

**Narrator:** Lawrence Frowen (LF)

**Company Affiliations:** Saskatchewan Wheat Pool (SWP)

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**Interviewer:** Nancy Perozzo (NP)

**Recorder:** Nancy Perozzo (NP)

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**Other speakers:** Trudy Frowen (TF)

**Summary:** Grain handler for Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Lawrence Frowen discusses his short career in Thunder Bay's grain industry, as well as his father's career before him. He discusses his father's work as an annex man and watchman for SWP elevators, his memories of the Pool 4A and 4B, and his first job with SWP at Pool 6 in the car shed. He describes the boxcar dumper operation at Pool 6, boxcar shovelling at Pool 5, and moving up to the scale floor weighing grain coming in and going out. He shares the differences between SWP elevators in terms of equipment and crops handled, and he describes the immigrant- and veteran-heavy labour force during his four years with SWP. Frowen then looks through a family photo album, describing photos of Pool 9, the Pool 4B explosion, ships loading grain, the *James Whalen* ice breaking, flooding the Pool 6 annex with excess grain, SWP social picnics, and the St. Lawrence Seaway. Frowen also shares memories of loading an oil tanker with grain, watching grain trimmers at work, working alongside the Canadian Grain Commission, and refurbishing elevator manlifts in his later career.

**Keywords:** Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Grain handlers; Grain elevator disasters; Grain elevator explosions; Pool 4A & B explosions; Car shed; Boxcar dumpers; Boxcar shovelling; Grain doors; Boxcars; Grain weighing; Manual scales; Ship loading; Grain transportation—rail; Grain transportation—ships; Grain varieties; Grain trimmers; SWP Pool 6; SWP Pool 8; SWP Pool 5; SWP Pool 4A & B; SWP Pool 7A & B; AWP Pool 9; Western Grain By-Products; *James Whalen*; Ice breaking; Canadian Grain Commission (CGC)

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: This interview is being conducted June 5, 2013, and I will have the person who is the subject of our interview today introduce himself and his connection to the grain industry.

LF: Lawrence Frowen, former employee of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool (SWP), worked at elevator 6, 8, 5, 4, and 7.

NP: Okay, great. That is wonderful. I am going to ask you about those elevators later on. I should also mention that sitting in on the interview is Trudy, Lawrence's wife, who we interviewed independently a few weeks ago. So if you hear a voice other than mine and Lawrence's, that's who's here. I should also say that Lawrence and Trudy kindly let us borrow a family album that had a couple of pictures in it related to the grain trade. A little later on in the interview we will take a look at those photographs and comments you might make about the photographs. Those photographs go back a little ways, and that is where I wanted to start today. You weren't the first member of your family who was in the grain industry.

LF: No, my father was there. My mother wouldn't let him let me work at the elevators because she didn't trust them. They had a habit of blowing up.

NP: I understand from Trudy's interview that your family was involved in those explosions. What can you tell us about that?

LF: My father was an annex man, Pool 5 in the north end, in 1945 when it blew up. He was standing at the bus stop on Cumberland Street when it went up. He lost a couple of uncles and cousins in the explosion. One of them was never found for six weeks. But I didn't know the people.

NP: When were you born?

LF: 1939.

NP: You were just a youngster at the time.

LF: Yes, I was just starting school, I guess.

NP: Who were the family members who were killed? Do you remember their names?

LF: Just their last name. They were Harrises. There was an album with their names and where they were found and everything else. But I don't know where that's gone.

NP: Was it an album that your family had?

LF: Just pictures my father took after the explosion. They put footnotes on. But I think my sister got that album, and nobody knows where it is.

NP: Oh, what a shame. You sister is--.

LF: Dead.

NP: Is dead, oh. This is one of the reasons our project exists is that we are trying to make sure that a lot of these other things don't get lost. Your dad was an annex man. Do you know what an annex man did?

LF: After the grain was put in the elevator, it had to go into certain bins, and it was his job to direct it into those bins. All he did was put a big spout over a hole in the floor and let it go.

NP: You had to make sure you didn't put it in the wrong bin.

LF: Oh yes.

NP: Did that ever happen?

LF: It happened quite often. The wrong stuff went in the bin.

NP: How did that get fixed?

LF: A lot of times it was just left. [Laughs] If it was close, if it was No. 1 wheat or No. 2, they just left it. And when they loaded it on the boat, they mixed it up then.

NP: And they were within what they called the tolerance?

LF: Yes, there were so many kernels with wrinkles and so many full kernels.

NP: You had said that your grandmother, because of her experience with her family members who had died in the explosion, she wasn't keen on you going into the industry. But you did.

LF: My mother.

