

Narrator: William “Bill” Green (WG)

Company Affiliations: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, United Grain Growers (UGG), Agricore United

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Summary: Retired manager of terminal elevators for United Grain Growers William Green discusses his ascent through the terminal elevators in Thunder Bay. He begins by discussing his first role with Saskatchewan Wheat Pool as a general labourer performing a variety of tasks, learning about grain grading during his layoff periods, and becoming a company grain inspector. He describes moving to UGG as an inspector, making training courses for new employees, and sitting on the union executive as a grain handler representative. He discusses the differences between UGG and SWP operations, different company cultures, meeting with the Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association, and changing elevator and inspection technology. Green then discusses moving into management as a foreman, then superintendent of UGG A, then general manager of all UGG Thunder Bay terminals. He explains how his role changed, the larger challenges and issues he dealt with, and the other organizations he had to now coordinate with, like the Canadian Grain Commission, Canadian Wheat Board, railways, and the Canada Ports Clearance Association. Green also discusses becoming manager of Thunder Bay and Vancouver terminals during UGG’s amalgamation with Agricore. Other topics discussed include his recollection of the UGG A annex collapse, the downturn of grain movement in the mid 1980s, downsizing of the workforce, women joining the workforce on the CGC side, issues and challenges with lake shipping, the introduction of modified work programs, and the new zero-tolerance policy for alcohol and smoking.

Keywords: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; United Grain Growers (UGG); Agricore United; Grain inspection; Grain handlers; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Terminal grain elevators—British Columbia; Grain sampling; Grain grades; Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Foremen; Management; Labour unions; Contract negotiations; Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association; Canola; Protein testing; Automation; Computerization; Amalgamation; Manitoba Pool Elevators; Women in the workplace; Grain transportation—ships; Canada Ports Clearance Association (CPCA); Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); Alcohol and drug use; SWP Pool 4A & B; SWP Pool 5; UGG Elevator A; UGG Elevator M; Thunder Bay Elevator; MPE Pool 1; UGG A collapse; Grain elevator disasters

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: Good morning, we are interviewing Mr. Bill Green at his home on Clayte Street in Thunder Bay on November 10, 2010. Thank you very much for giving us time and doing this interview. We have been looking forward to it. It has been a long time coming. So can we start by having you say your name, so that we will have it in your voice? Tell us about how you first started in the industry.

WG: My name is Bill Green, and I started in the grain industry in 1964 with Saskatchewan Wheat Pool as a labourer. I swept the elevator, and I shoveled boxcars at Pool 4. Up at Pool 5, on the river, I worked there for the fall of '64. I passed coal at Pool 4 when they were drying grain in 1964.

Subsequent to that, I became a grain inspector for Sask Pool at Pool 4. I had an opportunity to go to United Grain Growers [UGG] in 1969 as a grain inspector, and I became their head house inspector shortly after that. In 1977, I became a general foreman, and I became one of the youngest foremen on the waterfront. Then in 1984, I became the youngest superintendent on the waterfront. In 1988, I became the general manager for United Grain Growers until 1993, when I became the manager of Thunder Bay and Vancouver from 1993 to 2001.

From 2001, I helped with the acquisition of Manitoba Pool, which was Agricore back then, putting the two companies together. In 2007, Viterra took over Agricore United. The year after that, I went to Churchill and became the general director of the port of Churchill.

NP: Oh, not very successful I see! [Laughs] I am going to change my mind about how we are going to approach this because I think we will leave the history stuff until later. There are so many things here! There are stories within stories. I'd like to deal at some point, too, about how that whole acquisition went about, impacts and so on. Let's just start with your career. You said you had started out sweeping and shoveling. Was that your first experience with grain elevators?

WG: Initially, my grandfather, he was the superintendent of P&H [Parrish and Heimbecker] Elevator. As a young boy, about 6 and 7 years old, I used to go to the elevator on Saturday and Sunday with my grandfather and hang out in the elevator while he did the paperwork to pay the employees. That was what I did when I was a kid. When I became a teenager, my next-door neighbour, Fred Macog, got me a job in the elevator because I was an 18-year-old unemployed kid. And that's how I started in the elevators.

NP: So that was Saskatchewan Wheat Pool that you got the job in? What was Mr. Macog's job?

WG: Yes, that's right. He was the head grain inspector at Pool 4 at the time. That's how I managed to get into the grain inspection part of it, from being a labourer.

NP: Going back to going to the elevator with your grandfather, can you think back to how that felt?

WG: Well, as a young boy hanging out in this great big elevator, which was P&H, which was the smallest elevator on the waterfront, it was quite an experience. I used to sweep the floors and do different things to pass the time while he was doing his office work. I'd be out in the plant as a very young kid. That would never be allowed nowadays! So that was my initial experience in an elevator.

NP: My husband was just telling me last night that he had an experience similar to that. His grandfather was a night watchman at one of the elevators, and his grandfather took him into the elevators. He talked about riding up on some sort of a belt, up to the top--?

WG: That would be the Humphrey—a Humphrey belt, or a lazy belt. All it is just a belt with a step on it and a grab handle. One person rides on this belt between floors. You'd go from the bottom all the way to the top of the elevator, on this unenclosed belt, with no safety on it or anything. That's what they did.

NP: Was that the only way to the top?

WG: Yes.

NP: So the elevators that are inside the elevators now were more recent acquisitions? That must have been difficult to put them in, the elevator in the elevator.

WG: The elevator in the elevator, no, I'm not really sure how that came about. I was just a young boy at the time.

NP: So let's fast-forward to an 18 year old boy starting out at the bottom, probably in more ways than one. Tell us how it felt to do that job, and what it entailed.

WG: I started out at the very bottom as a sweeper and a sampler. I sampled grain on the boats by hand. I swept the elevator and shoveled boxcars. You just did what you were asked to do back then. That's the way it was when you started in the elevator. They didn't have the safety equipment they have now, like respiratory masks and things. They just used gauze masks back then, instead

of the ones they use today. But that's the way it was, and everybody did have a bad cough back then. But, like I say, as an 18-year-old kid, that's what you did. You worked your way up. I knew I didn't want to be in the dust. I wanted to be in an office. So that's where I went.

NP: So how was it possible to make the progression?

WG: How I made the progression was I went to work when I was laid off, just like I would go to work and not get paid during the winter and studied grain. I did that on my own. I went to the elevator. I had permission to come there and had a lot of help from the people in the CGC [Canadian Grain Commission]. They help me to learn about grain. I brought my lunch, just like I was working, but I was learning. I did that for the first three years, and that's how I became full-time and became a grain inspector.

NP: Who was running the elevator at that time?

WG: Back then, the elevator that I was at, it was Bill Squiers, the superintendent. Mike Lucas, the foreman. Jim Given and Norm Given, they were the foremen. The house inspector was Fred Macog, who was my next-door neighbour. That's who helped me out and got me started in the business.

NP: Was it a good place to work?

WG: It was a great place to work! It was like family. They treated you very well and took a lot of interest to make sure you were successful in what you were doing. I was very fortunate with the people that I worked with.

NP: I recall a term that you used when you were doing a very brief overview and that was "passing coal." What is that, and where did it fit in your career path?

WG: Back in the early days, they had steam boilers. To dry grain, they would use the coal to fire the boilers. At Pool 4, I believe 1964 was a wet crop year, and they had the dryers going. They used to dump the coal through the tracks onto the ground, and we used to shovel the coal into wheelbarrows, and bring it into the boiler house. We were just completely black by the end of our shift every day. That's what we did. We were coal passers. You would bring it from underneath the trestle, load it into wheelbarrows, haul it into the boiler house, stack it up for the night. During the night, they would use all the coal that we had brought in during the day, and we'd do the same thing the next day. We did that all fall in 1964.

NP: Was it a young man's job?

WG: Oh, definitely! Yes, it was real hard work, a real tough job. It was work.

NP: So where did that fit in, with sweeping the floors, and becoming a grain inspector?

WG: Well, the first year I was just a labourer, the lowest of the low on whatever the job was, and that was one of the lowest jobs was coal passing. The progression was a sampler, a sweeper, a shoveller, and a coal passer. When you were a coal passer, you were right at the very bottom, you were the next guy who was going to get laid off. That was the fall of '64.

