

Narrator: Edith Halverson (EH)

Narrator: Alan Halverson (AH)

Company Affiliations: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Reliance Grain Company, Fort William Elevator Company, United Grain Growers

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Summary: Wife, daughter-in-law, and mother of grain handlers Edith Halverson and her son Alan Halverson discuss the Halverson family's connection to Thunder Bay's grain trade. Edith begins by sharing the story of her husband Bill's father and grandfather's immigration to Canada from Norway and their work in various grain elevators. She recounts the story of her husband saving a piece of carved wood from the Empire Elevator before its disaster, and she relates other items her husband made from wood salvaged from the elevator operations. Alan describes his work unloading railcars on boxcar dumpers and other tasks like bin diving, brakeman, and sampling. He also shares stories of some unsafe work situations he witnessed or heard of before health and safety became a concern in the workplace. Edith shares more stories she heard from Bill about his colleagues, about his time as secretary of the grain handlers' union, and about a family trip to Norway. Other topics discussed include artifacts from her father-in-law's immigration to Norway, alcohol use among grain trimmers, and Alan's brief time as a programmer for United Grain Growers' Winnipeg office.

Keywords: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; Reliance Grain Company; Fort William Elevator Company; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Grain handlers; Electricians; Grain elevator disasters; Empire Elevator fire; Grain car doors; Boxcar dumpers; Railcar unloading; Boxcar shovelling; Car shed; Bin diving; Grain elevators—equipment and supplies; Labour unions; Health & safety; Alcohol use; Grain trimmers; United Grain Growers; Immigrant workers

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: All right, we're ready to go after a little bit of tweaking the technology here. Today's interview, which is on June 24, 2014, we have a double bill. The interview is taking place on Syndicate Avenue at the home of our narrators. I'm going to have them introduce themselves, so that we have them saying their names on tape.

EH: Edith Halverson.

AH: Alan Halverson.

NP: Edith, if you would just mention your connection to the grain trade because it's a little bit special here. You didn't yourself work in the elevators.

EH: I did not. [Laughing] I did not work in the elevators. I'm the mother of the sons and the husband and the father-in-law and the great grandfather.

NP: Who all worked in the trade?

EH: All worked in the trade.

NP: And Alan, you did work in the elevators, and just give us a brief summary of your work there.

AH: I worked there from 1980 to 1984. It was summer employment, and it was a nice job.

NP: Good. So, Edie, we're going to go back to the early history of your husband's family, but first of all, introduce your husband who passed away in 2001.

EH: My husband, Bill Halverson, he started his career in the elevator business at the Reliance elevator. I can't really say what he did there—just general work, I guess, at that time. Then the elevator was sold, and he went to the Fort William Elevator Company, and there he worked just general work for a year. Then he learnt the electrical trade, and he worked there for many years. That's where he ended. Well, then he went with the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool when they bought the elevator, but that time he still worked as an electrician. He took some time off at one time to work for the union, elevator union. Then he went back to Saskatchewan Wheat Pool again at Pool E. That's where he finished his career at the elevators, and that was due to a heart attack that he had had. When he went back to work, they gave him shiftwork to work, 4:00 to 12:00, and he couldn't do that, so he got another job.

NP: He retired from that job and went onto another job with the School Board, I think you told me another time.

EH: Right, right. Yes. And he worked for the School Board for 18 years then.

NP: Now, Bill's family had a long history in the industry. What do you recall about that?

EH: Well, I don't recall this, it was just from what I was told over the years. His grandfather was Hans Christian Halverson, and he came from Norway. I forget which year it was that he got here. He worked for many years at the Elevator D, and he was quite a—as I understand—quite a figure. He used to—. On Saturday night they would come in and say, "Everybody to work on Sunday." He said, "Not me!" He said, "I'm a religious man and," he said, "I take Sundays off." But Monday morning he'd go back to work again.

NP: They'd call him back?

EH: They'd call him back to work, yeah.

NP: So, when you say he was quite a figure, what--? Was he still alive when you and Bill--?

EH: I never knew him. Bill never knew him either. He died in 1922. He lived at 214 Herron Street. That's where he came when he came from Norway, and that's where he died.

NP: So, that was Bill's grandfather?

EH: Bill's grandfather, yeah.

NP: So, what about his dad?