NP: Oh, your mother.

LF: Well, I was in the army for a while. When I got out, I was laying around home, and one day my father woke me up and said, "Go get a job. Don't come home until you have got one." So I went to the pogy office, and they sent me to the elevators. [Laughs]

NP: Did you have a choice of what elevator you went to, or they sent you to a specific elevator?

LF: They sent me to Pool 6, Saskatchewan Pool 6. They hired me and then they shuffled you where they needed you.

NP: What was your first job?

LF: In the car shed taking broken grain doors out of the pits that they dumped the grain out of the boxcars into these big pits. All the doors got broken and that. Before the next car came in, you had to go down and get all the paper and junk and whatever else was in the car out of the way.

NP: What kind of system did they have there for getting into the boxcars? Because some of the elevators had dumpers.

LF: This house, Pool 6, originally it was a shovel house, and then they put in four big dumpers. When the steel door was open, there was wooden doors inside holding the grain back. They had automatic dumpers, or door breakers. Big electric motors rammed the door off, smashed it all to pieces.

NP: What did the rammer look like? Did it look like just a big, long pole?

LF: It was just a flat disk. It pushed against the door. They broke. Sometimes the car wiggled a little, but they broke. They held the door inside until the car was empty. Once the door was broken, grain started coming out and they started dumping the car. And then what they called baffles went in from the right and left side, depending on which end the car was dumped. If it was down on the right side, the one on the left went in. So when they tipped it up, there was a deflector to take the grain out of it as it came past the door.

NP: Was that system a pretty efficient system? Did it empty it pretty well?

LF: That was the most efficient. It was the fastest. And then later on, they came with another one called the Seabar dumper that tilted the car. They used the wall and the floor as the baffle. They smashed the door and tilted the car towards you, and then tipped it up, and then ran a little trough out.

NP: Almost like a seesaw action.

LF: Big teeter-totters.

NP: Teeter-totter. That's the word I was looking for, teeter-totter. How did you like that first job?

LF: The first one was good.

NP: What did you like about it?

LF: It was easy. That was the whole job, just cleaning that thing out after until the next car come in.

NP: Climbing in and out of the pit? You were a young man then?

LF: Oh yes, yes. A little younger than I am now, more agile, too. But it was all young people then. The only drawback then, at layoff time, they sent you to Pool 5, which was a shovel-house only. And you shovelled the cars by hand. You emptied them by hand. The first day you did nine cars, and then after that it was ten cars a day. You would shovel them out, sweep them out. And then they would bring in another one. There was two people.

The shovels were about three-foot square pieces of hardwood baffles, pulled by electric cables. It was all automatic. There was slack there, you pulled it into the car and then held it, and the cables rewound and pulled the baffle out. You had to stand there and hold it up, and if it hit something and tipped over, you let go of it or you'd get pulled through the grain. Shovelling was difficult, because people used to steal grain by drilling a hole through the bottom of the car. When the railroad got the car back, they nailed a piece of two-by-four over the hole, and the shovel hit it and just flipped you right out the door.

NP: Wow! Were there lots of injuries, or because they were young people--?

LF: Oh, no. They were young people, and after the first time it stopped, you learned you didn't hold it very tight, so that it could get pulled out of your hand very easy.

NP: I have never heard that before. I heard the story about the drilling through the bottom but never how the railway fixed it and the implication.

LF: They just nailed a board over the hole on the inside, so the grain didn't go out. And it pulled along like that, with you holding it up. [Inaudible]

NP: Now, you said Pool 5. First there was Pool 4 and 5 over at Current River, and then there was a Pool that surfaced--.

LF: Pool 5 surfaced--.

NP: At Western Grain.

LF: Over on the river.

NP: On the river. So which one were you working at?

LF: The one on the river, because Pool 5 blew up in '45.

NP: Did they re-build it?

LF: No, they knocked it down and built Pool 4B.

NP: Okay.

LF: 4 and 5, and then they took over what was left of 5 and demolished it, completely re-built it and called it Pool 4A and B.

NP: And then there was another explosion there.

LF: Yes, A House went the next time. It was just a little one. It fell over the boat and killed a guy on the boat.

NP: No family members lost in that one. [...*audio skips*]

LF: I remember that one because that happened right at noon when I was getting out of school in Grade 7.

NP: Where were you going to school?

LF: Prospect Avenue. So we went down there for the rest of the day.

NP: Describe the scene, as you remember it.

LF: Just a big hole in one side of the building, that's it, and all the stuff laying across the boat.

NP: There must have been ambulances?

LF: No, by the time we walked there, all that was over. The only thing I remember was a lot of police, so you couldn't get near it. But we went on the property of the other elevator and there was just a big hole in the wall.

