. I'm not going to be around where this is going to happen." I didn't experience it because I wasn't there, but I saw what had happened to my friends and well--.

NP: Did most of them go back anyway?

GC: I think Paddy Perrier did. He was older. Billy Hurd, I know he left, like I say, and went to the LCBO. And I know Johnny Nielsen later in life was a steelworker and, in his obituary, it said he'd been a steelworker for 30-some-odd years. So, I would assume that he also left not too long after that.

NP: Did they ever determine what the cause of the explosion was?

GC: It was grain dust.

NP: Ignited by who knows what?

GC: Spontaneous combustion. It just needed a spark or anything you can--. They tell you, you know, a light switch, you flip a light switch and there's enough of a spark in there to cause an explosion. Now, I wasn't around for Pool 4, but I certainly heard about it from a lot of the older fellows on the railroad when Pool 4 blew up, and, I mean, there were quite a few people killed there.

NP: Do you remember any of their reminiscences?

GC: No, this was just stories told later by the older fellow. You kind of, like, sat around the fire and they told you stories. You don't know if they were true or not, but I know for a fact from researching that there was a terrible explosion at Pool 4 in the mid '40s right after the war.

NP: From researching? Do you have an interest in researching?

GC: With the connections I had, I would go and talk to people and ask them if they'd been working there. I didn't go into depth as you do nowadays by googling things or that. It was just word of mouth. I would ask someone, "Were you there? Do you remember that?" I always took a keen interest in history and things like that, so.

[00:25:03]

NP: Did you take any notes about those--?

GC: Oh, no.

NP: It was just a personal interest.

GC: Just a personal interest. What happened? How many were killed? And things like that, which I can't even remember now, but--.

NP: 20-something. Well, actually, there were two of those. Pool 4 was not a fortunate place to work.

GC: No. Later in life, my wife's cousin Bob McKinnon, he became the general superintendent. He worked at Pool 4. He went on to be superintendent of the elevator, and then general superintendent of all Sask Pool operation. So, he might be a person who would have more stories about that than I would. It would still be quite a topic in that elevator because people probably were there that had experienced it.

NP: Now, there were McKinnons in the--.

GC: Grain trimming.

NP: Grain trimmers. So, same family or--?

GC: No.

NP: Okay. So, different Bob.

GC: Different. No. Was there a Bob McKinnon in the--?

NP: There's a Don.

GC: There's a Don. Don. Yeah, I talked to Don the other day, but that's a different family.

NP: Okay. Do you think Bob might be interested in being interviewed?

GC: He might, but he has been very sick. He was in Toronto for a year, waiting for a lung transplant because when they call you, you have to be there within so many hours. You won't have time to buy a ticket to fly down. Because of his age, I think they only did one lung. He may be interested. He may not be up to it, or you know, at that time of life, he may not care.

NP: Yes, people react differently to talking about their lives, and a lot of it depends upon how they're feeling at the time, just having the energy to talk. So, you then decided that elevator life wasn't for you and that you would prefer to go back to the railway, but instead of going to CN you went to CP. How did that come about your start of your career with CP?

GC: Well, my father had worked for CP, hired on in 1925. I don't know why. I never did find out. It's probably because of layoffs and that. He was laid off or left, and he hired on CN in 1926. As I work with different fellows on CP, they all remembered or were very close friends with my father. And one of the fellows was a gentleman who at the time was station master, looked after all the passenger trains. It's a job of the past. It's redundant. He had been my father's best man, and he called me up, and he said, "Are you working?" And I said, "No." I said, "It's spring, and everybody's looking for a job." And he says, "Well, come on down, and I'll put you through the eye test and everything else and get you on switching." So, through my father's friend, I ended up going down there and ending up switching.

Now, the previous year I had been hired on. The general yardmaster then was Jimmy Jones. When I went down and spoke with him, and he said, "Oh, yeah--." You know, in those days, it was, "Oh, your father's this," or "Your uncle this." "Oh, your dad so-and-so. Yeah, I know him. Yeah, okay. We'll give you a call. You can start next week."

Well, I think my father took it upon himself, he didn't want me to work on the railway. Next thing, I got a call from Jimmy Jones, and he said, "No. Your dad said you're not working here." Well, the next year, when it was my dad's friend who was his best man—my mom and dad's best man—I guess he didn't have the heart to say anything to him. And it was I guess about ten years later when my dad finally said, "If I had known you were going to make a career out of railroading, I would've got you on the CNR." Like I mentioned before, I'm glad I didn't because I did it on my own. But the one advantage was that all the old-timers on the CPR were all such great friends of my dad that I felt very comfortable, very, very comfortable.

[00:29:35]

NP: So, you started out as a switchman?

GC: Correct. And then yardmaster. At that time, we had positions in the tower called supervisor. You supervised the operation in the yard, and then there was also a coordinator's position. The coordinator more or less—as the title describes—coordinated everything throughout the yard, moving grain to different parts. Then we had yardmasters in certain areas, like we would have a yardmaster in Current River and a yardmaster in Westfort. So, I basically worked all those positions, yardmaster in Current River, yardmaster in Westfort, supervisor in the tower. Coordinator? I relieved as coordinator. I never really got the promotion, but I relieved during the summer. Then they asked me to be assistant general.

NP: What's the tower you're referring to?

GC: Oh, that was at the foot of Victoria Avenue. It was a two-storey white building. It's no longer there. That's basically where our operations for the yard—the main yard—was, and the lunchroom, and the facilities, and our offices. My office was upstairs. I took that job and basically stayed at that until I retired, with the exception of one year. Due to the fact that I had hired on as a union employee and had become a supervisor, I was fortunate enough to maintain my seniority on the trainman/switchman's board.

When I first started as a supervisor, they were two separate boards. It was a union board for switchmen and a union board for conductors and trainmen. During the years--. I think I worked as assistant general for about 22 years. During that time, the union and the company amalgamated the two boards. So, when it came time for me to retire, it was a better opportunity to retire as a conductor than to retire as a supervisor due to the fact that during the union negotiations years prior to this, the union had asked for job security. The company, in their wisdom thought, "Well, they're all working now anyway, give them job security." So, they gave job security to the union. Not knowing that a few years later, there would be electronic boxes on the back that eliminated the cabooses, and people were paid to stay home because they had an ironclad contract.

So, the union was offered an opportunity for employees who had a certain amount of time to retire with ten percent more pension than was in the pension plan. That was negotiated between the union and the company, and not for any other employees. When it came time that I was going to retire, I thought, “Well, you know, that’s pretty good.” By the time you get a 70 percent pension, plus an added 10 percent, plus the fact that you no longer pay 6 percent into the pension plan, you weren’t losing much of your disposable income. So, I went back and retired as a conductor after one year. But the ironic part of it was, when I went back as a conductor, I had never been on a main line before. So, they had to put me as the trainman for six months to find out what was going on, and then I took over for six months as a conductor and then I retired.

NP: What is a trainman?

GC: Well, the trainman is the one that gets off and lines the switches and does the flagging and things like that, checks the train. Brakeman, that’s another term for it. I mean, going back in history, a brakeman used to be the guy that would come up along the top of the cars and had a big club and tied the brake on. The wheels used to be on the top of the car for the brake. Some of the terms that have stuck are from a hundred years ago on railroading. I think they’ve changed them all now, giving everything a new name. But, yeah, when I went to work, when I crossed the tracks, when I first hired on, there were five men on a crew on a train: there was the engineman, there was a fireman, there was a head-end brakeman, there was a conductor at the tail-end and the caboose, and a trainman in the tail-end.

NP: And by the time you retired, what did that crew look like?

GC: There’s two now: Conductor and an engineman.

[00:35:05]

NP: Would it be possible to focus on the different moves in your career and look at the grain aspect of it?

GC: Sure.

NP: For example, with the switching, I would assume that a lot of—if not almost all of—the trains that came through Thunder Bay were grain trains. Is that an unfair comment?

GC: Well, they didn't go through. They terminated here. Not until later in the '80s that we started to clean grain here in Thunder Bay and ship it east during the wintertime. It was quite a shock for us to see grain going east, which we'd never seen before because it all terminated here, and it went in the grain elevators then was shipped from the port of Thunder Bay.

Back in the old days in the shipping trade, insurance came off all ships at midnight on December 15, and if the ship had not sailed by midnight on the 15th, it was not insured. Consequently, at one minute after 12:00, the grain industry basically shut down here until it opened again in the spring. To see that grain being cleaned here and sent east, that was quite a shot in the economy and quite nice for the employees of the railways.