EH: Well, his dad, I don't know when it was that he went to work, but he went to work at the Reliance. He worked there for many years, and then it was sold to the Fort William Elevator Company. They've bought the Fort William Elevator Company, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. He also worked at the Empire Elevator. I'm not sure what he did at the Empire, but when he went to E and F, at E he was the foreman.

[0:05:04]

I'll tell you a little story of when he worked at the Reliance. They had a big snowstorm, and he went to work no matter what. So, he walked all the way from Herron Street to the Reliance Grain Company for his day's job. When he got there, there was a notice saying they weren't going to work that day. So, he turned around and walked back to Herron Street.

NP: Can you estimate about how far that would be?

EH: Gee, I haven't any idea. Do you?

NP: Two or three miles, probably?

AH: Oh yeah, for sure.

EH: Oh yeah, or farther. Or farther, I would think, yeah.

NP: Those were the hardy pioneers.

EH: Yeah. Oh yeah. He had to work. He had to work.

NP: So, let me get this straight then. We have Bill's grandfather, and he started out at Elevator D?

EH: No, he started out with--. Yeah, Elevator D, I'm sorry. Yes.

NP: With Elevator D. Then moved to--?

EH: He stayed there.

NP: He stayed there. But it's his initials that are carved at the Empire elevator?

EH: No, it's Bill's dad's.

NP: Bill's dad's, okay. So, what was the grandfather's name? Do you know?

EH: Oh, his name was Hans.

NP: As well?

EH: Yeah.

NP: Just to confuse matters.

EH: Just Hans.

NP: Oh, okay.

EH: Just Hans, yeah.

NP: And then the father of your husband was Hans Christian?

EH: Hans Christian.

NP: And thank goodness they didn't call Bill Hans. Or did they?

EH: Oh, they called him William Hans. [Laughing] Got to get the Hans in there.

NP: Okay. So, the grandfather then, now he--. I'm just trying to think because I took down some information before we started chatting on tape. Hans Christian was born in 1893, so his father, Hans, would have been born at least 20 years before that, right?

EH: 187--. Yeah.

NP: About 1873?

EH: 1874.

NP: Okay. Yeah, that's about right.

EH: No, I'm telling the story there.

NP: Okay. I'll put you on pause here for a moment. **[Audio pauses]** Back. Okay, now we've done a little bit of searching to find out who was born when. Determining that Hans Sr.—which is what we'll call him now as opposed to Hans Christian—was born in 1851. Do you have any idea when they came to Thunder Bay? Oh, back to the records.

EH: No, just that they came. Not really. Just that they went to 214 Herron Street.

NP: Okay. That's easy enough to track down, especially with an address, because--.

EH: And they had seven children.

AH: I believe he was a carpenter on the boat when they came across.

NP: Okay. So, he may have even been involved in building some of the elevators then.

EH: Could have. Could have.

NP: Yeah. Because the Reliance, I think, was built either the late 1910s or 1920s, so. He would have been here for a while. Was Hans Christian born here?

EH: No, he was born in Norway.

NP: Okay. So, we know they came over after 1893.

EH: Yeah, yeah.

NP: And probably in the 1910s when an awful lot of people came over.

EH: The first child here that is registered that was born 1879. Now I don't know whether he was born in Canada or whether he was born in Norway.

NP: Well, if you said Hans Christian was born in 1893, and he was born in Norway, then they moved here after he was born.

EH: Yeah, oh yeah, that's right. And they were married in 1879.

NP: Right. Good. So, we have a photograph that I've taken of a special memento that your family has. Before I forget to ask you, maybe you could tell me about the story that goes behind this piece of wood.

EH: Well, apparently, they were going to tear down the Empire Elevator where my father-in-law worked. My husband was down there one day working, and he seen on one of the pillars his father's initials carved into it—the HCH. So, with a pen—or a knife rather—he cut it out of the piece of wood there. He brought it home and he's laid it into a little thing with the temperature and the humidity, all those things. So, we have that sitting on the [inaudible]. But when Bill cut this out, he took a picture of the elevator. Well, lo and behold, it wasn't long after that the elevator burnt. He had taken the pictures into the studio to be developed, and they informed him that they had lost it. So, he never did get a picture of the elevator in colour, but he did find one in black and white at the library.

[0:11:06]

NP: Ah, so this is the one we have here, which is loose. I'm just going to read what's on the back of it because I didn't take a picture of that. It says: "Hans Halverson's initials carved on 4 Shipper leg casing while he worked there. About 1915 and 1916." Okay. "Pool #12 workhouse burned to the ground November 6, 1970. Fire started at approximately 4:45 PM." Good. I would never have known what was written there five years ago before this project. But shipper leg, I even know what that is!