NP: Were there lots of school kids down there, checking things out?

LF: No.

NP: Just the little rascals! [Laughs]

LF: Just the ones that had relatives there and could walk.

NP: Did you have family working there at the time?

LF: Yes, my dad was in there at that time.

NP: In the annex part?

LF: Part.

NP: Now you said something about his offices being--.

LF: The annex on the top of all the tanks, there is a little office there. So he kept all his records and all that on blackboards. Each tank is numbered, and he writes down what's in it. Those offices were taken off both times.

NP: Taken off, as in blown off. He obviously wasn't in them.

LF: No, he was out on Cumberland Street both times. It was interesting work.

TF: His dad's cousins also worked there at the elevators.

NP: What family was that, his cousins?

TF: Sonny and--.

LF: Frowens. We are all Frowens. They are all related.

NP: How did your dad get involved working in elevators?

LF: He started at what was Wheat Pool 6 before Saskatchewan Wheat Pool owned it.

TF: It was Manitoba Pool.

LF: Manitoba Pool.

NP: Do you know when his career started, approximately?

LF: No, I have no idea.

NP: Was he away in the war?

LF: No, he was guarding the elevators during the war.

NP: So he had started before that.



LF: The regiment here had guard duties at the elevators. He was in the Lake Sups then. He used to be a farmer out in O'Connor and met up with my mom. I don't know when he started.

NP: That would have been before the war?

LF: There used to be a trestle out to that.

NP: When was your dad born? Maybe we can figure it out from that.

LF: He was born in 18--.

NP: Oh, the 1800s

TF: Well, your mother was born in 1904.

LF: It was around there somewhere.

NP: So he could have possibly started in the 1920s and '30s.

LF: Yes, that's quite possible.

NP: I wonder if it was Canadian Northern then.

LF: Might have been.

NP: Canadian Northern because that was when it was out on an island.

LF: I'm just waiting for them to finish their great Marina project when they find out that there's a trestle buried under that.

NP: Interesting.

LF: They never took the trestle down.

NP: They just built over it?

LF: They just put screenings and old grain and bark and sawdust from Oscar Styffe's.

NP: We will look at our old pictures. We've got some great old postcards, which show just what you are talking about. I'll look for that trestle. Maybe they should take a look at it before they start excavating. Take a look at the postcards.

LF: They don't know half of what they are--.

NP: Did your dad ever talk about what it was like working in the old days? You know, whenever you complained about it, he said, "Oh well, son, when I worked there--."

LF: No, no. He never--. It was funny, we both worked there at the same time at the end, the same elevator, but he never talked about that. He went to work every morning. That was all there was to it. He was a qualified carpenter. He served his apprenticeship in BC. But he come down here and ended up at the elevators.

NP: Did you get a sense--.

LF: He enjoyed that more.

TF: Well, when they retired him from the elevator, he became the watchman at the elevator, so.

LF: He knew what he was doing around the place.

NP: How did he get to work?

LF: Somebody picked him up on the way to work.

NP: Someone who had a car, because a lot of these guys in the early days walked to work.

LF: Yes, oh yes. He didn't have a car until later on. Although, when he married my mom, he had a car.

NP: Let's go to your career, then. We left you when you were shovelling grain at Pool 5, which I understand from listening to other people was where they sent people to see whether they were going to see whether or not they were--.

LF: Going to last.

NP: They were going to last. Did you get that sense?

LF: Oh yes. That was understood. The layoff list would go up and who was going to what elevators, and if you got sent to 5, you knew you were on your last week of work before you got laid off. And then sometimes when they called you back, you went back to 5 to start, or you went right to your original house.

NP: When you went on poge, as you called it, and then they sent you to the elevators, you went to Pool 6. Was that your first time in an elevator?

LF: Yes.

NP: What did you think of them when you first saw them, the inside of them?

LF: Interesting. I liked the machinery.

NP: Tell me about that.

LF: I guess how things were done and how you moved it around. I just like machinery, that's all. The whole building is quite the setup. You don't wear the stuff out moving it around. And they know where every boxcar is in an elevator. You'd unload a couple of thousand of cars a year, and they would know where everyone of those boxcars went, which is a good idea. It was interesting.

NP: It is one way that Canada kept its reputation for good quality grain because it shipped what it said it was going to be shipping.

LF: Yes. Oh, well, when you loaded a boat, they were constantly sampling this stuff. You sampled it in the elevator. You sampled when it came out the pipe into the boat. You'd sample and they kept them samples. So when the boat left, they had a sample of all the grain.

NP: Now you didn't, I don't think, that you ended up shovelling for the rest of your career.