NP: You mentioned you were in the grain sampling. You moved from there into a foreman's position at that same elevator?

WG: No, as I say, I learned the trade of grain inspector with Sask Wheat Pool and received my licence. Then I moved to United Grain Growers as a grain inspector with them. After being with them for eight years, I became a general foreman. But I was a grain inspector with United Grain for eight years.

NP: Tell us a little bit about the work of the company grain inspector, and how you liaised with the Canadian Grain Commission inspectors.

WG: The role of the company inspector was to expedite the movement of the grain through the elevator, and that was to give a quick grade on the grain so that you could keep it moving through the terminal. The Grain Commission, they would take the sample and analyze it, check the dockage, moisture, so they would be behind quite a bit, and you would have to check quite a bit to see that you were on the same page as them with your quick grades. As a company inspector, you'd have to deal with all the byproducts from the cleaning of the grain and re-introducing them into the shipments, while ensuring that the shipments were meeting standards.

It's an exciting job. In my other role, more recently in Churchill, that's what I was doing up there, showing them how to do that, because they weren't quite as adept at that part of the business. I really enjoyed that part of the business where you controlled the movement of the grain.

NP: It seems, just from the way the setup is, with the government inspectors and the company inspectors, that there's a lot of chances for perhaps not disagreements, perhaps professional rivalry.

WG: I think it's more professional respect because you have to respect each other's opinion. The company inspector, he's protecting the company's interest, and the Canadian Grain Commission inspector, he's protecting the farmer's interest. At the end of the day, we have to look after the customer, who ultimately receives the grain at the end of the day. It doesn't matter about the farmer, it doesn't matter about the company, it matters about the customer. As long as the customer's happy, that's what matters. That was the big part of the business where we had mutual respect for what we were doing. I think that was the challenge that we had to make sure that we met the customer's needs, rather than our own individual goals of looking after the company or the farmer.

NP: I'm interested in the practical aspects of when there is a disagreement. You mentioned that you did a "quick" look at it, and then the government inspectors would be following in behind, just for timing. What if the grade had to change? Doesn't that make a big difference, if you had to un-bin and re-bin?

WG: The company inspectors and the government inspectors were both well-trained, and we were normally on the same page. If there was a disagreement, it wasn't a major disagreement, it was just the "fine line" grading, as we all referred to it. You're so close you can go either way. Major disagreements were very few, very few. It was usually the "fine line" because you were both qualified in what you did.

NP: When it went into the bin, I guess you have thousands and thousands of bushels, so it all works out in the end?

WG: That's right.

NP: Who was on the inspection staff, both at Sask Wheat Pool and United Grain Growers that you recall working with?

WG: The company people? I worked with Fred Macog. Oh boy, that's going back a long ways. Bert Lewis and Biddo Cousineau. Then when I went to work at UGG, I worked with Bob Antoniak. He was there. He was the head inspector, and he moved into a foreman's position when I became the inspector. Subsequent to that, I trained quite a few inspectors to work with me because I was the head inspector, and they didn't have a whole bunch of inspectors.

NP: Do you recall some of the people that you trained?

WG: There was Ed Rybak, John Hanrich, John Harris, Augie Potec, and Mike Toskovich. Some of these fellows are still there now. We even set up courses and schools to train inspectors for our own people after it had progressed down the road. We

established that this was an important position. You had to have qualified people in these positions. Under my direction, that's how I ran the show when I became the boss.

NP: Were there inspectors of that sort in the line elevators for Saskatchewan Wheat Pool?

WG: In the country elevators, no. They usually just had the country managers. They didn't have qualified inspectors. They were somewhat qualified, but not completely.

NP: At the time you were working for Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, was there much connection with Winnipeg and Regina? Was there much of a connection there between the Thunder Bay operation and the head offices?

WG: At that time, I was very low down on the ladder. I was a worker in the plant and the union. I believe the operations were run locally here, from the PUC [Public Utilities Commission] building. They had a major office in the PUC building, on the 8th floor I believe. They ran the whole thing from there, I guess with some direction from Regina, but not much, because they had a local manager here.

NP: You moved from one company to another, which is in itself a little unusual in Thunder Bay, I've noticed. How would you describe the differences between the two places where you had your career?

WG: It was just the philosophy of how you managed your plant. At Sask Pool, they made all their supervisory people from their weighmen, from the scale floor, where at United Grain, they made their supervisory people from grain inspection. I had approached Sask Pool about wanting to move in that direction, and they said, "Well, we don't do that." So I said, "Well, goodbye." It was unfortunate that many years later the fellow that told me that it isn't going to be, that you're never going to get a job like that, I ended up being his equal in the grain business. He was working for Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, and I was working for UGG, and I reminded him of the time he told me I'd never make it!

NP: Now what did he mean by "You'd never make it"?

WG: Well, he meant that I would never make it into management from a grain inspector. Years later, they changed their philosophy. When you talk to the other managers from Sask Pool, they ended up coming from the grain inspection eventually.

NP: Where would they normally have come from?

WG: They would come from the scale floor. They were weighmen. The Canadian Grain Commission has inspection division and weighing division, and in the elevator, it is basically the same. You have the inspection office and the weighing, which is the operating part. That's where they took their management from. One company took their management from the weighing side, and the other company took their management from the inspection side.

NP: Can you speculate why they had that difference in progression?

WG: I guess it was just the way they did it. They always do what they always do, that philosophy. But, as I said, at the end of the day, they ended up changing it.

NP: So when you moved over to UGG, was the job the same?

WG: As a grain inspector, yes.

NP: Different elevator, same job? There was no real change in responsibilities?

WG: Not really, not really.

NP: Who was heading up UGG at that time?

WG: The foreman there was Bill Ternowskey, and the superintendent was Stan McKay, when I was originally hired on there.

NP: Stan McKay is a name I have heard many times. I understand that his roots went fairly deep into the grain industry. Do you know anything about that, as he is no longer with us?

WG: I think his roots are four generations deep in UGG. The person you should really talk to is Murdoch McKay. He is in Winnipeg. As a matter of fact, I just talked to him this morning. Stan McKay, his father, was the superintendent before him, and his father before him. Like I say, that's just the way it was at UGG. Stan McKay, he went on to be the manager of UGG in Thunder Bay, and then went on to Winnipeg as a manager for a number of years, then came back to Thunder Bay again, subsequent to his retirement. Bob Antoniak took over from him.

NP: Have I heard correctly that UGG was sort of a Gaelic? There were a few UGG elevators, so was that a particular UGG elevator?

WG: Well, it was particular to the one in Current River. It was very tight knit. When I arrived, it was loosening up, but prior to that, I understand that's the way it was. It was all the Scottish people. That's the way it was.

NP: Although by the names that you mentioned, obviously when you came, they didn't sound particularly Scottish to me.

WG: No, as I say, it was changing by that time. They were fairly young people, at that time as well, but prior to that it had always been that way.

NP: In some elevators, according to some of the people we've talked to, the shoveling staff, they would have been non-English speaking immigrants. Was it the same way at the two elevators that you were familiar with up to that point?

WG: At Sask Pool, it was the way that you were saying. The immigrants, the new hires like myself, we did the bull work, the labour jobs. However, at UGG, they had automated car dumpers there, so it wasn't that way there.

NP: When was that elevator built?

WG: I believe it was in the late '20s. It was originally built in three sections. It was a much smaller elevator. In 1952, I believe, it was expanded, with the portion that was built on the shore side—the part that fell in the lake in 1959. That was expanded when they rebuilt, and it was opened in, I believe, '61.

NP: What stories have you heard about that incident?

WG: It was before my time, and there were pictures of it. We had them in our office when I was in the office. But when I left, they were left behind. Who has them now? I have no idea. It was a chronology from the day it fell in. They took pictures on a regular basis as the clean-up progressed, and as they rebuilt it. It took them just one year to clean up the mess and rebuild, so it was quite quick.

NP: There were no deaths or injuries in that incident? That's quite amazing!