EH: I have no idea. Do you know what a shipper leg is?

AH: No, I don't.

EH: No, you don't, eh?

NP: You know how they--?

AH: Oh, actually I do.

NP: So, Al, would you like to tell us?

AH: It's when they throw out, I guess, they call it a leg. What it is is a band of buckets on a belt, and they lower it into the boat. They turn it on, and the buckets pick up the grain to take the grain out of the boat, and they throw it back into the elevator.

NP: I think probably this is the reverse one, being a shipper. Although many of them had an offloading leg at the time so that you could offload grain here. Very few elevators now, if any, have that capability to take off the ship.

AH: Yeah, there's a couple that still are out there. The ocean ones, they still have them from what I've seen. But basically, a leg is a contained unit. It has a belt with wheels that makes the belt go around, and there's metal buckets attached to the belt which will move the grain up and dump it onto a transfer belt.

EH: Are we talking now?

NP: Yes, we're talking. [Laughing]

EH: Oh, okay. Something else I'd like to tell you about my husband. When he worked at the elevators, they had pallets that they used to throw away all the time that used to close up the train's door. He used to bring them home, and out of this he used to take it and smooth it all down and whatever. When our first son was born, he made his crib. That crib went through to Luann, our second one, and it went through to Alan, our third one, and then we lent it to somebody--. Oh, I know. Because Alan and Luann was here at the same time, so we borrowed a crib from the Marks', if you please, and that's where the crib ended up. I think we lent it to somebody else. It was being delivered to some place way out by Kakabeka, and it fell off the car and smashed on the road. So, that was the end of it.

NP: Oh, I'm so disappointed to hear that because one of our special features is what happens to grain car doors, and that is a very special story.

EH: Yeah, there was many things in our home that he had carved out of the doors.

NP: Well, tell me more about what you remember which ones are.

EH: Well, I have--.

AH: Actually that, I don't know what you would call it--.

NP: The frame?

AH: The frame. The initials on that—I don't know what you would call that—it's got a temperature gauge, humidity--.

NP: Humidity and maybe a barometer?

AH: Barometer. Those are from the grain doors. On the outside, they're holding the barometer and stuff. The initialed piece of wood there is off a main beam in the elevator that he chiseled out, one of the main portable straight beams that they had in the elevator. And I'm not sure where the bottom piece came from, but I know that the grain doors are on the outside of that there.

[0:15:37]

NP: When I first thought about grain doors, I thought like how you get some really rough lumber at bargain prices, but this is very lovely wood.

EH: Yeah, no, it was beautiful wood. I have a magazine rack that Bill built out of wood too, but I can't think of anything else right now. I have the magazine rack.

AH: He did lots, eh?

EH: Yeah.

AH: And this book here is Hans' schoolbook for when he first came across. Everybody on the boat had to learn to drive the boat because the boat belonged to the Queen. I shouldn't say boat, it was a ship. It's just like the ones you see in the movies, the big 1800s--.

NP: Do you know what ship he came across on?

AH: No idea at all, but in this book here is all--. It's his schoolbook on navigation and how to steer and command a boat. You don't have no questions in here, but all the answers are. This is all done with pen and quill, like you dip the ink in, and this is how--.

NP: That is beautiful.

AH: You can take a shot of that one.

NP: Oh my god!

AH: And that is just--.

NP: Points of the compass, I guess. Is that what that is?

AH: Yes, yes. This is his school--.

NP: I'm going to take a close-up of that too, Alan.

AH: Okay. This is his only schoolbook that he had.

NP: It doesn't have a date there, does it? In the front of it?

AH: On the front it is, yes, actually. It says on there: "Hans Halverson. Owen Sound. January 1894."

EH: There. That tells you where he went and when he did come.

AH: When he first landed in Canada.

NP: I'm going to take a close-up picture of that too. You guys are a wealth of really good stuff. I'm so pleased that you have taken such good care of this stuff.

AH: I honestly think this should go down in a ship museum someplace. This book here.

NP: Well, actually it should go to our museum. [Laughing]

AH: It's better there than where it may end up because people won't know what it is.

NP: Exactly.