But at one time, when we were selling grain to Russia, we were unloading 1,000 cars a day, and the CNR was unloading 1,000 cars a day, which made for a very, very busy terminal. You also have to consider that when you're putting 1,000 loads into the elevators, you're taking 1,000 empties out. So, you're running about ten trains of empties, and you've got about ten trains of grain coming in, plus all your normal traffic. And you had just that window of time, say from midnight until 8:00 in the morning, to pull all the empties out and place all the grain in. And, of course, if it wasn't done, somebody had to answer for it. Most of the time—I'd say 99.9—there was no problems. The crews were very efficient, very, very efficient. I have to compliment. I'm sure the CNR crews were the same, but our fellows were very, very good.

Now, did you know about the exchange they had for grain between the two companies, CP and CN? Okay. There was a study done. I just can't remember the fellow's name. I think it was a Scottish name, McKenzie or something. He was asked to do a study on grain movement here in Thunder Bay. It had to be in the '50s because what was happening was that on the Prairies—and these are just rough figures—CP serviced about 57 percent of all the grain elevators. All those little, small grain elevators. The CNR did 43. But when the grain came here, there was a reversal. CNR had 57 percent of the unloading capabilities, and CP only had 43. So, what would happen in the old days, because the CNR had lots of cars, they just filled up elevators left and right. CP was limited to 43 percent, and then there became a backlog of grain. Usually, halfway through the week, I heard—this was before I was a supervisor—that the CNR would say, "Well, we placed all our grain. We want some of your grain to place in the elevator." And the CP would say, "We're inundated. You know, we're overflowed here. We can't even fill our own elevators. We got no room." And it worked out to be not the most auspicious way to unload grain.

[00:39:55]

So, this gentleman did a survey, and he came up with the solution that there should have been an exchange, percentage exchange, so that each day they would exchange a percentage of the grain in town and coming into town. And it had to be replaced regardless of having your own grain. Because we had 57 percent coming out of the prairies, it was all basically CP to CN

exchange. We would meet every Thursday at the grain office. I don't know if anyone has mentioned to you Tony Kaplanis and Dino Burella. Okay, we would meet in their office, and there would be the CN and the CP, different categories of supervisors, staff, and we would decide amongst ourselves, based on the percentage, where we would exchange the grain.

Now, there were only three places that we could exchange the grain. That would be in Current River, that would be in Intercity, and that would be at what was called the CGR in Westfort. Now, if you asked 100 people on the railway what the CGR was, they'd have no idea. The fact that my father had worked previously on that railway--. That was the old Canadian Government Railway. That's the one that comes through Westfort and goes over the now-closed swing bridge. That's where the government railway went. Of course, when they were all amalgamated, they became Canadian National. There was Great Northern, and there was Grand Trunk Pacific.

But people used to say CGR--. CGR was always CGR, and they'd ask you, "What's CGR?" "I don't know. It's just the CGR." But it was for Canadian Government Railway. That was one of the three places we exchanged. The CNR would pick it up and take it to the Mission. In Current River, they would put it in their elevators, and at Intercity, we had certain elevators to do, and the CNR had certain elevators to do.

So, that grain had to be on track at a certain time, and if it was there, the CNR was obligated to place it, CP grain. They were obligated to place it. If it wasn't there on time, then they could put their own grain in, which would give them more unloads than what we had. But it seemed to be a system that worked well. And I found that, under the Grain Commission, they changed things, I thought, for the better. Now, I know most farmers hated them. They hated the CPR. They hated the CNR. They blamed the CPR if it snowed and rained, but a lot of times you didn't see the big picture, and what the Wheat Board did was they said--. Unlike it used to be before, when a grain train came in, we would switch each car into a separate track because it belonged to an individual elevator. So, you had 27 grain elevators when I worked. In Westfort, when we would hump a grain train, we'd be looking at as many as 27 different tracks, grain going to different elevators. Some of the bigger elevators, you might have two or three tracks, like Pool 4 or Pool 1. There was, I think, 36 tracks in Westfort.

Then the Wheat Board came along and said, "We've got a better plan." And I'm only saying this in my words by observing the plan. They said, "From now on, when somebody loads a car of durum in Pumphandle, Saskatchewan, when it gets to Thunder Bay, it's a car of whatever it was." So, if you loaded 20 cars at 20 different elevators for your company, instead of switching them all out when it got here to Thunder Bay, we'd make it Board grain. And if you had 20 cars of wheat—no matter who loaded it—you took 20 cars of wheat. It didn't matter what the billing said. It belonged to anyone. I think, in principle, what the Wheat Board says, "It all belongs to us, and when we get there, we'll dispense it."

So, it worked out well. We could move grain a lot faster because we didn't have to do the humping up to the point where they did away with the hump in Westfort. You could look at grain trains coming in out of Winnipeg, and you could pretty well tell what was Board grain and if you need grain in a certain area. Rather than going to the yard in Westfort, you could basically, at times, take a whole grain because it was Board grain, and take it right to Current River and use it there.

[00:45:20]

NP: Now, when you talk about humping, what is that?

GC: Oh, in Westfort there used to be a hump, and what would happen was that--.

NP: What is a hump? In railway language.

GC: It's a little hill. It's a little hill and two yards, one on each side, and they meet to a single track on the hill—the hump. What is done is when the grain was brought into the west end of the yard in Westfort, it would be humped over the hill into the tracks at the east end of the yard.

NP: Now, what actually did that entail?

GC: It entailed an engine crew going up, tagging onto the west end of the track, and shoving it eastward over the hill. Now, there would be a signal board to control stop and go—go ahead, back up, stop, and go. This would be controlled by someone sitting in the Westfort tower. The other part of the crew would be down with a list of the grain. He would look at the list, and he would pull the pin on the car to release it, and through gravity, it would roll down the hill. We had, at that time, what was called switch tenders, and they would have the same list and it would all be marked where the grain was going. So, they would line up the tracks as these cars came down and they all went in the separate tracks. We had riders on there that handled a handbrake, slowed them down so they didn't hit too hard.

NP: What do you mean riders?

GC: Switchmen were called as hump riders. On every boxcar there's a brake, a handbrake. There's, of course, the air brake system, which is used when everything is coupled together as a train. But individually, you have a handbrake for each car. If you spot a car on a siding, there's supposed to be a handbrake on it. You climbed up, and there was a wheel at the top, and you tied it up, and there was a chain that went down and applied the brake.

So, what would happen was that these riders—who were basically switchmen—would ride these cars into different tracks, slow them down, let them couple up, and then walk back up. That saved the expense of an engine pulling up and down, up and down, switching out cars, switching out cars. So, on an average, we would do ten, twelve tracks a day and there'd be 60 cars on each track.

NP: I have visions of people falling off all over the place.

GC: Well, things were a lot more dangerous in those days, I have to admit it. In later years-- I never did this, but in later years, they had to tie a belt on. When I worked out there, I never saw a belt. Safety wasn't as much of a concern as it became later. I feel it was a result of compensation, the Compensation Board. As far as I know, compensation for a company is based on how many claims they had in the previous year. So, when it started to hit in the pocketbook, a more serious approach was taken towards safety that had never been there before.

NP: Did you actually--. Were you a rider because you were a switchman?

GC: Yeah.

NP: So, I want you to think back to the first time you got up on top of that train and you did this. Can you describe it and describe your feelings?

GC: I thought I was king of the world, actually. I mean, you know, I was a young guy, and here I was controlling 60 tonnes of grain. You know, we'd run back up the hill to take another ride. Then you kind of notice after a while that the old guys, they didn't rush back up.

But there were a lot of things that changed. We used to take grain out of the Westfort yard. We'd take 60 cars, and we would go to Current River. We would pull out of Westfort, and you had a foreman and two switchmen on the ground crew. And when you pulled out of the yard onto the main track, one of the switchmen had to stay back and line the switches, return them to normal. So, you had points, mental points in your mind when you got to the CPR station, "This was so many cars when you got to the icehouse. This was so many cars when you got to here. This was so many cars--." So, they would slow down, and you—as the tail-end guy—would line the switches back.

[00:50:37]

NP: Now, I don't understand what you mean by, when you got to the CN station this meant so many cars. What does that mean?

GC: Well, the distance from where the switches were. The switches were at the foot of, say, Brock Street. So, when you get up to the icehouse, in your mind you knew that held so many cars. Then when you get up to the CP depot, you knew you had that many cars. Based on how many cars you had, that's where the engineman slowed everything down. So, the tail-end switchmen would get off and line the switches back. Then--.