LF: The second year I was made a scale-floor helper.

NP: Tell us about that.

LF: Well, that is just weighing the grain coming in out of the boxcars. The boxcars were all emptied, and the grain was weighed and checked to see if it was what was supposed to be in the car. Then it was put away to be cleaned. You weighed it out at 60 tonnes a scale load. Again, it all went on record. You stayed on shipping, or receiving, for the first year, and then the third year I was up there, I was on shipping. Putting the stuff on--.

NP: The difference between those two jobs, the receiving versus the shipping?

LF: No difference at all except where the grain went.

NP: Speed more of an issue for shipping?

LF: No, because they had special bins that they could drop into if the boat wasn't there when it was supposed to be. They had special shipping bins that they could drop the grain into and then as soon as the boat came, it was already weighed and ready to go. It could go right into the boat. That is how they managed to load 1 million bushels a day into one of the boats.

NP: Was that the record?

LF: Yes, loaded over 1 million bushels of oats in a boat in [inaudible]. But all the shipping bins were full when the boat showed up.

NP: Excellent. Forward thinking.

LF: Yes, it was. They used to be very slow process, a little more efficient as it got on.

NP: Where were you working then when you were on the scale floor?

LF: Pool 6.

NP: Back at Pool 6 then.

LF: Pool 6 and Pool 8, over near the CP station in Fort William.

NP: The old Ogilvie's. Because you were in those three elevators—I think you mentioned some others you were in—how would you compare the elevators themselves, between Pool 6, Pool 5, and Pool 8?

LF: Pool 8 was very antiquated, very slow. It was. Anything coming in went through two old, very old dumpers. Anything going out had to be loaded on a [inaudible] outside the building to the river, and then along the river a little bit and into the boat.

NP: Because their bins are a little bit back--.

LF: Well, it is just the way it was set up. I guess at one time it was fast, but it just got slower and slower because it was so old. And Pool 5, I have no idea what happened to it after we shovelled it into a hole in the floor. [Laughs]

NP: Because you never worked on the scale floor there.

LF: I never went in it. I was never inside Pool 5. But Pool 5 also had a feed mill, where they bagged the grain up for feed.

NP: In Pool 5?

LF: At Pool 5, yes. They used to bag it and load it right into rail cars. I was lucky. I never got stuck on that.

NP: Why do you say that?

LF: I don't like carrying 50 pound bags of grain. [Laughs] [Inaudible]

NP: Did you have a preference for dealing with one type of grain versus the other?

LF: No. Sask Pool had 90 percent of the elevators here, so at Pool 6 they only took wheat and oats, nothing else. If it came in and got accidentally unloaded, like a load of durum wheat, it was put right back into an empty car and sent out because they didn't want to do that. That went somewhere else. That way they kept a huge quantity of everything spread all over town. You didn't put too much of a mixture in either building.

NP: Much difference in dealing with the weighing of one versus the other, like flax versus oats?

LF: Flax is terrible. It's slippery.

NP: What difference does that make?

LF: Well, it's hard to walk on and when it come in the cars, the cars were lined with heavy paper, construction paper, so the flax didn't leak out the cracks. Well, when you unloaded them, you got all that paper torn up and it all went into them. It was a pain. But oats, nice and light, dusty but it was a nice [inaudible] to load.

NP: So which Saskatchewan houses dealt with oats?

LF: Most of them had oats, but Pool 7 was mostly durum wheat. Everybody had their own kind of specialty, where the boat would come in and take a whole load at one elevator rather than go to three or four different ones and pick up a load eventually.

NP: So things would be quite different now on the waterfront with SWP--.

LF: Oh, down to nothing.

NP: And having to deal with everything at one spot.

LF: They don't even have crews at every elevator now. They have one crew that goes to every elevator and does unloading and everything else. When I worked, there was over 2,000 people on the waterfront, just in elevators. Now I think there's 300.

NP: And I think that's exaggerating.

LF: Going down, yes. But, no it was interesting work. It is just that you had to be careful because you could get cut up, very easily, by not paying attention to what you're doing.

NP: I didn't ask you, how long did you work?

LF: Four years.

NP: On the scale floor?

LF: Altogether, four or five years at the elevators. And then the year I left, if I had worked, I would have worked two weeks, and they weren't consecutive.

NP: What were those four years that you worked there?

LF: Oh, gosh.

NP: You have to put it in perspective, eh?

TF: You got laid off October 23, 1964.

LF: The day before I got married.

TF: The day before we got married.

NP: So you worked from '60 to '64 perhaps?

LF: No, '64 to '67? Yes, when I went to the jail.