WG: What happened, as near as I understand, there was some creaking during the day, so they brought the engineers in, and they examined everything, and said, "No, everything is fine, not to worry." About 4:30 that same day, that's when it went into the lake! There was only one person left in the elevator, being the watchman, who fortunately wasn't in that area that went into the lake. So,

there was no one injured. It was quite amazing. What they say it was, it just slipped off the pilings. They had earth where the trestle is now—that used to be all earth—and it pushed against the bins and pushed it off the pilings. So, when they rebuilt, they took out all that earth. Now they have a trestle out there.

NP: So in the time that you were working at UGG, how long did your career last with them?

WG: From 1969 to 2007, 38 years.

NP: UGG owned or operated three elevators, is that correct?

WG: Yes. UGG, when I started, had the UGG in Current River. They had McCabe's elevator, which is Elevator M, and they had Thunder Bay elevator, which was a wooden structure opposite SWP Pool 7. Shortly after I started with them, about '72 or '73, they shut it down and tore it down, the wooden structure. What's left there are the cement bins. That's all that's left of that building. The wood from that building was sent back out west to build other elevators.

NP: I think it's fascinating to hear where the demolition pieces go. That in itself is an intriguing story. But then, I'm sort of weird. Now let's go to C. That's the Current River terminal. You talked about the rebuilding of it taking about a year. What changes occurred to the physical structure during your career to that elevator?

WG: The physical structure pretty well stayed the same, other than that we took out the dumpers. They slowly converted from dumpers to boxcars. The original hopper cars, I believe, came about 1965. They used to be coal cars, and they put plywood roofs on them. These roofs would leak, and water would get into the grain. This was before the hopper cars that we know of today, the enclosed ones. They were old coal cars, and that was the start of it. Slowly over the years, the dumpers were removed from the elevators, because boxcars were no longer used.

Originally when I arrived at UGG, we used to dump boxcars and hopper cars, and they didn't fit well together, because there were completely different methods of unloading them. So over the years we took the dumpers out, and we put in automated hoppers, and put in control systems on these hoppers to increase the production in the plant.

NP: Was there any expansion of storage facilities?

WG: No, not at that time. We increased the throughput of the plants by electronic control systems and different things like that.

NP: Okay, let's look back at your rise to the top. You were the inspector at UGG, so what happened from there, and how did your job responsibilities change?

WG: When I was at UGG, I was a grain inspector, I'd been in the union at Sask Pool, and I was in the union when I went to UGG. I was on the union executive. I was on the negotiating committee, and I negotiated the contracts for the union workers, as their representative. Over the years, I got to sit on the other side of the table, and I was the management-union negotiator, so I knew both sides of it. I could be sympathetic to what they were asking for sometimes, but other times I knew darn well it wasn't the real issue. It was very beneficial over the years.

NP: Talk a little bit more about union-management relationships within the grain industry in Thunder Bay.

WG: We had a very good relationship with the union at UGG, where the employees respected the actual union representative and there wasn't really any conflict during my tenure as a union representative. I only had one grievance in the all the time I was there. I attribute that to common sense. We were always able to come to a solution. Even though it wasn't always the solution you wanted, you had to explain to the employee that that's as good as it's going to get. You are just going to frustrate yourself if you keep banging your head against the wall here. Like I say, we had an excellent relationship. Over the years, when I sat on the other side of the table, we tried to manage the same way, with common sense. It seemed to work out at UGG that we managed to do that.

NP: Was that type of co-operative integration of wants, needs prevalent throughout the waterfront, or did it vary?

WG: No, there were different philosophies at different companies on how you operate. Some companies just liked conflict, but that wasn't in the best interest of the company that I ended up working for. Conflict doesn't create production. So we seemed always to manage to settle.

NP: As you look back it and the differences between the mediation approach versus the conflict, what caused the difference in approaches? Was it individuals, was it philosophies of the companies?

WG: I think it's just culture. When you're in a culture, that's what it is. Over the years you're brought up in that culture. It just carries on under whoever is there. The culture I was brought up under at UGG—like I say I was at Sask Wheat Pool, and I knew the culture there a limited amount—then I went to UGG, and the culture was completely different. That's the way I was brought up, and that's the way I managed.

NP: How would you describe the cultural difference? I know you mentioned earlier on about there being a certain path to the top at Sask Wheat Pool, which was different than the path to the top at UGG. So can you describe the difference in cultures?

WG: The culture at Sask Pool was very hard-nosed, where they ran the plant, and they ran the men. Where at UGG, the men ran the plant. There was very little supervision out in the plant. Where at Sask Wheat Pool it was heavily supervised. Like I say, that's their culture.

NP: From an outsider's perspective, if you look at Manitoba Pool and the privately owned companies, how would you describe cultural differences there, as you saw them from the outside?

WG: From an outside perspective, Manitoba Pool was very family cultured. They were, as we saw it from other companies, we seemed to think they were overstaffed, nepotism, all those kinds of things. As I said, that just wasn't the case in the company I ended up working for. But that's just my opinion of how it was.

NP: We all see things through our eyes, looking from the outside. As you know when you get in, it's not always what it seems.

WG: Right.

NP: Private companies, any different philosophies that you saw there?

WG: The private companies were a little more bottom-line oriented. They ran a little tighter ship. We ended up running a very tight ship at the end when we became a private company, or a publicly traded company rather than a co-operative. That's the way it is. You have to respond to the shareholders. Where in a co-operative, you're a little looser.

NP: Was there a perceived barrier—is a little strong word—between the co-operatives and the private companies?

WG: Well, the companies had the Lakehead Elevator Association, and that brought all the companies to the table. They dealt with issues collectively—major issues that is. Like I say, each company had their own culture and how they dealt with the employees, but on major issues within the industry, they were all dealt with by the association. I think that's what made it go along so well.

NP: So there would be a management negotiation team, and a union negotiating team. The management negotiation team would represent all those elevators?

WG: Yes, there would be members from all the companies on the Association.

NP: What kind of direction, as a manager in a negotiating situation, would you get from head office?

WG: You really wouldn't get any direction as to what they wanted or didn't want. It was the Association got together and established what the Association thought was required, or what they could afford, and tried to work to that end. The direction from Winnipeg and Regina was more of a support. They provided legal assistance, but you were left on your own pretty well. When you got to the end of the road, you had to get an okay from them as to what you finally agreed to, which was usually forthcoming.

NP: You had mentioned earlier on that only one grievance had gone forward. What kinds of grievances come up in an elevator?

WG: Well, some grievances, everybody figures they deserve the job, or they were docked wages for whatever reason, or treated differently. We tried to look after them. Like I say, good employees, you treat well. That's the way it works in this world. That's the philosophy that we worked under. You don't get a benefit unless you earn it. A lot of the things you did were just because of that. If you had a good employee, you looked after him, and if he wasn't a good employee, you didn't look after him. That's the way it went.

NP: Looking at benefits, how did they change over the years?

WG: Benefits became quite the issue in the elevators. I'm not sure of the percentage of what it ended up being, but probably 20 to 30 percent of their wages were benefits because they had amassed this benefit package rather than take wages. That was always a problem. They would look at their wages, and say, "Well, we're not paid as much as they are on the West Coast or at the pulp mills." But they had this massive benefit package that included everything. That was just the way it is. The union had decided they would go after benefits rather than wages most times.

NP: So you saw your benefits improve over your career?

WG: Oh definitely, yes, the benefits did improve. We ended up with health care, dental systems, eyeglasses. I mean these things, nobody had them back in 1964, didn't even dream of them! Having 13 stat holidays and 7 weeks vacation, whoever thought you would have these things, back then? You were lucky to have a job! But over the years, that's what amassed.

NP: We are going to move on from the labour/management area, but I do have to ask because we've been amassing memories about Frank Mazur. Did you work with him?

WG: As a matter of fact, I worked with Frank Mazur from 1964 to 1977 in the union when I was an executive member of the union and one of the people he was sort of tutoring to move along and help him out in his future. He was not real happy that I left the union and went with management, but he understood at the time. I knew him quite well, and we spent a lot of time together in the union negotiations.

NP: In your opinion, how would you describe his success as a union leader for the people, for you?

WG: Well, as I say, he was a real role model. He would never take anything that he didn't think he deserved. He wasn't out there trying to get things that weren't required for the employees. He was always trying to better the employees' lot. He was really a true union leader. He believed in what he did, and he was good at what he did. He didn't take on fights that weren't required, and under his direction we only had the one grievance because he would tell you how to settle them, and that's the way it is.