NP: In other words--. Because, you know, I'm really quite uninformed here. In other words, your train couldn't be longer than the distance between switches.

GC: Well, no. The switches came out of the yard, and when you're on the main line, everything is supposed to be green. So, if you left the switches aligned, you'd get a train coming into town that would stop, would have to have a switch lined against it. For the main line, everything was the highway.

So, you had a rule—you had your rule book—that said that switches had to be lined back in normal position. Due to the rules--. And these rules were set out by the government, not by the company. A uniform code of operating rules stated this. So, we would line the switches back, everything would be normal. And then, because you might stop for coffee at the Venice Grill on the way over, you would run across the top of the cars—60 cars of grain. You'd run across the top of the cars, jump from car to car to car to car to try to be there if they stopped for coffee.

In the later years, when they found out there were a lot of accidents happening, they cut all the running boards off the top of the cars. You could no longer go to the--. It was against the company rules to go to the top. So, that was a direct result, I think, of compensation and injury. It was changing. It became a much safer place to work. I can recall maybe three fatalities in switching when I was young. And after that, you know, when safety was more of importance, there were injuries, but there were no fatalities.

NP: What would cause a fatality? Do you recall any of those three incidents?

GC: Yeah, there was one fellow, Art Luzius at Pool 1. We used to go in and grab a track of empties and then pull down, throw the switch, get on top of the cars because, in those days, it was hand signals. You had to be on top of the car so the engineman at the front could watch the fellow who was on the first car, who was watching you maybe 20 cars away with your lantern giving signals. So, they would pull the empties out of one track at Pool 1—and I say Pool 1 because this is where the incident

happened—and that switchman would ride down, stop the train, line the switch into another track of empties, and then climb back on top and shove up and make the coupling.

Well, we figured that this is what had happened because the gentleman was dead after. But when the coupling was made, he had walked over and looked down to see that everything had met because sometimes your knuckles went sideways, and you had no coupling. We feel that, in this time, the momentum that was put into the second track of empties as he coupled up had gone the distances and started to come back like a wave. As he was looking over, this momentum came, and he toppled between the cars. That's the story anyway.

Then there was another fellow who was an older fellow. They were shovelling into the grain elevator, and you mentioned about how they had the tippers. Well, I guess he wasn't aware of the tipper coming up, and it hit him and knocked him down into the hole. So, he was a fatality.

There was another fellow who was killed in a yard. Yeah, I think he was tying on a brake, and they kicked some more cars, and the momentum knocked him off. The fourth one, I'm trying to remember now. Anyway, that was back in the '50s and the '60s. Things have changed so much for the better because of the safety factor. Yeah, that kind of sums up that.

[00:55:37]

NP: So, when you were switching, and you were talking about getting the cars from Westfort, let's say, through to Current River, where was CN yards? Were they there in Westfort too?

GC: CN yards are in Neebing.

NP: Okay. So, just sort of in advance of--.

GC: When CNR comes through the city, they tie up all the crossings, and then they cross over to their yard, which was just by the ore dock. And they handled all the ore. So, any time you got blocked by a train, it was the CNR.

NP: We'll make sure that's on tape. [Laughs]

GC: And we had what we call a diamond, that's where two tracks cross. That diamond is very close to where Walmart is today. Because of the fact that the CNR came through the centre of the city, we had a signal operator in Winnipeg who operated those

lights for that diamond. So, the CNR would phone up when they said, “We’re leaving now, in about five minutes.” And the fellow would say, “Okay. You have the light.” And he’d put that light on, so it was green for the CNR and red for the CPR because if we had to stop, we didn’t block anyone. Sometimes you can still see that when you’re coming from Port Arthur heading south. There’ll be a train sitting, waiting. He’s waiting for the CNR to come through.

NP: Which would be crossing by Walmart there.

GC: Well, it would cross across the road, where the CPR never crosses the road. The only place it really basically crosses is the overpass on James Street and then Mountdale and things like that. But in those days, I mean, it wasn’t as built up as it is now, so it’s more of a problem.

NP: Well, let’s take a pause because we are at that.

GC: Sounds like a plan.

[Audio pauses]

NP: So, were going back online now. We took a little bit of a break to have some wonderful muffins and some refreshing tea. One of the things that you had mentioned was about stopping and heading to the--.

GC: The old Venice Grill.

NP: The Venice Grill. So, why the Venice Grill?

GC: Well, at the main yard, which was referred to as E Yard, which pretty well parallels Simpson Street, you had crossovers for working with trains at the east end and crossovers for working at trains at the west end. When you stopped your engine just clear of the crossover at the east end where the Venice Grill was, you also cleared the crossover at the west end where the tail-end of your train was. I call it train. It’s not really a train because it didn’t have a caboose and markers, but for the sake of saying train. So, we would go and have coffee, and then we would continue over to Current River to do the elevators there, which consisted of pulling the empties and putting the loads in.

NP: Let’s talk about the actual switching job. Let’s pick Current River as an example. So, how does that job unfold?

GC: Well, we, first off, had one of the exchange tracks there that we gave grain—if it was agreed upon—to the CNR. We would pull empties from Richardson's. We would pull empties from Pool 4A and Pool 4B, and we would also have empties returning from the CNR. You had to pull the empties first before you could get the loads in. So, we would pull the empties and put them on two tracks. The car department would send someone over who would couple all the hoses so that, when we did leave, we had air brakes through the whole length of the train, which sometimes were 100 empties. Then when the elevators were pulled, we basically commenced to fill them. Each one had its own unique characteristics. Richardson's, you used to go downhill, Pool 4A used to go uphill. Or was it Pool 4 B went uphill, Pool 4 A went downhill?

You had to know the area, and, of course, the most important thing is you had to know how many grain cars each elevator hold, each track held because if you miscounted, they're in the lake. That happened from time to time. They'd be floating out, and they'd have to phone someone to come on a crane the next day and lift the car out of the lake. Of course, you went in for an investigation. It was very embarrassing to say, "Well, I miscounted. I thought I was up to 20, but it was 21." Anyway, these things did happen.

We didn't get any casualties or any injuries because, usually, we stayed right at the dumper and counted the cars as they went over. Then when we got our 20 or so cars in, we just cut off and went somewhere else. The next day they were sitting there waiting for the grain people to come and unload them.

[01:01:11]

NP: Did you ever send a car over?

GC: I probably did. I can't remember. [Laughs] It wasn't anything that was uncommon.

NP: Was it more likely to go over in one place than another? Like, going uphill or downhill, I mean, did that make any--?

GC: Well, Pool 4A was one of the trickiest ones because when you came in, you came downhill. Sometimes combined with the grain dust on the tracks and moisture—because most of the time, filling at night, you had dew—you did get some greasy conditions. I can remember sliding into the grain elevator and thinking, "Oh, my God. Are we going to stop in time?" Fortunately, most of the times I remember, we did. But there were other times where somebody put three or four cars over.

NP: You know, now that you mention this, somebody I interviewed recently—and I can't remember who it was—said that there was a guy that they felt was in conflict of interest because he worked on the train, and he also worked as a diver, or a salvager. Does that ring any bells?

GC: Yeah. I worked with him. He'd put them in at night and bring them out in the daytime. I can't think of his name now. It started with an S.

NP: So, it was a question at one point, whether he was making work for himself?

GC: And there was another one too, Jimmy Jarvis. I don't think anyone wanted to put them in the lake. But later as assistant general yardmaster, I was at the scene of many recoveries, and my job, in part, was to investigate mishaps. We didn't call them accidents. Accident is something you have no control over. A mishap is something that could be avoided. So, we always referred to them as mishaps. I would get the particulars, and measure the distances, and see how many went over, and try and find out how fast they were going. We would have an investigation.

NP: Any of those results of the investigation memorable?

GC: Yeah. There was one that I really thought was memorable. Going back to the uniform code of operating rules, there's rules spelt out for practically every situation. And, like I say, the way the CPR and CNR looked at it, an accident is only something that cannot be avoided. So, the idea of having a statement was to find out in writing, with the individual present and his union rep with him, what happened, why it happened, and how it could be avoided. Well, of course, there was always some rule that somebody had violated, and this was the last one: How could it be avoided? "If I adhered to rules such-and-such, this would not have happened."