NP: Not to jail. We just want to make that clear. [Laughs] If it had been steady work, would you have stayed?

LF: Oh, I probably would have. It paid fantastic. The guy that was behind me on the seniority list, the next guy, he worked two weeks that year. He didn't work the next year at all. He eventually became the car shed foreman down there. Being just married and a house and everything else, I couldn't afford to sit around.

NP: Tell me a bit about the other people who worked there. Was it a pretty mixed workforce?

LF: Oh yes. If you could speak Italian, you had it made.

NP: Why was that?

LF: It was all Italians there.

NP: The managers wouldn't have been Italian, I wouldn't think?

LF: Oh, some of them were.

NP: Were they?

LF: If you had the seniority, you could get any job you wanted. But the manager at Pool 6, he was a veteran. I don't know how long he had been there before or after.

NP: Do you remember his name?

LF: I did until you mentioned it. [Laughs] Fred Hague.

NP: Did people get along?

LF: Oh, yes. Yes. Most of them, there weren't groups. Like if you were on the scale floor, you were so busy with your scale. You were the only one on that piece of machinery. At Pool 6 they had four scales. There was four guys running scales. That was it. If you weren't doing that, you were underneath it, sweeping. Other than the car shed, there wasn't a lot of free time. We'll put it that way. You were working all the time. There was always something to do.

NP: You were there a relatively short time. Were there any changes that took place in that timeframe, or were things—unlike today—pretty much steady, no changes?

LF: Oh, there weren't very many changes. Just around the end of July things slacked off every year. The crop year changed, and then they sped right up again once all the yearend tallying was done, and right back at it again until the lake froze.

NP: You'd be called back in--.

LF: You might be laid off for a week, or they might have you out there weeding the tracks for a couple of weeks. They kept as many on as they could. Like some of the elevators, I don't know if you talked to anybody who worked at Searle, but they had so



many employees. In the summer you worked like hell. In the winter, you took it easy. They didn't lay their crew off, but they didn't hire more in the summertime either. You worked year-round. When you worked, you worked!

NP: You mentioned Searle Elevator. I have seen their photograph when they had, I don't know what celebration it was, but it was in 1945. They were showing out-of-town visitors, mostly from Winnipeg, coming in and the grounds were like a park.

LF: Oh, yes.

NP: Did you find that back in those days the elevator companies actually did pay attention to the grounds around them?

LF: Oh, yes, and families. Like Sask Pool used to have a huge, big summer picnic for their staff. All the elevators closed down for the one day and they went to the Casino Park on Cumberland Street there. And they had a big tent full of stuff and gave it to the kids. There was races and everything else. That died out too.

NP: During your time?

LF: During my growing up.

NP: During your growing up. Why do you think that changed, any thoughts on that?

LF: Union.

NP: Oh, how? That wouldn't have come first to my--.

LF: Guys wanted to be paid for that day off. They said fine, we'll pay you. You won't have the day off anymore.

NP: Isn't that sad.

LF: But the union was good, but the union was bad, too. They still are.

NP: Sort of the downside.

LF: But they were the highest paying jobs in town when I started there.

NP: Did you ever give any thought while you were working there for your connection to the farmers out west?

LF: No. Only when her uncle come down one time. I took him through the elevator. He'd never been to one. That was the only time.

NP: Do you remember his thoughts?

LF: Surprise. [Laughs]

NP: In what way?

LF: He just grew the stuff, he said. He didn't know where it went. He got a full half-day tour of the elevator. There was nowhere he couldn't go to be shown what was going on. He enjoyed it. They happened to be loading a boat that day, so we watched that from the top of the building.

NP: Surprised by the size, was he?

LF: Oh yes. Well, you see, now they have all these terminals out on the Prairies. That's why these are dying out.

NP: Not the size of these ones, but bigger than the original Prairie elevators.

LF: But they do all the cleaning and that out there now. So the farmer is making more money out of it, not the elevators.

NP: You know, you mentioned the picnic. I remember seeing pictures of the picnic. But before I go on to that, you mentioned you worked at Pool 5, 8, and 6. Did you ever work at 7?

LF: I worked at 7, but that wasn't for Sask Pool. I worked there after they had an accident, putting in an elevator.

NP: Putting in an elevator in an elevator? What happened there?

LF: Well, it's only built for four guys, and there was seven guys in it. It fell from the top [inaudible].

NP: Any injuries?

LF: No, they were packed in too tight. But they packed it too full.

NP: This is good to know, because we take some tours of Pool 10, which is now Western Grain By-Products.

LF: The one-man elevator.

NP: Just about. You go up in the elevator, and oftentimes we have five people in there, but I'm going to think twice. I'm going on a tour there tomorrow to take a couple of people up.