NP: So did you sit across the table from him then too? And how did that feel?

WG: Yes, I did. It was uneasy, yes. Initially when I joined management, I was at the lower end of management. I wasn't the manager of UGG, so I was just brought in to advise them—what I thought they should be doing with management when they were negotiating. I never really got to negotiate with him head-to-head. When I started that, Herb Daniher was the lead on the union side. I never did sit directly across and negotiate with Frank Mazur.

NP: Thankfully?

WG: Thankfully, yes! [Laughs] I was just there for support for the management that was negotiating. I'd be in the other room.

NP: Yes, I could see. Touchy situation. Let's go back to the grain inspection. Over the time you were grain inspecting, were there any changes at all in that job? Technical expertise, equipment required, or things like that?

WG: When I was a grain inspector, I believe it was about 1967 when the initial canola movement started, and nobody had really seen canola before in any volume in Thunder Bay. I learned how to look after canola and deal with it quite well and looked after it for Sask Pool at the onset. Then everybody knows what happened with canola after that. It became one of the main crops out there, in dollar value. But that was the main thing that changed was the actual introduction of canola. Prior to that, it was strictly your wheat and durum, oats and barley and rye. Rye used to be a big crop back in the early years, and now it's almost non-existent. They don't grow it.

NP: I have heard from talking to others that the introduction of protein content in wheat changed the inspection system a bit. Were you part of that changeover?

WG: Yes, that probably happened about 1975, if I'm not mistaken, where they brought on protein. It slowed down the movement of grain initially because you had to receive the protein on, and the equipment and the expertise of the people using the equipment wasn't quite what it could have been. But with anything new, we managed to deal with it. We had to put the grain away and keep things moving. Over the years you were able to get protein grades a lot quicker from the government. They established how they do things to help you out to keep production up because that's what it's all about, production.

NP: So, you were a grain inspector until when?

WG: I was a grain inspector till '77, when I became a foreman, and then I was a foreman until 1984. That's when the first, initial hit came to Thunder Bay, in 1984, and a number of the people from UGG went to Vancouver to work because of the downturn in the grain industry in 1984.

NP: When you were foreman, were you foreman of Elevator C then?

WG: It was Elevator A then, which is now C. I also worked at Elevator M as a foreman over there, and I had been a grain inspector over there as well.

NP: What, would move you from one place to another?

WG: Need, holidays, there was only a number of us. Alistair Graham, he was the grain inspector at Elevator M, and I was the inspector at A, and if he went on holidays or something, sometimes I would go over there and take over.

NP: How did you like the job of foreman?

WG: It was a great job. It was a different job because I was young and dealing with people that were all older than me. Gaining their respect and getting the work out of them was kind of tough to start, but it worked out.

NP: What would a day be like in the foreman's job?

WG: The foreman's job was to decide the workload, what had to be done, and if there was a boat at the dock, to arrange for the loading of the boat. If there was a breakdown, to arrange for the crew to fix the breakdown. If the railway wasn't delivering cars, to deal with the railway. If you had a union issue, you had to deal with that. You never knew what you had at 8:00 in the morning! Every day was different. There were no two days that were ever the same, and it was a challenge.

NP: When you look back on it, what did you like best and what was worst about that position?

WG: The best part of it was that it was not boring—the challenge to deal with multi-tasking all the time. You were constantly multi-tasking. I think that's where the original phrase came from! [Laughs] There were just so many things to deal with, and it was quite exciting. It never got boring!

NP: And what you disliked?

WG: There were very few things that I really disliked about that position. It was once in a while when you wanted to make improvements and there was no funding, capital, available to make those improvements that you could see would pay for themselves. But you couldn't sell the idea. Those were the hard ones. But that's just the way it is in business. The capital isn't always there.

NP: You would be reporting up to someone. You were classic middle management there. You don't get to talk to the people who control the purse strings.

WG: That's right. You have to convince your boss, who has to convince his boss, who has to convince the people that have the money. In an organization the size of a grain company, the grain terminal is only a small part of it because you have 200 elevators in the country that also have their hand out. That's just the way it is. They decide where the capital is going at the start of the year, and if there's none for terminals, then there's none for terminals, no matter how good your idea is.

NP: I'm wondering, as you're talking, what would it be like sitting on the Thunder Bay harbourfront in the foreman's position? What was your view of head office in Winnipeg?

WG: The view of head office back then, we didn't get to see it very often. We just knew they controlled the purse strings. We ran the operations pretty well in Thunder Bay. Sask Pool did the same thing. They had an office here and they ran operations and that's the way it was. And UGG had an office, and they ran their operations, and that's just the way it was. The guidance they got from Winnipeg, I believe, was quite limited.

NP: Did they call you together for a visit with the Winnipeg group coming in?

WG: As things developed and the culture changed over the years, we became team oriented. We had younger people running the company in Thunder Bay and in Winnipeg. We would have meetings regularly in Winnipeg, or across Canada, with the people from Vancouver, from their plant and our plant. We'd all get together for networking and sharing ideas and planning for the next season. It changed completely.

NP: You had mentioned that it was about 1984 that the industry took a big hit. What happened with UGG on the waterfront here?

WG: I believe that was when the Crow Rate changed, that was '84. The volumes became very sporadic. You never knew what the volumes for the year would be. I believe it was in 1982 or something like that, we had 19 million tonnes through this port, and from there it just went downhill. Now I think there's about 6.5 million tonnes, and that's a good year. So it did go downhill when they changed the rate. Everyone had to adapt to that.

NP: Was there any elevator changeovers at that time? Did any elevators close down or change hands?

WG: I don't think any elevators changed hands at that time. What happened over the next 10 years, there was a strike. What happened was the union refused to work overtime. UGG, we managed to run our plant weekends with management. We brought in management from Winnipeg as well as the management in Thunder Bay. We ran the plant, and we were the only plant that ran on weekends. From that, we learned how to manage the plant with a lot less employees. That was one of the fortunate and unfortunate things that happened in the plant at UGG. We learned how many employees were really required, and staff was just decimated. We cut staff unbelievably after that because we just found out that we didn't need all these people. We got the job done with a lot less.

NP: Had automation already taken place?

WG: No, it really hadn't taken place to any extent. The philosophy we had at UGG was to try and do as much as we could with the people we have and the equipment we have rather than automate. Automation was so expensive, and we didn't have the capital as a cooperative. As I was saying earlier, we could never get the money, even though they were great ideas, to do all these things. When they did, they automated Elevator M, which was later mothballed! It had all the automation, the early automation, and it wasn't used.

But in later years, we converted Elevator M to a non-Board house, and we were able to run that elevator with six people! From an elevator that used to have 120 people, to be able to run it with six people is just unbelievable. It had to do with all the automation, and the hopper cars compared to the boxcars. With boxcars, we used to have bobcats and bobcat operators. Whereas with hopper cars, all you needed was one person on the opener, and you could open the cars.

NP: I was talking to an electrical engineer last night, and he was commenting on UGG M and saying it was quite marvelous what they had done for upgrading UGG M. Were you involved at that time?

WG: Yes, when it was originally in the development stage, I was still in the union as a grain inspector, and I had been brought over there to help them with it—the design and what they should be doing. That was very interesting at that time because the superintendent there was Bob Devine, and the foreman was Bill Yahn. I was the grain inspector, and these two individuals were on their way to retirement, where I was just a young man at the time with new ideas how to do things, rather than just carrying on with the old ways.

NP: Can you pick one idea that would illustrate one of the new ideas, rather than the “old way”?

WG: In the car shed, it was all boxcars, and we had the opportunity to unload trucks there because there was no freight available, and there was a big premium on flax in Thunder Bay. They were trucking flax from the west into the elevator and dumping it in the car shed. Well, it wasn't set up for trucks, so it was quite a production to unload these trucks. We developed a system where we could drive the trucks through the shed across the hoppers, and just unload them when they were driving through. That was one of the things.

Another thing was the shed was built for boxcars, which were 40 feet long. But hopper cars were 50 feet long. Therefore, you could never unload the hopper cars in a string because they wouldn't fit over the hoppers. So what we did was we cut the floor and extended the hoppers, so we could unload four hoppers at one time rather than only two because they were all mismatched to the hoppers. It was just little things like that. And that was where we got our production from, when we were able to do these things.