[01:04:39]

We had an instance where we were up in Westfort, and the lead, which is the main track that you run your engines up and down. The other tracks are basically for storage. The lead ran in a big loop towards the river, and all the other tracks were off of those lead tracks. One of the rules stipulates that yard speed is determined by being able to stop in half the distance that you can see. So, that's the rule of speed, you know, if it's not posted, "This is the speed or that." Yard speed is being able to stop in half the distance you can see.

Well, we had another engine working in the area. Sometimes when it got busy, they would call an extra engine rather than an assigned engine and send them to an area to help out. We were pretty well used to being the only engine in that area at that time, and an extra was working that day. I got off at the tail-end of a track to take the brakes off, because there was also rules that you had to tie so many brakes on each track to secure it.

NP: What do you mean by tie so many brakes on each track?

GC: That's the one with the wheel that you tie. The handbrake, they call it. Our first job in Westfort was to take a track of grain from the main yard out to the CGR for the CNR to pull. So, I jumped off at the East End to release the brakes in anticipation of our engine being on the west end and pulling it. And when I was waiting, I heard this very, very loud clunk. I started to walk up the track, and here the two engines were welded together.

Nobody got hurt, but there was damage to both engines. At this time, I wasn't a supervisor, so we were called in for a statement, which is investigation to see what happened with it. It was rather funny because each of the engineers said he was stopped when the other one hit him. So, both of them were stopped at the same time they hit each other. That one always stuck in my mind. And they firmly believed it, too, "I was stopped when he hit me." And, "I was stopped when he hit me." Basically, they were both stopped when they hit each other.

NP: With the investigations for the ones that went into the lake, was it always just a miscount?

GC: No, sometimes because they couldn't stop in time. They were going too fast. The other gentleman—now his name comes to me—that used to do the diving and the dumping was Eddy Spiess. He worked for the diving company in the daytime and then engineered at night.

NP: S-P-I-E--?

GC: S-P-E-I-S-S. No, S-P-I-E-S-S. Spiess.

NP: Yes. You mentioned that the elevators that you were delivering to in Current River in particular—and that was Richardson's, Pool 4A and B—and you mentioned earlier as well that--.

GC: Pool 8 was at Ogilvie's.

NP: Yeah. That they had CN operations and CP. How did they decide which elevator got deliveries from where, from which company?

GC: As it worked out, my father worked at one end of the yard, and I worked at the other end of the yard. I worked on the midnight shift, and he was on the day shift. CNR looked after the elevators on the north end, and we looked at the elevators on the south end. We had Pool 4 and Richardson's. They had UGG A and, at one time, was Alberta Pool 9, which was torn down.

We basically went over there and did nothing but grain. Whereas the CNR, having basically the one elevator, they looked after the paper mills, the Thunder Bay Mill, and kept themselves busy. They had work too, shipyards. We would have assigned tracks for empties, for loads, and everything else. We would put our loads to be placed by the CNR on one track, and then they would bring the empties back, put them in, and we weren't supposed to use these tracks for anything like that. It worked very well. We got along well.

NP: How did they determine though, who got what?

GC: At the grain meeting. When we went to that grain meeting, we would find out what the percentage was and how much grain we had to exchange.

NP: But as far as the lines going into the elevators?

GC: Well, the elevator would dump all the cars they had. I mean, you didn't have cars sitting behind the elevator.

[01:09:55]

NP: Yeah, but as far as who serviced--. Like, which rail companies serviced which elevators, how was that decision made?

GC: The CNR, historically, had done the north side of the yard, and we had done the south side of the yard. Now, you could only get into the north side on a CNR lead, which led to Pool 9 and also to UGG A. You could only get in on the south side. It was like a Y, so you couldn't get into the other elevator, and they couldn't get into ours.

NP: So, perhaps at the time that the elevators were built, it was determined which rail was going to--.

GC: Well, there's an interesting story there, too, that maybe you could look into. When the elevators were built and were being serviced, there was not just CP. This was before the time of Canadian National Railway. So, like I say, you had CGR servicing the Mission—Canadian Government Railway. You had Canadian Northern, which was coming into some places in the pocket, and I can't say which. I can only refer back to what people had told me, my father being one of them because he was around in those days.

You had actual diamonds where they crossed each other when they were filling elevators, which was very unsafe. Because when you were coming down at nighttime, and you were trying to follow the signals of somebody who's 25 boxcars away with a coal-oil lamp, there was always the thought that that coal-oil lamp would go out. The rules were, as soon as you lost the signal, you stopped. But sometimes in the situation where you had two railways with a diamond, you had a railway pushing in over the same track as you were going over, and you could--. Maybe you had the lamp go out on the fellow who was on the point of your train when you see the lamp, and they had terrible accidents. So, once it became CN, I'm sure they sat down and very responsibly said, "Okay. You go here, we go there, and never the twain shall meet."

NP: Before we move on to some of your other responsibilities, I'm interested in grain car doors.

GC: When I first started off, we used to switch what we call big ones and little ones. We used to go down to the Intercity yard, and as the empties were pulled out of the grain elevators at Intercity, they were sent over across the mainline into what was called a new yard, and it basically runs parallel to the new area at Intercity where all the new box stores are. We would go down at night, and we would switch out big ones and little ones. There were 40-tonne wooden boxcars, and there were 60-tonne steel boxcars.

NP: Those would be the--.

GC: Both with the sliding doors on each side. The larger cars—the 60-tonne—were brought up and put down to where our present mechanical shop is in the East End. There used to be sheds down there where ships came in, and we had what was the cleaning yard before the shops were built down there. We would put the big empties into the cleaning yard, and with air, they would go and clean all the grain out. These cars would be shipped east for general merchandise. The old ones—the 40-tonne ones, wooden sides, sliding doors—they were shipped back west. They were shipped back west to be mixed in with the 60-tonne cars who were coming from the east with high-class merchandise because then they would both be filled with grain and sent back again. To keep the grain in, they had what they called grain doors. They were--.

NP: Both the 60s and the 40s?

GC: Both the 60 and the 40 had grain doors. These were wooden planks which were nailed to the sides of the inside of the car and had to be broken when the grain was taken out of the car. A lot of houses and a lot of sheds—anything that could be made of wood—you would find in the East End of both Port Arthur and Fort William were made of grain doors because-- Well, some of them they were able to use the wood for other things. You're not supposed to, but a lot of people did.

Then it got to where they eliminated most of the 40-tonne cars, because these cars went back 50, 60 years, and they started putting in what they called paper doors. It was a corrugated cardboard with metal strapping through it to give it strength, and that was probably the latest procedure.

Now, as a switchman, we all regretted when they did away with the wooden doors because there were times when we would derail a car, and rather than reporting it to our bosses, we'd go and get some grain doors and stack them all up and pull the car back on the track. You couldn't do that with the paper doors. You had to report it. So, we regretted to see the old wooden ones go.

[01:15:53]

NP: How did that work? Filling it full of--.

GC: Well, you have a rail, and you have a wheel. Now, the wheel is bevelled, and there's a flange that comes down inside on each side of the track. There were times when—maybe for snow or ice or something or whatever the case may be—that flange would lift over top of the rail and go down, and you couldn't move either way because there was no rail underneath. What we would do was we would get grain doors, and we'd stack it under there so that when we pulled it back up, it would climb up the wood and then finally come over and plop down. Then we didn't tell anybody. Later on, of course, when there were no grain doors, if you did that, you couldn't lift it, you couldn't move it, you just had to phone the car department. And you probably went in for an investigation to find out why the car derailed. They never, ever use the term, "jumped the track." Cars don't jump, they derail.

NP: And there was an actual grain door department.

GC: That's correct.

NP: What--. You know, as an outsider looking in, you think, "What's a grain door department doing?"

GC: As the cars came out of the grain elevator, we would pull them slowly by. Prior to us pulling the empties, the grain door department would go up when the empties were sitting in front of the elevator, and pry off all the grain doors, and had them

bundled. As we pulled by slowly, they would dump the grain doors, slide them out the side of the boxcar so that when they were shipped west—or shipped east in the case of the 60-tonne—there were no grain doors or any debris in there. Then when it went to the paper doors with the steel strapping, they also took out the remnants of these doors, and I don't know where they took them. I'm sure they had someplace to take them. But then, of course, when they got to the hoppers, there were no grain doors. Consequently, there were no grain-door men.