LF: Is that the one with the rope drive?

NP: Yes. Have you been inside that elevator?

LF: Oh, yes. I rebuilt that hoist, too.

NP: Oh, when? [Laughs]

LF: That's quite a while ago. There used to be a sign in there, "One person plus the operator".

NP: And now that you rebuilt it, we could get more than one person plus the operator in it?

LF: Oh, no. We just fixed the motor up on top. That whole place is driven by rope drive.

NP: It's now been changed, but it was driven by rope drive. The owner, Mr. Mailhot, has kept all of the old ropes, and of course he's left all the hanging pieces there.

LF: You used to walk in there when that place was running and as soon as you walked into the rope-drive floor—like there's a building here with the engine in it and a shaft and then it goes to the elevator with the rope pulleys—you could your hair go up like that from the static electricity.

NP: And that's all from the rope drive?

LF: The static of the rope going over the pulleys.

NP: Now, when I hear static electricity, I think of--.

LF: Boom! Yeah. It never had problems. Yes, old rope drive on that one.

NP: Do you remember anything else about it, that's no longer there?

LF: They replaced the coal plant with an electric motor, and they just turned that shaft that's all, but turned it like crazy.

NP: Tell me, what noises should I be listening for on that elevator? [Laughs] Before I panic?

LF: I don't know. It depends. I imagine it has been changed by now.

NP: It's still the cage.

LF: Oh, yes. The cage is weight.

NP: I'll check it out. [Laughs] That's great. That's a nice little tidbit, because Pool 10, which is Western Grain—used to be the Fort William Elevator F, I think—is the one we are putting forward as our national historic site, because it is a living museum.

LF: Yes, it's still a going concern. And of all that are on the river, it is the only one left.

NP: It's quite a beautiful elevator. The look of it--. [...*audio skips*] Let's take a look at some of these pictures and you can tell me who they are.

LF: I've got a picture here. Somebody was asking where Pool [9] was. It used to be right in that hole, right there.

NP: What happened to it?

LF: They knocked it down. The United Grain Growers knocked it down.

NP: In order to build this?

LF: No, that was there, too. It used to be almost a workhouse, nothing else.

NP: It was quite small.

LF: The foundations are still there. If you drive there, you see the hole, right where it used to sit.

NP: I will look for it because I was wondering. It was one of the earliest ones. It was built as Union terminal and then it became Pool 9 Alberta.

LF: But it was small, very small, about a quarter the size of Parrish & Heimbecker.

NP: You know Parrish & Heimbecker are closing down? I saw that in the newspaper. Anyway, let's take a look at your pictures. But before we do that, I want to take a picture of you.

LF: My father took hundreds of pictures of Pool 5 after it blew up, while they were taking it down. The book is full of them. Okay, the boat there that the guy was killed on was where that one is and this whole wall came down and went right across it. That dock there is from Pool 9.

NP: The little dock we see up in the left-hand corner. You mentioned that one of your relatives, the body wasn't found for six weeks. How did they eventually find the body?

LF: They took the grain off the ground. He was outside, and he went around the corner, and this corner tank split just as he was--.

NP: Isn't that sad. Oh, my goodness. This one doesn't look like it's at an elevator.

LF: No, that's not an elevator. I don't know where that is.

TF: Well, she said, if she wrote on it, "Loading Pool 4."

LF: It's probably the shipyards somewhere. "Two boats in the slip at Pool 4." So that would be Alberta's dock again. Two boats at Pool 4.

NP: We are looking at this picture taken by Regina, that's how the elevator Pool 6, looked just before it was blown up. How did it look different when you were working there? Or did it look pretty much the same.

LF: It looks pretty much the same. Those boats they are still around in Styffe's colours, Oscar Styffe's. Now wait a minute, there you are. That's UGG, that's the south end.

NP: That's what we call the Intercity group. **[Audio pauses]** Describe the picture you are looking at right now.

LF: "Breaking ice in the slip at Pool 4," the *James Whalen* there breaking ice.

NP: So what time of the year would this be? What month? This year April. [Laughs]

LF: That would be in April, late April.

NP: How can you tell that?

LF: That was the main break. They went out and broke to open water and then came back and did all the slips. They still broke the slips when the Alexander Henry was commissioned because it was too strong. It would come in to break the ice and break the docks. So the *Whalen* and *Strathmore* stayed here just to do the ice-breaking.

NP: Tell me what you are looking at here.

LF: Pictures of Pool 9, which was between UGG and Pool 4—a fire in 1932 destroyed it.

NP: When I first saw this album, that was the first I had any indication that that had happened. Nobody else had mentioned it. So I really appreciated having these pictures. Are your nieces and nephews still around? Did your sister have children?