NP: From an engineering perspective, was there a consulting firm that worked with UGG in doing that major overhaul?

WG: Most of the work was done with C.D. Howe. They were the main consultants in the grain industry at that time. That was Pritam Lamba, and the people that he works with now.

NP: Which engineers do you recall working with over the years?

WG: I recall working with Lamba, and Yves LeBrecque. There was Bill Reist. He always looked after the waterside of the elevator—the wharf and the pilings, those kinds of things. We dealt with him on a regular basis. There was Syd Halter, he was the manager of C.D. Howe back when I started, and I still talk to him occasionally. I can't recall all the names of the engineers but can visualize them. They have all passed on, unfortunately.

NP: I understand that company had a worldwide reputation.

WG: Yes, C.D. Howe did. It's hard to imagine a company of that size to just go away.

NP: You mentioned about other people moved out to BC. What was happening out there? Did UGG always have ownership of elevators out there?

WG: Yes, we always had one elevator in BC. What happened at that time was that their management out there was retiring, and we had excess people in Thunder Bay. We had been running on three shifts, 7 days a week, and then all of a sudden, we were down to one shift. We had a number of people that were surplus, so we sent some to Vancouver. They fit in out there quite well because they brought the philosophies of Thunder Bay to Vancouver. In Vancouver they had their own culture out there.

NP: Am I correct in thinking that an awful lot of the staff in Vancouver originally came from Thunder Bay?

WG: I understand quite a few people that ended up in Vancouver originally came from Thunder Bay. I couldn't say how many, but some of them, their families moved out there with them, and there was quite a bit of nepotism in that plant as well. That's just the way it was. And then the managers from Thunder Bay went out there and started running the plant.

NP: Did you ever consider moving out to Vancouver with the company?

WG: Well, originally in 1993 I had been asked to go to Vancouver, and that's when I said, "No, I'll stay in Thunder Bay and run it from Thunder Bay." It was the housing crisis. There was no way I could afford to buy a house in Vancouver with a young family.

NP: Moving from foreman then, you moved up through the system. Did you always see yourself moving up through the system? Did you have ambitions to move up through the system?

WG: I always had ambitions to be a foreman, but to go right through the system to being the manager, that just came through time. It wasn't my original goal when I started. My original goal was to be a foreman, and it just worked out. When I became the manager of the company, I went to work in an office, and I had never worked in an office environment, administrative office, with women. I had never worked with a woman before. And then here I am, in charge of an office, with 12 women all of a sudden! [Laughing]

NP: Do you feel comfortable, safe, talking about how you adjusted to that, and what adjustments were required?

WG: It was just the initial day, but it was a different situation to be put into. All of a sudden, after you're used to dealing with men all day long, every day, and you deal with men very gruffly, and all of a sudden you had to deal with women and their issues. But I have daughters and a wife, so it wasn't that hard.

NP: Twelve women! What positions were in that office?

WG: There were no computers back then when I originally went to the office. I believe computers were first used in the plant in 1984-85. I can still remember getting the first computer that they had ever had, and when I went to the office everything was basically manual grain accounting, payroll, everything was manual. Over the years it quickly changed and became computerized very quickly. All of a sudden, at the end of my tenure there, we had two women working in the office there, that's how much it changed over the years.

NP: Were the office staff responsible for co-ordination with the rail companies, or was that still done out of the plant?

WG: Yes, out of the plant. Under my tenure, I looked after the railways out of the administrative office on a higher level, where they dealt with it on an hourly level at the plant, on a daily and weekly level.

NP: During your tenure, did you see a large influx of women into the elevators?

WG: Yes, in the grain industry. The start of the women working in the elevator was probably during the period of the mid '80s, the first round. They came in through the Grain Commission. They worked with the Grain Commission in the elevators. We didn't have any working in the elevator for the elevator company.

We tried to bring women into the grain company, but we were downsizing, so it was an uphill battle. We had good intentions, but it just wasn't meant to be. We were always letting people go. As I said earlier, we found out we could run the plant with a lot

fewer people than we had, and that's just the way it was. Then we ended up taking on Manitoba Pool, where we got another bunch of employees. So we couldn't hire women again because we had all these employees. We never did get to hire any women. We had women on the list to hire. We went out and got applications and put them through their physicals and everything like that, but it just wasn't meant to be. We never got that busy. In Vancouver on the other hand, they had women working in the plant because there they were on the other side of the curve. The people were retiring, and we were replacing people, so we were able to put women into the plant.

NP: I understand from other interviews that have been done, women didn't necessarily have an easy time of it when they came.

WG: No, it was cultural. It was an industry that was a male-dominated industry, and so when women showed up there was a lot of resentment for them being there. Novelty, I guess, would be a good word to describe it. All of a sudden, you have women working alongside you, so it was a tough row for the first women that did show up in the elevator.

NP: Were there ever any issues that came up. What kinds of issues?

WG: Harassment. Harassment issues and things like that. There was one case that went all the way up to a high level to be decided. It was just the way it was. Women in an industry that was male dominated, a lot of men didn't like it.

NP: As a manager, how did you deal with that? I guess you didn't, or did you, because you said you didn't have any?

WG: Well, unfortunately we did have issues, as our employees dealing with the Grain Commission women. There was a harassment issue that crossed over. We became involved in it. That's the way it was, and you had to deal with it. Even though our corporate culture was such that we would respect women, you can't determine what people are going to do.

NP: What form did harassment take?

WG: The form it took was derogatory pictures, claiming derogatory pictures or whatever. It was never deemed to be such, but it did take a lot of time. It went right up to hearings in Winnipeg, and it was eventually settled.

NP: You were on the management committee that involved other elevators. Again, out of other interviews that we're doing, some stories come up, some of which people refused to have taped, where there were dangerous situations, as opposed to just the sexual harassment and making people uncomfortable. Was that anything that you were aware of?

WG: No, not that I'm aware of, not in our company at all. It may have, but not that I am aware of.

NP: No, not in your company. It's more of the grapevine, across the industry. There's sort of an undercurrent here that nobody is willing to speak of, at least not for the record. Moving on, you went from foreman to superintendent, so what changes did you see in your daily responsibilities, and the pluses and minuses?

WG: The way I always explained it to the employees I worked with is the manager, he looked after the month-to-month, the superintendent looked after the week-to-week, and the foreman looked after the hour-to-hour. You look after things by the hour when you're the foreman. The superintendent is going to decide what we were going to do for the week, and the manager is going to decide what you do for the month. If you think of business in those kind of time frames, that's how you did business. The time frame of what you were doing changed. The foreman, it was quick decisions, quick action. You had to deal with things immediately. As superintendent you had a little more time to think about things and plan things. It was more planning than reacting.

NP: Who did you replace when you moved up into the superintendent's position?

WG: Bob Antoniak. He was the superintendent. He became the general manager from 1984 to 1988. I took over from him.

NP: As the superintendent, was that at a particular elevator?

WG: That was at Elevator A or C, Current River.

NP: So then when you moved up to general manager you were responsible for all of those?

WG: Right.

NP: What challenges do you recall from that era, that piece of your career?

WG: The biggest challenge was the declining volumes and the change from running three shifts seven days a week to running five days a week with one shift. Doing the volumes that we did do, we increased the production rate. The bills are still the same. Your fixed costs are still the same, and to pay the bills from one shift rather than three shifts, it became a real struggle. That was the biggest challenge, to pay the bills using just one shift.

NP: I've heard people say that managing in tough times is really quite different than managing in good times.

WG: That's right. You have to be so cost-conscious of everything you do and come up with novel ideas of how to trim another little bit out of the system. It was truly a challenge. As I said, we were very fortunate though that we learned how to run our business with a lot fewer people. It was fortunate but unfortunate for the employees.

NP: Just hearing you say what you are saying makes me think this must have been a really disheartening time.

WG: Oh yes, it was very hard because people would keep asking, "When am I coming back to work?" And you'd know in the back of your mind that they're not coming back to work, ever. It's just a matter of time before you're going to be making out their severance cheque. But you would always be hoping that you're going to bring them back, and that the volumes would come back. But at the end of the day, it wasn't to be.