Now, just talking about hoppers—and I'll jump back a bit to when the grain started to go to the West Coast—we were told by the Wheat Board that we were not as efficient as the grain elevators on the West Coast. I guess it's Prince Rupert that the CNR goes into on the north. We found out that, yeah, they were much more efficient than we were because they were getting all the hopper cars. We were getting a mix. Every time we had a boxcar mixed in with the hopper cars, they had to break down the door, shovel it out, tip it upside down, and all that. So, not being our choice of what we got, and not being as efficient, I feel, was unfair. As it worked out, we became a reciprocal port—an overflow port—but I would imagine it was all based on economics and which was the easiest way to go.

[01:19:21]

NP: Plus, was there not also—if I understand it—a possibility of bringing in more cars to Prince Rupert in a train load just because of the way the elevator was configured? They talked about unit trains that early on--.

GC: I really can't say because I didn't work out there, but as far as a unit train--. The only thing I can think of when I get a unit train is when we used to get coal trains and potash trains. That meant that everything in the train was of all the same calibre and the same commodity, same grade. As a unit train for grain, I would say that you would have to collect grain at some of the country elevators, and in some place, you would have to do work to get that into a unit train where everything was the same grade, the same type. To me, it's like cutting a piece of string off of one end and tying it on the other end to get a longer piece of string. You're either going to have extra effort when you put that train together to send it to Prince Rupert than when you bring that train to Thunder Bay, and we basically do that portion as we unload.

Maybe it's because I'm loyal to the port, but I feel that we got a raw deal. I still think we did. It wasn't a level playing field. They did get all the hoppers, and if they were unit trains, somewhere along the way, somebody had to put that train together. And we don't get all the same grain out of one little country elevator. It comes from all over, and it has to be graded. In that respect, I was a little upset. Now I look back, the economics of it is probably because we shipped most of our grain to the Pacific Rim. But at that time, we held our own with anyone. In fact, we probably held it better, unloading 1,000 cars each day with both the CN and CP. That was 2,000 cars in and 2,000 cars out.

NP: You moved from switchman to what position?

GC: Yardmaster.

NP: So, from a grain perspective then, is there anything involved in that job that you haven't already referred to?

GC: As yardmaster, you're not actually responsible for the moving of the cars. You give the information to the crew, and you tell them what is to be done and when it is to be done. And they will, of course, report back when it is done. You're just basically, not just a supervisor, you're doing a little bit of thinking too. You have to figure out where you're going to have your grain on hand to get it in. You can't have all your grain sitting in one place, there just isn't enough room. So, you--.

NP: Did this bring you more in touch with the various elevator managers then?

GC: No, you would more talk with the foreman—with the shed foreman—because he was the one responsible for the dumping. I mean, I had no concern for the guy on the scale floor or anything like that. You'd get a rapport depending on which elevator, which job you were on, and, you know, "When do you want us there?" And "How many do you want?" And "What do you need? Is there anything special?" You would be there to try and serve him best possible.

NP: Now, when you say, "Was there anything special?" what might be some of the issues that would be out of the ordinary?

GC: He might have a couple of cars of different grain or something that he wanted to hold back. He didn't want to unload with the wheat or something. He'd say, "Well, this is a different grade," or "This is a different commodity. So, how about if you leave these three cars behind, and only—instead of bringing 20—bring 17, and we'll load these at the end of the day when--." Yeah. So, you know, whatever suited them was--.

[01:23:42]

NP: Any issues that--. I'm thinking now, just talking to an elevator manager nowadays, a lot of unhappiness with getting cars delivered. Was that ever an issue?

GC: Not when I was--. Like I said, we did, between the two railways, over 2,000 cars a day. It was amazing the amount of grain we moved. We unloaded a lot of grain. There were times when, due to congestion in the yard, sometimes it was late getting the

cars in, but it wasn't because the cars weren't available like now. I think that the railways have committed themselves to other things like potash, coal. Oil now, a lot of oil travels now and that gets priority over grain.

And, of course, you don't have a stockpile of railway cars. You only try to maintain what you feel you're going to need. If you have a bumper crop, you just can't snap your fingers and have extra cars appear. Efforts must be found to get those extra cars, and then basically what they do is when traffic increases, they will lease cars, and they will lease units. What basically tells you, when you're sitting at a crossing watching cars go by, if something is leased, it has an X on the end of the--.

NP: Oh, the number.

GC: Yeah. So, even myself working at CP for many years, our government cars were CPWX cars, and the other on the CNR were CNWX. One day, a fellow came in on a Monday morning, and he said, "I want to see these three cars." And I said, "Well, they're probably in Saskatchewan. We pulled them out on Friday." He said, "Well, I phoned here on Friday, and I asked about these three cars, and the fellow told me they're here in the terminal." I says, "Well, they're long gone now." And I said, "Why would it make any difference to you?" And he says, "Because we own these cars." I said, "These are Canadian Government hoppers." He says, "No, they're owned by the Mallon Corporation of Pittsburgh." And when I think back of it, there were the Xs on the end.

Now, if you sit and watch a train go by, you'll see where the railways have bought these cars and painted out the Xs. They're now CN and CP cars, but they were all leased cars to my knowledge, only based on my own perception. But it was interesting to find that out.

So, the rolling stock was--. There's not as much rolling stock owned by the railways now as used to be in the old days. They'll go out and lease as many cars as they can. Then as both railways have expanded—like the CP into the Sioux Line and the CN wherever they've gone—they'll utilize cars from that other railway into their own system. But you can't do it at the snap at a finger, and especially with units—power—you have to have power to pull these trains.

NP: You talked about the--. You went from the 40-tonne to 60-tonne, and then the 60-tonne to the hoppers, which held how much grain?

GC: 100 tonnes.

NP: 100 tonnes. So, I think your mathematics had to improve as things went along because then if you had a mixed train, you had to figure out how much space you had on that track.

GC: Yeah.

NP: They weren't all the same length.

GC: Hoppers are longer, yeah, than boxes.

NP: What else is there to say about hopper cars? The switch to hopper cars where it relates to grain. Any benefits? No benefits?

GC: Oh, there's no grain doors to deal with. There's no sweeping out cars for change of the commodity. Those cars are just so smooth inside that when they're dumped, they clean themselves basically—just so much easier to work with.

NP: Less leakage?

GC: Well, you don't have--. We call it shrinkage. I always used to smile when I first heard that because I said to somebody, "How could grain shrink?" They allowed so much for shrinkage, and you did have a lot of shrinkage with the grain door, wooden, and with the grain door, paper. But I think shrinkage is very minimal with the hopper cars. Of course, whatever grain they maintain, that's a profit, because I can remember humping in Westfort--. Like I said, where we allowed those cars to go over the hill. Nobody's perfect. Every once in a while, a car would go over the hill with nobody controlling it, and when they hit, it would bulge those paper doors or wooden doors, and there'd be pile of grain five foot high. Of course, the grain department went down and bagged it up, but there's still a lot of damage done. So, that was all included in your shrinkage.

NP: What's the grain department?

GC: Well, they were the guys that--. Like the grain door men, they went around and cleaned up, you know. They'd put the grain in bags.

NP: Then what would happen to it?

GC: They would sell it to farmers. I'm sure they got rid of it someplace. I bet you a lot—if it was rye—went on people's front lawns. Well, you had to move it out of the way anyways because it blocked up between the tracks. You could have quite a spill—five feet high and sloped out both ways under the car. So it had to be re-bagged. Anything to do with the grain doors, we'd call up the grain door department.

NP: If a car came in with substantial shrinkage, was that dealt with elsewhere than in Thunder Bay? Or was there some method of the elevators or the Grain Commission?

GC: Well, right away, the grain elevator would complain because they'd say, "You know, we're supposed to get a full car of grain, and we don't." So, it would be upon the railway to try and find out where this happened and why it happened. This is where you might have a crew switching someplace that coupled up too hard. Sometimes you could track it back to where it happened. If it happened in the yard, you could usually find a pile of grain where it started and follow the breadcrumbs to where it ended up. [Laughs] Other times it happened out on the Prairies, so you couldn't be sure where it happened.

[01:30:45]

NP: So, who in the elevator would call who in the railway here?

GC: We had a grain coordinator, and he basically dealt with all the staff as far as instructions. Whoever—and I don't know because I didn't work there—at the grain elevator who was responsible would phone our grain coordinator, and say, "We got a problem here." Then we'd go out and investigate, see if it happened at our yard or maybe it happened in their yard. There were instances where people stole grain.

NP: Really?