LF: Oh, yes. Two. That's who ripped these books apart.

NP: Do you think they may have a collection?

LF: They are in Winnipeg.

NP: Oh, I'm going there.

LF: A tender subject. A lot of the pictures they took didn't belong to them.

NP: Maybe we just have to put a note in the *Winnipeg Free Press* saying, "Anybody have pictures of Thunder Bay elevators.?"  
Okay, we have come across a few.

LF: Again, this is Pool 6, Annex 3, the big picture. That one. This is Annex 3.

NP: We are now looking at one of pictures that Regina Coloumbe took. Which one is Annex 3?

LF: This is Annex 3 here. It didn't have a floor.

NP: So how did they keep the grain in?

LF: Well, the tanks were there, but there was no cap on them.

NP: Oh, I see. The actual annex floor level.

LF: They flooded it because of the huge volumes of grain coming in. [...*audio skips*] This is what the annex looked like when it was flooded.

NP: Okay, you are losing me here. Tell me about this again. If this is the annex floor--.

LF: That's only grain.

NP: That's grain.

LF: There is no floor.

NP: Okay, but shouldn't there be bins?

LF: The bins are under this.

NP: Oh, they flooded it with grain. That's good to know, because I thought it was flooded with water! Start explaining that again because I would like it all in one--.

LF: Bumper crops of grain from the west. There was no storage capacity for them, so they flooded the open-topped tanks. They just poured the grain in on top of everything else that was there. The only drawback was when they pulled the grain out from the bottom, it pulled anything—railings—that were up there went down into the tanks.

NP: When would that have been approximately?

LF: Was in the '50s, I guess.

NP: Ah, when they were having all the wheat being grown--.

LF: And nowhere to go. The other book has pictures of all the crunched-up railings and everything else that went down the holes.

NP: What are we looking at here? We have the new bridge in Annex 1.

LF: Okay, we have Annex 2 here. Annex 1 is behind it. That's the workhouse, then Annex 1, Annex 2, and Annex 3. This is a bridge between them, that the belts went in.

NP: So just to describe this, so that when I'm attaching it to a photograph, we were looking at the photograph again taken by Regina. Annex 1 is on the waterside of the workhouse, Annex 2 is on the land side on the left-hand side, and Annex 3 is on the right-hand side as we are looking from land. And the bridge that is referred to in the photographs where they are putting the new bridge in Annex 1 is between Annex 1 and Annex 3 and you can see it up in the air.

LF: The belts ran through the annexes and through those tunnels to the next one.

NP: They would enclose these bridges?

LF: They are enclosed, and then the belts and everything ran through them. That is how you got from one annex to the other.



NP: And this picture we are looking at here with the gentleman, the stuff that is hanging from the crane. Is that part of the bridge?

LF: That's part of the bridge. These pictures are when they were constructing the bridges. One it is hanging from the side of the building and the other it is hanging on a cable. It is almost complete. This is the Sask Pool picnic, either in Murillo or Chippewa Park.

NP: Why would you say that?

LF: The grandstand.

NP: This would have been before you were born?

LF: Oh, yes.

NP: So they moved the picnic to the Casino grounds?

LF: Casino grounds, yes.

NP: These would have been pictures that your dad had taken?

LF: My mother might have. Probably my dad.

NP: You don't see your dad in any of the pictures? The tug of war?

LF: No. They used to go to another place, Bishop's Field. They used to by train, which is now the Municipal Gold Course. That's where the train comes in.

NP: Would they have gone to Chippewa by train, too? Do you think?

LF: No, they had street railway then to Chippewa.

NP: So this is likely Bishop's Field?

LF: Probably Bishop's Field.

NP: This is 1931 and this is 1930, so it is possible they could be different places.

LF: Yes.

NP: Quite a fashion statement, looking at the women's clothing, dressed up for the picnic. And then I think we are back into family photos. I don't know if there is anything more.

NP: I love these old photographs. We have come to the St. Lawrence Seaway here. This would have been mid 1950s.

LF: They were just starting it here.

NP: How did you get these pictures?

LF: My mother and father went down there to visit my sister.

NP: Where did she live?

LF: Montreal, I think, at that time. She moved around all over down there. They took all kinds of pictures.

NP: Any idea of where this was?

LF: Beauharnois.

NP: Beauharnois?

LF: I think that's what you call it.

NP: In what province?

LF: Quebec!

NP: In Quebec, oh, okay.

LF: You drive right underneath the water. They kept the canal open.

NP: So here you are pointing to the photograph that has a car approaching this tunnel. The wavy stuff on top is water.