NP: Let's move up to when you took over as the general manager. How did that come about?

WG: That was another period of bad times in the grain industry. UGG had an early retirement plan, and they allowed retirement for a lot of people aged 58 and over. That was unheard of back in that era, to retire at that age. They did that to reduce their staffing. Bob Antoniak retired, and I took over from him at that time.

NP: Was that also the time you took over responsibility for the Vancouver office?

WG: No, that was in 1993, I took over that responsibility.

NP: So in that position, was that when you had a lot of contact with head office?

WG: Yes.

NP: You would have had a view of head office before you got into that position, and you would have a view of head office after you got in that position. What was your experience then?

WG: It changes your focus as to how you see things and how you manage. You're dealing with all different issues. You're dealing with people at one level, and then all of a sudden, you're dealing with administration at the next level. That became more of an administrative position, so it was quite a challenge.

NP: Mac Runciman headed up UGG at one point, sort of a classic from what I've heard. Did you ever meet the man?

WG: He was the head of UGG when I originally started there, and he left shortly after I became a manager there. Gerry Moore took his place, and that was the manager that I worked with. I didn't get to work with Mac Runciman at all. Everybody knew him, who he was, and what he had done.

NP: How did you like the shift of your focus from the operations to keeping the lid on, on both sides?

WG: It was a change. It's nice to work with people, and I enjoyed that. Then all of a sudden, you're an administrator. It's a completely different role. But that's where I was in my career and that's what I did.

NP: What happened with the company over that time?

WG: Over that time, we changed from a co-operative, and we became a publicly traded company. I think that was about 1991 or 1992. I'm not positive as to the year that happened. It was a different focus. Rather than to the farmer co-operative owners, now you focused to the shareholders, a little different orientation.

NP: In day-to-day work in Thunder Bay, how did that translate?

BG: It translated into a little more "bottom-line" orientation. It wasn't as loose as it was when it was a co-operative. When you're a co-operative, you have a whole different audience who own you. The farmers own you. All of a sudden, the shareholders own you. You're playing to a different drummer.

NP: Following an earlier theme, when the Thunder Bay elevator was around and there was the combination with Manitoba Pool Elevators, that must have all been happening around this time. Can you talk a little bit about that?

BG: I believe 1998, that Manitoba Pool, they were going to take over UGG, and that just wasn't meant to be. They headed down that road, and it didn't work out for them. A few years later, we ended up taking them over, and that's when we became Agricore United. It was a challenge, we had two elevators, A and M, and M elevator was only being utilized for non-Boards, a very small program. And all of a sudden, we acquired another elevator and the same small programs. It was quite a challenge. We ended up with another 100 employees that were no longer required. We had to look after them. We negotiated packages, a system of severing them, and that was a challenge in itself, looking after the employees and dealing with them fairly.

NP: How did that process actually work? Did you bring in consultants to help with that?

BG: No, as a matter of fact what happened there was myself and Murdoch McKay, who was the manager in Winnipeg. We sat down and worked out what we thought was a fair package. We took it to the union, and got buy-in from the union, and that's how it was handled.

NP: So to summarize, for physical plants, you had A or C—which is I guess when it became C—you had the Thunder Bay Elevator, UGG M, and then what did Manitoba Pool have open at the point when you bought them out?

BG: Pool 1.

NP: And that's the one beside UGG M?

BG: Yes, that's the S house now.

NP: So Manitoba Pool Elevators had shut down some of their other elevators, like the one on the Kam, before this happened?

BG: They had Pool 3, the one that is beside the ore dock. They had already shut that one down, and they were running their program through Pool 1.

NP: Farmers. We have a series of questions about other people outside the company that you had to coordinate with. What was your connection, philosophically or physically, with farmers?

BG: I had no direct actual dealings with farmers at all. That was all through our Winnipeg office. That was as close as I ever got to a farmer was through our Winnipeg office. They were our customers at the end of the day, rather than our owners. So as I say, we had to treat them fairly and keep them coming down the driveway. That's as much as I knew about them. That's not really what I dealt with.

NP: Had you ever visited a Prairie farm?

BG: Oh yes, when I was a teenager I worked on a farm in Alberta, on a grain farm, just for the one summer.

NP: How did you end up there?

BG: We had relatives in Alberta, so I ended up working on a grain farm, harvesting the grain in August.

NP: What were the highlights that you remember?

BG: I guess the highlights were we were 14 years old driving trucks! Nowadays, still 14 years old in Alberta and you can drive.

NP: Did that family ever visit here?

BG: No, not from the farm I was on.

NP: Farmers regularly came to Thunder Bay to tour the elevators and see what you guys were up to. Did you ever host tours?

BG: I was involved in some of the tours when they brought the farmers down, just as one of the guides. They stopped doing that by the time I became a manager. When I was a foreman, they would bring me along to take people on tours and things like that.

NP: Do you recall some of the reactions of the producers when they toured the plants?

BG: They didn't realize how big the plants were, that was the major thing that nearly everyone had that we put through the plant. They had no concept of how big they were from one end to the other, just the size.

NP: Magnificent size! The carriers, both rail and shipping, any remembrances about particular challenges or changes in having to deal with the grain coming and going out?

BG: The big thing was the size of the ships. They increased the size and wanted them out quicker. Everything was production oriented. Over the years, it changed considerably. The average size of the ship was probably 10,000 to 15,000 tonnes in the earlier years, but at the end, if a vessel wasn't 25,000 tonnes, don't show up! That's the way it was. And you had to load that ship in one day. That's what it was all about. They didn't want any ships sitting around because there wasn't that many ships in the system, and they had to turn them as quickly as possible. We were fortunate we had a very good plant, and we could turn a ship in a day.

NP: With the changes in the size of ships, did that have any impact on your docking facilities? Did they have to change over time?

BG: Fortunately, as I say, at UGG we had a great facility, and we didn't have to change anything at all. The only challenge we did have is we had to bring in a 1,000-foot iron ore ship one time, one of the 1,000 feet long and 100-foot-wide American ships. That was a challenge! The ship was so high, and the hatch covers were so small to get the spouts in. Well, we only did it the once!

NP: Was dredging necessary at any of the UGG plants, or were they lucky again to have slips that were deep enough?

BG: We had significant waters at A house. At M house, we did have some significant challenges there. We had to do some maintenance dredging there. What happened was that being it was a dual slip with Man Pool 1 on the one side and M on the other, the vessel movement in and out, their movement would move the silt around, so we had to do maintenance dredging quite often. Getting the permits to get to do it was a challenge for environmental reasons, and the costs were a challenge.

NP: Were there ever environmental issues related to the elevators?

BG: Not really. The issue was the dumping of the dredging material, where you had to put it into the containment over at Chippewa, and the cost of doing it. I don't think there was ever any problem with the actual material.

NP: Speaking of that, we were talking to somebody the other day about screenings, and pelletizing. How did that change over time with UGG?

BG: When I initially started at UGG, the pellets were made by Mailhot over on the river there. We trucked the screenings from M over to his place over on the river. He would make the pellets. Then again, if I am not mistaken, it was around 1984, A house built that large pellet mill, and we would truck the screenings from M house to that pellet mill. Then over the years, with the country cleaning the grain, we never had the material to make the amount of pellets that we once made. It went downhill real quick.

NP: So, the company did the screenings at the country elevator then, or was a separate company set up to accept the screenings from the cleaning on the Prairies?

BG: As I understood it, screenings from the country, they weren't the same kind of refuse screenings. They were a combined product of [No.] 1-feed screenings, mixed-feed oats, wheat heads. They didn't separate them out, and they sold them back to the farmers for feed. They would grind it up and make feed for the cattle. We would process the by-products, and we would have pure refuse, and that's what we made pellets of. We would sell the [No.] 1-feed screenings and the mixed-feed oats separately.

NP: So would that nose-dive in the pellet operation reflect on all the elevators across the waterfront?

BG: Yes.

NP: Lake Shipper's Clearance Association?

BG: Yes, they placed the vessels and decided who was to get the vessels, and that's the way it worked. They had a lot of authority as to the movement of the ships in the harbour, but they had to work for the Association at the end of the day. It all worked on percentages of what grain came into the port as to what left.