GC: Stole lots of it. The CPR and the CNR police were constantly on the watch for people stealing grain. If this grain, of course, fell in the yard, they would come and bag it before the railway could. Then it got so bold that they would cause the cars to leak. It got so bad one time that they had found instances where somebody had drilled with a wood drill through the bottom of the floor, and let the grain pour out so they could fill their bags. There was one fellow who was quite famous for it in this city. He got to be very rich, has a very nice house, and everything else. I think he's long passed on but-- I won't mention his name, but he had this beautiful Venetian gondola on his front yard, probably built with the proceeds of the grain.

NP: Was it sort of like cops and robbers? Like, these people were quite sly?

GC: Oh, were they ever! Of course, in my job, I dealt with a lot of issues that—in some cases—could cause someone to lose their job. You would take a statement, and then the superintendent would read it and come down with a decision. A lot of times, the unions took these decisions to the arbitrator. So, with the company, you are very careful. Unfortunately, with the union, it's not the

top of the union that runs the union. It's the bottom of the union that runs the top, so they would put in a lot of frivolous cases and lose most of them. But I can remember one time--.

[Audio pauses]

NP: Okay, going back--.

GC: I might've lost my train of thought while I was coughing.

NP: You were saying that the union would bring frivolous cases. We were talking about sly people in grain theft.

GC: This one gentleman, he was known by the police. Of course, they would ask our switch crews, "If you see anybody hanging around, or bagging grain--." Not only because they were stealing grain but the fact that we could injure someone. If they're injured, the railway's still responsible, unless they could show negligence on the part of the individual, which took time and effort. So, the switch crews would say, "Somebody's down on the track there. I'm a little leery of what they're doing. You know, they could be in the cars." We would send the CP police out, and he would play cat and mouse.

This one guy, I used to laugh at him. He would take two bags of grain, and he would put it under the light standard in Current River. Now, if you steal something, you're not legally bound to be charged with theft until you leave the property. He was still on the property, so he would put two bags under the lamppost. The CPR would park down the road, waiting for him to take the two bags away, and he never come back. He'd be on the other side of the yard putting about 15 to 20 bags in his truck. So, it was like bait. There were a lot of sly ones, but that was the best one.

[01:35:08]

NP: Was there ever collusion between railway employees and--.

GC: No. I don't think so. Like, the railway was very, very lenient with their employees. To the point that the only way you could lose your job was for insubordination, theft, or drinking on the job. You could pretty well get away with murder. They had a demerit system called the brown system where you got demerits, and you had to get up to 60 demerits before you were subject to dismissal. So, if you ran through a switch, you got five. If you did something else, put a car over the end, you got ten or something. It depended on the superintendent. But if you had a record-free two years, they deducted 20. But the others-- theft, insubordination, that was--. You were gone. Excuse me.

[Audio pauses]

NP: Most of your work then was in the north end of the city.

GC: We're spread out--.

NP: Or the north end of the city. Your position.

GC: My position was in the depot, and we had an office in what I call the tower at the foot of Victoria Avenue, which has long been torn down.

NP: Were you familiar with the Intercity elevators and the Westfort elevators at all?

GC: In the old days, we did Elevator D, E, and F, Pool 5, Paterson's, delivered exchanged grain to the CGR for the Mission elevators. I think it was Grand Trunk and--.

NP: Searle.

GC: Searle. Yeah, it wasn't Cargill in those days. And then we did Lakehead and Northwestern.

NP: Let's just sort of start with Northwestern and Lakehead. What do you recall about those elevators because a lot of people don't even remember that they were there?

GC: They didn't hold many cars. They didn't take in a lot of grain. I don't remember them working shift work. I think they were too small, really, to deal with the changes. Of course, what really changed the elevators along the river was that the ships became bigger and longer and couldn't navigate the river. They were right at the turning basin so that kind of put the end to them. If you can't ship grain out, there's no sense taking it in.

NP: Now, when they decommission an elevator, what implications does that have for the railway?

GC: Well, of course, it cuts back on our jobs. We don't have people employed to fill it.

NP: Do they immediately take up the tracks? What's the--.

GC: There are, I think, different reasoning. You can probably find out better from people who worked in the elevators, but I know in the old days, when insurance came off the ships on December 15, they closed the doors. That was it. They didn't take anything in. I don't know that they got a different tax rate or that, but everybody referred to it like, "Okay. The doors are closed." Then, if they got to a situation where the elevator was not working, they would take up the tracks in front and say that this is no longer an operating business to affect the way they paid taxes. When the tracks came up, you pretty well figured that was the end of it, you know.

Then, of course, I was present when we took two elevators down. I was there when we stopped all our traffic because, at this time, we're now using radios, and these were radio-controlled explosions. The day that they took down Elevator D, we had to consult with all our crews, make sure that when--. They were told not to use the radios, that they shut their radios off. We requested not to use them for 30 minutes or so, and then to check with us before doing any work. It was quite a big explosion. I was there.

[01:40:01]

NP: Who did the explosive work? Do you know?

GC: Don't know the name of the company. But I was in awe because I was working in conjunction with a fellow from the company, and he'd say, "Okay. We're getting ready to blow." And I'd say, "Okay. I'll contact all our crews. I'll contact the office." And I said, "The whole thing's going to go up." He said, "No. Everything except this elevator shaft." It was about five storeys high. I said, "You're going to blow the whole building up and leave that elevator shaft there?" Now, I don't know if you remember, but down at the foot of Syndicate Avenue, Elevator D was. One of the Zanettis or something had bought the property, and he wanted that elevator thing, and he painted his name on it. Well, when the smoke cleared, that was the only thing that was standing, was the elevator shaft. Everything else was rubble, and you just peeled everything off it. Then I was also working when they took down--.

NP: Just before you go on from there, what happened to the rubble?

GC: It was all carted away or used for fill. You know, probably dumped along the river. I never followed up on that. That was--.

NP: Did you take pictures of that event? Anybody that you know take pictures?

GC: Not that I can think of. Just another elevator at the time. Then Pool 5--.

NP: Little did you know how important their history was.

GC: Well, when you're young, you have different priorities.

NP: When would that have been, approximately, do you think? When the elevator came down.

GC: I started as a supervisor--. [inaudible].

NP: '70s?

GC: Had to be late '70s or early '80s.

NP: Okay, and then you said another one?

GC: Pool 5. Pool 5 is--. Are you familiar with that one?

NP: The one next door to F. In between Paterson and F.

GC: Yeah. They just came in one day and said, "We're blowing it up on such and such a day." We already had a routine worked out, so we said, "Okay." We shut down the radios. We blew that up, and then that was gone and never thought anymore about it.

NP: When you say, "We blew it up," what was CP's connection with them?

GC: They just basically held off all operations so that they didn't interfere with the radio. Because, evidently, there was a chance that if you had a radio communication from one of our engines, it could ignite what was being radio operated. So, they just asked us—out of safety and courtesy—not to use the radios, which of course, we didn't do.

NP: Were you watching that?

GC: I don't think I was there that day. No, I didn't see that one.

NP: Because that one is right next door to--. I mean, within a few yards of--.

GC: Yeah. Well, it's amazing what they can do. I mean, I've seen pictures on TV where they can bring a 15-storey building down and only have rubble ten feet out. It's charged a few seconds apart, so the top one goes, and then down to a certain level it goes. I did talk to the fellows, and I was quite intrigued with what they were going to do with the explosives, and where they put them. But just questions at the time, I can't remember anything specific.

NP: Anything memorable about Paterson elevator? Which is also gone now.

GC: That was one of the few elevators that still had a diamond in it so that when you went in there, you had to watch that the CNR was not coming in over the tracks. We came in from our Westfort yard, over King Street, and into the elevator. And the CNR came over James Street, and alongside the elevator and towards Pool 5 and then shoved back in. So, there was a point there. That's the most memorable thing I can think of. You really had to be careful. And, of course, we came in on kind of an S, so we had to get up a good head of steam to get going. So, once you started heading in there, if the CNR was coming, it would be pretty hard to avoid it. But I can't think of any instances--. Usually, what the yardmaster would do is say, "We're going down around such and such a time." Phone the CNR guy, and he'd say, "No. We won't be there until after midnight." But, yeah, it was a potential for something to happen. All you need are the right instances.

[01:45:05]

NP: The next three elevators then were 5, which you just mentioned, E and F, which went by various names. Anything you recall about those? There used to be a track that went, sort of, between two pieces of Elevator F, through to E. Had that changed by the time you were there?