LF: Yes. There, they are moving all the houses away. Along Soo control dams.

NP: When you think about your short, but illustrious, career at the grain elevator, [laughs] what were you most proud of?

LF: Loading grain on an oil tanker.

NP: That story needs a little bit of expansion. Tell us that story.

LF: When the Russians bought all the grain that we could produce, there was a big shortage of ships for it. So, they sent over oil tankers to take the grain. They had to make funnels to go into the pipes that would take the oil. You put the funnel in the pipe, put the grain in the funnel so it would go down into the holds. When they got to Russia, they put vacuum hoses down those pipes to pull the grain back out again.

NP: That was the only way you could load an oil tanker with grain?

LF: That's right.

NP: What was the condition of the tanks? Were they clean?

LF: Oh, they were all inspected before they were loaded. They were super clean. It took forever to load an oil tanker because you couldn't shoot the grain down as fast. You had to go through a funnel.

NP: Wouldn't that have created some problems with trimming, like trimming the load--?

LF: No, it was a full hold. Trimming is quite interesting. It was a hard job.

NP: You watched them doing it?

LF: Oh, yes. They are right there with you while you are trimming a boat. It's all a matter of lights. The front and back of a boat have red and green lights that show if you are loading it evenly. There was one boat—I can't remember the name of it—but it was one time brand new, and it got caught in a storm and twisted, so when you loaded it, the lights had to be crooked for the boat to be loaded straight. [Laughs]

NP: So it helps knowing the boat you loading?

LF: Yes, the grain trimmers have to know every boat. They have to know it inside and out. I said, "How come you've got different lights? You've got a red and a green." "The boat's twisted. Look at the boat now. It's straight. But when it's empty and that, it'll have a twist to it."

NP: So I guess you couldn't be colour blind and work as a grain trimmer?

LF: Not really. You just--.

NP: You just ask the other guy.

LF: There are two lights on this side, two lights on that side. [Laughs]

NP: Just where they were. Like a traffic light where you could tell by position. Any other stories that I haven't pulled out of you yet that you would like to have recorded about your time with the grain elevators? Or anything that your dad might have commented on?

LF: No. You weren't allowed to smoke in the elevators. My dad came into the scale shack one night, and he said, "Oh, whoever was smoking at the window, get a pail and go put out the fire on the roof." Everybody smoked. But somebody was smoking with their head out the window and the butt went down on the roof and set fire. My old man never got flustered about anything.

NP: Was that when he was a watchman?

LF: Get a pail and go put it out.

NP: Did he ever have trouble when he wasn't a watchman with people just hanging out for the night in the elevators?

LF: No. There was always people working. There was always shifts going on because Pool 6 had a dryer. There is always wet grain, so you always had a shift on midnights. You were never in there alone.

NP: Anything else?

LF: Not that I can think of.

NP: I am going to ask you a question. You can take a few seconds to think about it if you like. Just as a lead-up to it, I didn't know very much about the grain industry when I started this project, but in speaking with people like you, here and out west, I've been amazed at how much Canada accomplished given how big a country we are, how far from our markets our grain is grown, and how every piece of it seemed—at least over time—worked together so that we got a good reputation as a grain nation. Given what you did, how do you see the jobs that you did as contributing to Canada's reputation as a first-class grain country?

LF: Just a cog in the wheel, that's all.

NP: A little cog in the wheel? An unimportant--.

LF: A little cog in a big wheel. That's all it is.

NP: A little cog in a big wheel. What if your cog wasn't there?

LF: It wouldn't have hurt.

NP: You don't think so?

LF: Yes.

NP: No?

LF: No.

NP: If it didn't get done properly? Somebody else would have done it?

LF: No. It's all caught eventually. It's all weighed going in. It's all weighed coming out. No matter [inaudible].

NP: And who does that?

LF: A little cog somewhere. [Laughs]

NP: Another cog in the wheel. The Canadian Grain Commission?

LF: No. They don't touch it.

NP: I thought they had to have a weighman on, along with the company's weighman?

LF: He just comes by and hands you a little ticket to punch. And you punch it on the scale and marks the weight.

NP: And compares it with yours. Did the company do their own too?

LF: The government weighman gives you the ticket. You weigh the grain, punch it on the scale. He copies that weight into his book and your shipper copies that weight into his book. And then I don't know what happens.

NP: It all matches up in the audit.

LF: Oh yes, they are both identical.

NP: This has been wonderful. We have done over an hour. I was very pleased to get information about those pictures, especially the flooding because here I was expecting a whole bunch of water. That's clear now. So thank you very much. It has been enjoyable, and I hope you found it the same.

LF: Oh yeah!

**End of interview.**