NP: They had to work for the Association, what does that mean?

BG: The Lakehead Elevator Association was who they worked for. They were a clearing house, but they also had a mandate to work with the Association.

NP: Who were the Association members?

BG: All the grain companies.

NP: They were like that Lakehead Elevator Association you were referring to earlier that did the management negotiations?

BG: Yes, on all the issues. It was an Association that dealt with all issues, Lake Shippers being one of them.

NP: So let me take a guess as to what a discussion with Lakehead Elevator Association would be like. "How come you guys are getting the ships when you want them, and we aren't?" [Laughs] Am I off base there?

BG: No, no problem. It was just like that. There were issues, no doubt about it. There were issues, favoritism or whatever you want to call it, but at the end of the day, it was all based on percentages. What came into the port had to go out. There were heated discussions over it. Maybe you got the last boat on the last day of the month rather than the first boat on the first day, but that's just the way it was. Hopefully you had a good rapport with them, and these issues weren't a problem.

NP: So the person who headed up the Lake Shipper's Clearance Association, would he have sat on the Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association meetings, or were they separate?

BG: They were two different organizations.

NP: I have a question about the boats that sit in the harbour now. Some of them sit for a long time. What's happening there?

BG: Well, it all depends on when they were contracted for. When you see salties at the Lakehead, they've come into the Seaway for some other reason. They brought a cargo of steel, a cargo somewhere. And they've been contracted in Thunder Bay as an empty vessel, and it may not be contracted until next week. So if I have the cargo available, I can load that boat this week. But if I don't have the cargo in Thunder Bay, if it's still in rail cars, I don't have to load the boat, and the boat has to sit and wait, and there's no charges to me because I didn't contract the boat until next week. So it's just the [inaudible] period that you have contracted the vessel for. People outside the industry often don't understand that part of the business. Where a grain boat, a freighter, it's due when it arrives because that's the way they're booked. Salties are booked individually, for a certain date.

NP: So if you're not ready to deal with the freighter, then that would have some cost implications for you.

BG: Yes, definitely, definitely. But that's usually Wheat Board grain, so they can go to multiple elevators to pick that grain up. A saltie is normally non-board grain, where I've contracted for that vessel, for non-board grain being, say canola. But if I don't have it in my building yet--. It's still coming from Saskatchewan. So I don't have to start the boat because once I start the boat, then I have to finish it.

NP: Complicated!

BG: Yes and no. If you know the rules. [Laughs] Every day was a learning experience! No two days were the same.

NP: Grain trimmers. They were not your own employees. What was your relationship like with them?

BG: They are a separate organization that loaded the vessels. They would be contacted by Lake Shippers, and they would show up to load the vessels when they arrived. That was just the way it was. We had a good rapport with them. They would use our equipment to load the vessel, so you hoped they would look after it. You always stayed on a good footing with them. Not much more I can say about those people. They were a good bunch of guys. Keep on the right side of them.

NP: It always helps to keep a good relationship with the people that you rely upon, right? You mentioned something about the Canadian Grain Commission. You were working in a parallel position with them as a grain inspector. As you moved up through

positions in the elevator where you were no longer doing grain inspections, what was your interaction with the Canadian Grain Commission? What worked well, what was more problematic?

BG: At the start, when you're a grain inspector, you're dealing with them on an hour-by-hour basis. When you become a manager, you're dealing with policy more than anything else, and changes. So I had a lot of dealings with the CGC at higher levels in my career on many, many issues, like automated sampling systems to the tolerances of the various grades of grain. Every year was a different issue, but we always dealt with them. We dealt with a lot of different people, locally and in Winnipeg. You had to have a good rapport with them. You had to have their ear.

NP: This may not be a fair question—and as the letter said you can decide whether to answer it or not—was the Grain Commission considered to be a necessary part of the system or was there varying opinions about them?

BG: Even within our own company, we had very strong views as to their need. Our Winnipeg office looked at them as a cost, where locally we looked at them as an insurance policy because if we did it right, we had this insurance policy that said we did it right. If they weren't there, if the customer didn't like what we sent them, we were accountable to the customer, where the CGC was accountable to the customer. Personally, I always wanted them there as a buffer because I never wanted to deal with a farmer who said I gave him the wrong grade for my grain. I never ever wanted to deal with that because my job is production, where our Winnipeg said that was just a cost. "We don't need to pay them. We can do it ourselves." It was just a philosophy of business. From my own personal standpoint, I always fought to keep the Grain Commission between me and the farmer and me and the customer. I always found value in it.

NP: There are changes in that system now, too. They were probably in the pipeline just as you were nearing retirement. I believe there were changes at the federal government level, where they were looking at cutting back on inspection services. Any comments from your perspective?

BG: Well, as I say, it's still the same issue. Winnipeg looks at it as a cost, whereas as an operator I looked on it as an insurance policy. As I said, I never ever wanted to deal with the farmer. What's happening now is more and more grain companies are handling their own grain. We originate the grain in the country. It goes through our facility and our facility deals with the farmer. They ship the grain to our elevators in Thunder Bay, and it's a pipeline. So really, is the Grain Commission needed halfway down the pipeline? We've already dealt with the farmer. We loaded the grain, and we don't know whose grain it is in the car now. Now they are going to grade our grain that we purchased? As I say, it's a completely different system. But if the grain goes to a different elevator, now it becomes a different issue because now you're dealing with my grain at your elevator. Maybe the Grain

Commission is required! So, sometimes they are required and sometimes they are not now, in the new order. It's different. Business is changing every day. As I said, no two days are the same!

NP: Another item is the Canadian Wheat Board and the interactions you might have had with them.

BG: Well, in my position, I was an operator. I always considered myself an operator. The Wheat Board has policymakers, and it had operators. I always dealt with operators, who had the same goal and that is to move the grain. We always got along very, very well.

NP: So what positions within the Wheat Board would you have been dealing with?

BG: I dealt with the logistic people from Winnipeg,

NP: Like Dennis Portman is a name that comes to mind.

BG: Yes, and Sharon Meikle. Those are the people I dealt with near the end. They were basically in the same position as I was. Their job was to get the grain to Thunder Bay, get it on the boat, and get some more grain here. We worked very well together. But at a different level, you have the policymakers. I didn't deal with them. They had a whole different view of how a business should be run.

NP: Ian, do you have anything to ask relative to what we have talked about there before we move into our generic questions? You've dealt really well with the changes and challenges that occurred in Thunder Bay over time. I'd like to ask some more general questions, and one of them is when you look back on your career, what are you most proud of?

BG: I guess the thing that I was most proud of was the implementation of employee education. As we mentioned earlier, we had a lot of immigrant workers working for us, and we inherited them when we took over other companies. We started training—computer training, literacy training. We worked with Confederation College to establish these programs for our employees. Those are the major things that I think that we should be really proud of that we helped our employees with, with this literacy training. That was early on in the learning curve.

Another one of the major things that I think we brought to Thunder Bay was modified work. Where that came from was I used to travel to Minneapolis for weekends. I heard about modified work, and we introduced modified work to our employees that were sick. But we couldn't introduce it on the WCB [Worker's Compensation Board] side because it was such that it wasn't even heard

of in Canada, or Ontario. We soldiered on with it with the union. We had a little bit of conflict with the union with the modified work program, and it finally came to Ontario when Mike Harris was here. We introduced him to modified work that we were using. I believe that's how modified work came into Ontario is through the programs that we had at UGG.

NP: Please explain what modified work is.

BG: Modified work was for injured workers or people that couldn't do their job to the normal extent. We would make accommodation to their needs to get them back to work rather than them being at home, collecting a lesser pay at home. We had a lot of struggles and a lot of conflict with the union on certain issues, but at the end of the day, we were successful in our program, and I believe that through our program that it ended up coming to WSIB in Ontario.

NP: When you say you had conflict with the union, what were their concerns?

BG: They believed a worker should stay at home until he's 100 percent and he could do the work that he was hired to do. If he could do anything less, he should be at home.

NP: The union's position was one thing. The employee's position was another. Was it variable depending on the individual?