GC: I'm pretty sure E shut down very, very early in my railway career, but I can remember pulling the empties from the east side of the elevator. It went through the house and out the back and it was pulled from the back. Most of the elevators, you pulled from the same side. You shoved up into it and pulled the empties out the same way. E was one of the few ones where it went right through. So, it ran alongside our lead. It was not too hard to get to at any time.

NP: And F is the same, pull in and out because there's a connection.

GC: Is there? F was the one that became, what was the name of the grain company then?

NP: Western Grain By-Products.

GC: Yeah, and they started to deal in specific types of feed grain and that. I think there were two elevators that didn't come under the categorization of grain elevators. One was Canada Malt, and one was Western Grain Feeds. They were billed a second way and not considered in the Wheat Board's dealings. I really didn't have much to do with that other than the fact that they had cars come in—usually not on grain trains—and were brought from downtown or whatever and put in there. It was specific and, I guess, hard to come by grains.

NP: This might seem like a weird question, but it--.

GC: There's no weird questions, just weird answers. [Laughs]

NP: What makes me think of it is we're now rounding the bend with D—you've talked about—and then we're up into Ogilvie's. Someone recently talked about Ogilvie's and said that Ogilvie's had a gardener on staff. The length of your career and over that time—like, from the late '50s through to the '90s—did you see a change in sort of how people maintained or the pride they took? You know, both on the railway side and the elevator side on what they looked like, what they contributed to the city?

GC: Ogilvie's was—in the beginning—a name that I associated with a product. Like, Ogilvie's was a very high-profile name. During the course of my time, Ogilvie's I think sold out, and part of the elevator was transformed into a starch plant. Later on, I know that Labatt's took over the starch plant and Sask Pool took over the grain operations. It seemed to deteriorate. I mean, once the Ogilvies got out of it, it was just a grain elevator. Now, I hear it's in a real bad disrepair. CPR has changed its way of working and now bring all their engines up and park them on a track there. Some of the guys have mentioned to me that they're afraid to go in there because stuff's falling off the elevator. Yeah, it didn't--.

NP: And it didn't take long, once an elevator was decommissioned for it to fall into disrepair. Or at least the parts that could.

GC: I can remember dealing with a fellow by the name of Morrison, and a fellow by the name of Kaiser McLeod. One of them worked in the starch plant, so they would order boxcars in to be loaded, and the other was Sask Pool. Kaiser was Sask Pool. So, it was two different operations there in the end.

NP: The starch plant would be delivering to where?

GC: I really don't know. I think it became Labatt's. I don't know what it had to do with Labatt's, but they would load out cars. They had a loading platform. I mean, they didn't get grain cars in, they got boxcars and things like that.

NP: They'd head east, the ones that were loaded here?

GC: I really don't know. They would phone in the orders to one of the clerks out in the office, and he would mark the car and it was gone. I didn't concern myself with it.

[01:50:06]

NP: Just in a general sense, I mean, you've talked a lot about the challenges and changes that occurred, but are there any comments you'd like to make about sort of the overall changes that you saw?

GC: Definitely. As I said, when I first went to work, there were five men on a crew, and when I left, there were two. When I went to work, I had a coal oil lantern that you lit and filled with coal oil, when I left, you had a radio. Much more safer using a radio. Of course, radios could cut out as well as lamps could go out, but I thought it was much safer. Technology has changed everything so much. I notice nowadays that they have trains going by here, my grandson and I counted the cars the other day, it was 130 cars. In the middle of the train, they had a robot engine.

I don't know if you're familiar with the robot. They can now radio control the engine in the middle of the train to work in conjunction with the train engine at the front. Now, before we had that, we tried an experiment of bringing in a large grain train. I forget how many cars—enormous amount of cars. Put lots of power on it but found that it wasn't working because it was the slack motion. The stress when one part of the train went over a hill and the other train didn't, and it pulled--. They basically had someone from the mechanical department driving parallel, changing knuckles in the cars. There was just too much of a stress on the knuckle. Now, I presume that with the robot in the middle, it takes up that same slack that was pressure on the cars. So, now they're bringing in grain trains 130 cars.

The sad part of that is the rules of the railway are that if a train goes into emergency—that means if you lose your air—you have to get out and go and inspect the train to see whether the hose has come apart, hit a piece of ice, or you got six, seven cars in the bush somewhere. That's no fun in the middle of the wintertime when it's 35 below, and you got to walk 130 cars down one side, and 130 up the other side in the middle of nowhere where there's no paths, and the snow is up to your butt. As I said before, I went back for one year as a conductor and that was enough for me. I don't know how those guys do that.

But, again, another change comes to mind--. When I started on the CN—and they both work under the same rulebook, so this would apply with the CP—we had what they called ABS system. That was Automatic Block System. What you did was you got your watch, and you got your timetable. You didn't have any radios, and you got your train from point A to point B. In the timetable, you had different classes of train—first class, second class, third class, fourth class, extra. Then you had one direction takes precedence over another direction. So, you get in there, and you said, “I have to get my train from here to there. Now, I'm a second-class train; I have priority over third, fourth class and extra. They've got to get out of the way for me.” Passenger was first class, so you always had to clear the track for passenger.

Where I was in Saskatchewan, it was single-track, so you were running both ways, and you had to take sightings to clear the other train. When I went back as a conductor just before I retired, they had what was CTC. That was Centralized Traffic Control, where the guy sits in Winnipeg and puts the signals on and throws the switches. Anyways, you could see why you only need two people on the train. But that was the biggest change that I noticed from one end of the spectrum to the other.

NP: And changes in safety were something that you mentioned.

GC: That was. That was. Yeah, it was a big factor.

[01:54:30]

NP: And one of the things that came up quite frequently in the elevator interviews was the prevalence of drinking up to a certain time and then--.

GC: Drugs.

NP: Oh, really? So, were drinking and drugs an issue on the railway?

GC: Drinking had been a part of the railway as far back as the railways ran. I can remember some of the old-timers would bring their little mickey of tea. Only I don't think it was tea, and they'd get happier as the day went on. There was a lot of drinking going on.

As the supervisor and as an employee, I dealt with it on both sides of the fence. The interesting thing was, it's almost like a curtain came down. All of a sudden, there was no more drinking, and it was all drugs. I guess a different generation didn't like to have cocktails, where other ones didn't like to get high. They just kind of grew out of it. The nicest part of it was that as a supervisor,

we had meetings with the CPR police, and they explained to us that it's not against the law to drink. It's against the rules of the company to come to work or be subject to work and drink. So, if someone comes to work drinking, and you're aware of it, that's against company policy, so you look after it as a supervisor.

But it's against the law to have drugs. It's against the law to have drugs in your possession. It's not against the company rules to, you know--. Basically, you don't say, "Don't come with drugs." It's a known fact that it's against the law, so you can't be there with it. The CPR police said in effect, "If anyone comes with drugs, you notify us right away." And I thought, "That's just wonderful. I don't want to be dealing with people like that anyway." But there were instances where there was drug use. One of my sons, when he finished school, went to work on a railway and, years later, told me, "I was working with the guys out there." He says, "You wouldn't believe how much was out there." We watched for it, but you can't catch it all the time.

NP: They were growing it on the top of UGG apparently.

GC: Well, one of our guys, he had a good turn, which means he had seniority, which was stability. And he was an engineman, which I would say in today's market, would probably bring in anywhere from a \$110 to 120,000 a year. He got caught growing a whole bunch of marijuana at Intercity in one of those houses where the bridge goes over down to the Keefer Terminal. It was a warehouse. The way they caught him was he was supposed to be just renting it and hadn't been using it for anything. But when the hydro checked the electricity bill, they said it was unbelievable. He had all the lights. So, he lost his job, and I thought to myself, "How stupid can you be?" But, yes, drugs was a problem.

NP: As far as the drinking was concerned, why do you think--. Like, would your dad have said that was the same when he was a youngster too, or young guy on the railway?

GC: Definitely. I have my theory—it's only my theory—but you were at the beck and call of the railway. You didn't know when you were going to work. You didn't know how you were going to work. Consequently, you didn't have much of a social life. Up until the mid '50s, when my father was working on the railway, you got no holidays. You worked 365 days a year. You were subject to doing 365 days a year. If you did not want to go to work, you had to, what they call, book off. If you booked off, you didn't get paid. So I think, consequently, because of the lack of ability to meet on a regular basis with other people and carry on a normal life, I think a lot of the drinking was due to the fact, "Hey, this is where I am all the time, and I'm going to enjoy myself." It was a big problem.

I also—before I became yardmaster—I was a union rep, and one of the biggest problems we had was people drinking. Now, if you were found subject to duty or drinking on the job, you were subject to instant dismissal. The union that we belonged to was called

the Brotherhood—B of RT—Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen, which became the United Transportation Union. But there was always that feeling of brotherhood. You had to look after other people. So, if someone came drunk, you know if he got turned in, he'd be fired, and his family would suffer. Consequently, there was a lot of covering up for people who came to work who had been drinking. "Go sleep in the engine. Go sleep in the caboose. Don't let anybody see you." And you protected people.

[02:00:14]

Then, finally, the company was able to accept the fact that alcoholism is a disease and should be treated as such. So, they decided that they would do so, and send people to the Smith Clinic. Well, once the company said to people, "You can help yourself," the other employees took the attitude, "Well, if you can help yourself, and you don't do it, I'm not going to cover for you if you won't help yourself." It basically changed. We had a lot of people who had drinking problems who went to the Smith Clinic, and then we had those others who are so stubborn that they would never quit. But I was really amazed. Of course, we had to take training on how there was going to be this change. And, of course, we had our ideas of who were the heavy drinkers.

One day, there was a fella who came over from the Smith Clinic with the sanction of the railway, and said, "I want to look at your employees, and I'll tell you who the people are that have drinking problems." I thought, "Don't worry." I says, "I got a list of guys here." "No. No," he says, "just leave it to me." He says, "I want to look at their personal records and their work attendance." And I said, "Well, this is the greatest place in the world because we have a calling bureau. Everybody gets called to work, and everything is marked down, everything is taped." I said, "Just go in there and then talk to the chief clerk." At the end of the day, he says, "I have a list." And I says, "Let's compare lists."

Well, my list was not as complete as his. I'd say 90 percent of it was the same, but his was just a little different. I said, "These people never give us any problems." He said, "Well, they do have a problem." And I said, "How can you tell?" He said, "You look at the records. He says, "A lot of times, they take a day off after payday. A lot of times, they take extra time when they come back from their holidays." He went on to give me a lot of examples, and as it turned out, it was true. In that way, by sending people to the Smith Clinic, it became a lot easier to tell somebody who was working with you, "Look. Go get some help, and don't put me under the gun. You look after your family. You don't have to count on me to look after your family." So, it did help, and I'm glad that the company took that attitude.

NP: Because we are heading to lunchtime, it's time to just ask a few general questions and call the interview to a close. As you think back on your career, which is a long and successful one, what are you most proud of?

GC: The thing that made me the most proud is that all three of my sons never ended up in the railway because I told them I'd beat them to death with a baseball bat if they ever went to work on the railway.

NP: Why was that?

GC: It was not a good career. You had terrible conditions for socializing. You know, when you first started out, you worked midnights with Tuesday and Wednesday off. I bet you I worked midnights for 11 years straight. Then, when you go on the mainline, and you get called, somebody will say, "Come on over Tuesday night." And you'd say, "I don't know." "What do you mean you don't know?" "Well, I don't know when I'm going to work." For people who are not familiar with the way the railroad works, say, "What do you mean you don't know when you're going to work?" "I get a two-hour call when the train's going out."

Pretty soon, the invitations dry up. Pretty soon, like I say, a lot of people did their socializing at work. They took a bottle, they went to Ignace, or things like that. I don't think it was conducive to a good life. I mean, once you're in it, you enjoy it, you're proud of it. I mean, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it, but when I think back, I'm very, very happy that none of my boys went on the railway. Like, one started and left. He went back to school.

[02:04:50]

NP: Now, talking about boys, women have not been really strongly represented in the railway trade.

GC: No. In fact, up until a certain time, there were no women, and in a lot of professions, there were no women. When women came into the workforce on the railway, they were discriminated against, but--.

NP: How would that--.

GC: There'd be a lot of double entendres, and you know, this and that. Right off the bat, they didn't think they were as good enough to do the job. We've had some--. Well, I know of the ladies here. Are you going?

[Woman]: Not yet.

NP: We're just about finished.

GC: We had some ladies that moved up the ladder. Like, one became a conductor. She was the first female conductor. We had another lady that was the first female yardmaster. The difficult part for them was they not only, like men, had to be capable of doing the job, they had to be the best. They had to be unquestionable by any of the guys. The one girl who became the conductor, I never heard of anyone complaining of working with her. I mean, she was good. And this was the same as the lady that became the yardmaster. She handled it very well—better than most guys—but would not get the same credit. So, it was a wall. It was a ceiling they had to come through, the enginemen—engine women, I guess. But it's acceptable now. It's just like any new concept. You don't take to it easily.

NP: But there've never been large numbers?

GC: No, it's basically a male-dominated job. I mean, you can say that they were discriminated against. And then, I can think of another instance where we used to have checkers before we had the computers and everything. So, to find out on a track, you used to have to send the checker out to write down all the numbers. Well, I had a fellow that was working, and he was there for the summer from high school. He was about 230 pounds and played football and in good shape. So, one of the last jobs that I would also ask them is, "Go down and check the new yard, and come back with all the numbers, and let me know for tomorrow. Sign it. Put the date on it because if you don't put the date on it, nobody knows what it is. You might as well throw it away." Okay.

Then we had a girl take over the job, so I said to her, "I want you to go down and check the yard." "Well, it's dark down there." And I thought to myself, "If she was not a woman--. If she was the guy I had before, and he said this, I'd say, 'Get your butt down there and don't--.'" So, there was a little bit of a responsibility on each side. Some of the women played it for what they could, but the ones that were successful never did it. They just went out and did the job and did it better than the guys.

NP: We are planning to have—we're hoping to have—a grain industry centre of some sort, recognizing the history of the grain industry in Thunder Bay. Obviously, a major part of that is the railway. Can you think of what we should be considering featuring related to the grain trains?

GC: Well, for the actual mechanical end of it—bringing and distributing and returning cars—you know, maybe a couple of scale models. Some of these cars that they have on these model trains now are right down to the perfect numbers. I mean, they're very, very good to show people what was used rather than try and explain it.

Then, for the distribution side of it, I think that if you explained how the percentages worked and how things were done, and why they were done, and it wasn't just, "Hey, there's a train going by." Please feel free to call me if your notes--. You know, if you say, "Oh, did I write that down? What did I mean by that?" Just give me a call back.

[02:09:50]

NP: I will. Last question, sort of a follow-up here--. Oh, slipped my mind!

GC: Yeah, I know. It happens to me all the time. It's not a small club.

NP: Oh, I know what it is! Are you in agreement that Canada is a pretty successful grain trader? In spite of some pretty major physical drawbacks, like location and climate.

GC: Well, at one time, I would say that the grain elevators here in Thunder Bay probably turned out the cleanest product. From what I've heard of other countries and people who have sailed on boats, they said when they got Canadian grain, they didn't have to do anything to it. It was well-cleaned, and other places, not so well-cleaned. So, you might've got it for a cheaper price, but you had to do more work to bring it up to the grade that we used to have. I think that Thunder Bay is very important in our reputation in the grain trade.

NP: If you think back to your career, what was your contribution to that reputation?

GC: We took great pride in having the grain in position, and you were disappointed when you couldn't do it. The whole thing of the railway was to have the grain sitting there in the morning when it was time to dump it. And if you didn't, you came up short. No one likes to come up short.

NP: When—and I don't even know if you do—if you follow any of the recent issues with grain transportation, just a matter of circumstance? Or have things changed that lead to ships sitting in the harbour waiting for grain shipments for days on end?

GC: I don't think there was any waiting when the Wheat Board was there. It was very simple. A car of wheat was a car of wheat, and it didn't matter if Searle loaded it in Alberta. The Searle didn't have to get it in Thunder Bay. Or it didn't matter if Sask Pool loaded it in Manitoba. It was a car of wheat. It was a car of wheat. It seemed to work better for us, not so much for the farmer. They were the ones that said, "Well, we'll take it upon ourselves to get our product to the market." It worked well for those who were in eastern Manitoba, could drive down to the States and that. I don't know how it is working, but I still have to say that—and I can't remember the gentleman's name that come up with that formula—I think it worked very well.

NP: Well, thank you very much. It was, as I anticipated, a great interview, and I appreciate your time. I hope that you follow our progress. I will take you up on the offer that you mentioned and also put you on my list of people to contact for questions about the grain industry. Thank you.

End of interview.