BG: Yes, it was. Some employees saw this as the greatest thing, to get back to work as soon as possible. Others chose that they shouldn't have to come back to work until they were 100 percent. Like I said, it was a real challenge at the time, but we soldiered on, and we worked hard at it. When I left there, we still had the program in place.

NP: Going back to the first thing you were proud of, the training, I would think that served the employees well, especially in a downsizing situation, because they would have skills that were transferable.

BG: Well, as I say, a lot of the employees had never seen a computer. I mean we provide computer training, literacy training, so it helped us because we had started to computerize the elevator and the operation, the systems. We benefitted from it as well.

NP: Are there any specific, or even small, situations that are vivid memories as you think back—things that just pop into your mind as you think of your career?

BG: I guess that things that I really vividly remember are the consumption of alcohol in the elevator, at the early years when I started there. It was well known that that was just the way it was, and over the years it changed to zero. There was no tolerance at

all. We implemented programs for that as well. The same with smoking. Smoking was prevalent everywhere in the elevator. It went to zero tolerance and zero on the property, even. It was just a complete change.

NP: Were those changes brought in on your era, under your direction?

BG: Yes. Both were. The first person to be brought up on drinking charges when I was a foreman, I can still remember that. Nobody knew how to deal with it! Later on, with the smoking issues, it was the same. When we implemented no smoking, and people were found smoking in the building, how to deal with them. But we managed to deal with them, and at the end of the day, it was zero tolerance. That's the way it was. I believe that's the way it is now everywhere.

NP: So obviously those changes really make a difference to the people running the elevator now. They have a lot of problems gone!

BG: Yes, there are a lot of problems gone. As with everywhere else, the drug problems, those were there, and we had to deal with them. Like I said, we dealt with them.

NP: I wonder why drinking was such an issue. It wasn't exclusive to the elevator employees. Drinking on the job was such an expected behaviour.

BG: I think it was a culture. It was just accepted, and that's the way it was. But it became zero.

NP: Did the war have anything to do with that, do you think?

BG: I have no idea. Like I say, it was there when I arrived.

NP: And you weren't alone! That's come up in just about every interview. Do you think what you did contributed to Canada's reputation as a world-class grain deliverer?

BG: Well, I'd like to think that I didn't hurt it! [Laughs] I don't know if I contributed because the customer was the guy we had to satisfy all the time. Whatever his expectations were, that became our goal. So I can't say I improved a whole lot of it, but I can say I never hurt it!

NP: Would you agree that Canada has a pretty decent reputation for delivering what they promise?

BG: Well, with the Canadian Grain Commission as the insurance policy to guarantee that what we deliver what we say we're going to deliver, I believe we have a great reputation in the world as suppliers of grain. The biggest thing is to always remember who your customer is, and it's not a one-time deal. You need him next week as well as this week. I always tried to explain that to the people working for us, that you cannot do anything that would harm that customer in the future. We've got to keep him every day.

NP: Did you ever meet your customers?

BG: Not directly. We had agents for the customers come and watch the vessel being loaded, but the actual customer, whoever he was, never showed up. [Laughs]

NP: As you know, we're working on trying to preserve Thunder Bay's important place in the growth of Canada as a grain-trading nation, and preserving as much as we can of that industry's history in Thunder Bay. What do you think is important for us to focus on in attempting to do this?

BG: Well, I think the change aspect of it, where we started from and where we are, and how it changed. What are the issues that caused this change? Those are the things that are important. People will realize it wasn't the customers that changed the system. Government, what they did, changed the system. It is still changing the system by what they are doing. It's not what the customer is doing.

NP: Explain a little bit more about what the government is doing that is changing the system.

BG: I feel the Wheat Board, and what they are doing, and their involvement in the movement of grain in Canada is tantamount to being criminal. They have so much control, but they have no investment. The people in Winnipeg are government people, and their decisions that they make have no ramifications on them personally. Their decisions have ramifications against every grain company, who have the investments in these terminals.

NP: Can you give an example? My understanding of the Wheat Board is that their business starts with selling, and they sell to customers, and customers have changed over time.

BG: Their role as seller of grain, I don't have a problem with their selling of the grain. Their directing of the grain, and where it goes, to which terminal, and at what cost, not only into Thunder Bay but down into the river, it doesn't seem right to me. They are

not accountable to anybody. We can load the grain in the country, a UGG terminal. It comes to Thunder Bay, and they decide which elevator it will go to. With the Grain Commission, they wouldn't be required if that grain came to a UGG terminal because we loaded it and we would have to accept it. But if it goes to Viterra or Mission, we need the Grain Commission in there to guarantee the grade. That's what they are doing right now, they're directing the grain into the port, and they're directing the grain out of the port.

NP: And right now, there's excess capacity. That really does make a difference as to where it goes.

BG: And we're building more capacity at Mission. It just doesn't make any sense at all, what we're doing here.

NP: You also talk about it going down into the river--.

BG: It's the same thing, they direct which elevator on the river it goes to, so if somebody has an interest in a certain elevator, and they are directing it to it--.

NP: Has there ever been any discussion as to reasoning?

BG: Oh, I believe there is at a different level, a lot of discussions. [Laughs] But like I say, they just have too much power—too much power and no money on the table.

NP: When you say, "No money on the table," how does that come to be? What do you mean by that?

BG: The grain companies, the grain industry, own the infrastructure, where this government agency controls it. How it's being used.

NP: My understanding is that the Wheat Board is a farmer-owned and operated group, with a Board that has government representatives on it.

BG: No, it's an agency of the government, which has elected officials on their Board, which may or may not be farmers from different regions. But it is not owned by the farmers.

NP: So, the suggestion of focusing in on where we started, where we went, and where we are. Are there any other things that you think should be a focus of celebrating the port? Not just past, but present too.

BG: The actual history of what a terminal was, how it evolved into the terminal of today with its automation, but also the events that caused these changes. What are the benchmarks, what caused this to happen? It just didn't happen because. Something had to cause these things—significant events. If you can nail down where were these significant events that caused these changes? There are a number of them that really changed this industry.

NP: And not well understood locally.

BG: Exactly.

NP: Are there any questions we didn't ask that we should have asked you?

BG: I'll probably think of something after! [Laughs]

NP: Well, this is open-ended. We can always come back at another time! You have given us some beautiful pictures from your albums. Do you have any other memorabilia that you've collected over the years that we should know about, even though you have no intention of ever letting go of it?

BG: No, as I said, I left on short notice, so there was not much I gathered up. What was left behind, I don't know what was done with it.

NP: So it could still be there at the office?

BG: Well, they closed the office, and I understand they shredded everything out of the office. They brought a truck in, and they just shredded everything. I just hope they didn't shred all the pictures, because we had albums of pictures and things. I'd have to make a few phone calls to find out if they did or what they did.

NP: Would you do that for us please?

ID: I have a very small question. Can you go back to your first week as an 18-year-old guy, and it's payday. What would it have been like?

BG: When I started, I was probably making \$1.67 an hour, and I can still remember getting my first paycheque, and I said, "If I ever made \$100 a week, I think I'd have the world by the tail!" So let's see, at \$1.67 an hour, that's about \$60 a week you were making, and I figured if I ever made \$100, I'd have it made!

NP: Any other people we should interview? Are any of the people you mentioned still around?

BG: I said Murdoch McKay. He comes to Thunder Bay occasionally. He's in Winnipeg. He's very knowledgeable about everything, and he's still right up on top of it. And as I said, his dad was the manager before him.

NP: And his dad before him! Any others, such as colleagues in the same age group?

BG: How about Brian Storry? He was from the Grain Commission. He's very knowledgeable about everything and everybody!

NP: Just keep that in mind.

BG: I don't know how many you have already contacted. I could name off 100, but you've probably interviewed most of them! Bob McKinnon from Sask Wheat Pool. He used to be the manager. Jerry Speers, he was the manager at Manitoba Pool.

NP: I think he said no.

BG: Brian Mallon, he was the MPE manager after Jerry Speers, so he might have some insight.

NP: Yes, we are moving into the younger guys like you now from John Mallon. [Laughs]

BG: There was Dino Burella, he was with the GTA [Grain Transportation Association] when it was here. And there's Tony Kaplanis.

NP: Thank you so much.

BG: And there's Jack Robertson, from the Grain Commission. It was very valuable information.

End of interview.