AH: I mean even Luann my sister, I don't even know if she knows what it is. The only reason I know is I spent a lot of time with my father working in his woodshop in the basement all the time, or in the garage. His father's father played with wood, was a carpenter, and his father was—my father was—played with wood. And I was a carpenter when I was younger. I used to build houses and stuff as well. So, there was always a wood presence.

NP: In the Halversons.

AH: In the Halverson family. The boys anyways.

EH: And you have built lots of things at home here.

AH: I built toys and stuff.

NP: Now, since we were talking about grain doors, and you, Alan, worked at the elevators in the car shed--.

AH: Yeah. 7A and B.

NP: So, would you know what happened to grain doors, other than being made into cribs? I think that's a fantastic story.

AH: Well, I've known some of the senior men that worked at the elevators. They used to take the grain doors, the used ones, and bring them home and use them for siding on their garages and houses. Now, these doors were going to go in the garbage anyways because once they were--.

EH: It's okay. It's okay, Nancy. I can make it.

AH: Once they were cracked, they couldn't use them. But the lengths were there. They were still 10 feet long.

NP: Really?

AH: So, a lot of them, they would just burn them or get rid of them or wherever. Dump them. They wouldn't even sell them. And through the years, when I was working there, they still had grain doors back then, but tanker cars started moving in at the same

time. So, the grain doors were becoming obsolete. Now, when someone thinks a grain door, it's not really a door. Okay. What they did is they put a piece of wood on the top and on the bottom of the opening of the boxcar.

[0:20:33]

NP: What would be the dimensions of that wood? Even just an estimate.

AH: It was rough lumber, maybe an inch and a half thick by about ten inches wide, and about 10 feet long. Some of it could have been longer because it wasn't exact lengths, but all of it had to be at minimum 10 feet to get across the door. What they would do is, like I said, they would put a piece of wood on the top, a piece of wood on the bottom, and then they'd use cardboard. They'd fold the cardboard over the wood and staple it or nail it with box nails. Then they'd load the grain into it up to the top, and then they'd ship it to Thunder Bay. When it arrived in Thunder Bay, they'd put it into what they called a dumper. It would grab the boxcar from each side, and they'd rock it back and forth. As they're doing this, they slide a metal tongue into the boxcar and it would break the cardboard, and the grain would come out. They had two tongues—one on the left and one on the right—so every time the boxcar was lifted and dumped sideways, they'd put in the different tongue and the grain would come out of the tongue. There would be nothing left inside of the boxcar, other than maybe a couple shovelfuls of grain when it was done.

EH: Wasn't there a man that used to have to go into the boxcar and clean it out?

AH: Yeah. There was a guy that worked for the CP [Canadian Pacific Railway] and that's what they did. After the car was pulled out, the CP employees would knock the wood down and the cardboard down, wrap it up, and just throw it in a pile, and it would end up in the garbage.

NP: Now, I understood with the railways, there was a boxcar door department that would actually come around and pick up some of this wood too.

AH: Yes, yeah. If the wood was still good and didn't break or wasn't cracked, they'd reuse it. But if it had a crack in it going widthwise, they couldn't use it because it wouldn't hold. So, they just used new stuff all the time. While I was working there in the '80s, there was very few that were refilled or reused when they were shipping them back or out because they just used the tanker cars at that point.

NP: Yeah. So, it wouldn't be worth having a whole department for the few number of boxcars that were still operating. Now, the dumper. So, this was at Saskatchewan?

AH: Yeah. 7A and 7B. Yes.

NP: Not every operation had a dumper.

AH: No. 7A had five of them. They had five tracks and five dumpers. 7B, which was right beside it, and it was connected with a transfer belt for the grain, just did tankers—opening the bottom of the tankers and dumping—because they didn't have the equipment, the shaking machines, the dumpers. But in the old days, from what I was told—and I actually worked on a boat when they put the wrong grain on a boat—and I had to go and help remove the grain. In the old days, they used to have a piece of wood that was about 5 feet long, 4 feet tall, and it had two handles on the top, and the rope was attached to the bottom of this piece of plywood. They'd pull it into the boxcar, and when the rope hit to the end, it clicked a switch and would start pulling back, just like a spring. You'd pull it out so far and it automatically started pulling back in again. What your job was to do was to grab it, carry it as quick as you can in, jam it into the grain, and then it'd click, and then it would pull the grain out with this wooden--.

[0:25:15]

NP: They called it a shovel.

AH: Shovel, exactly. But it was more like it was just a piece of plywood.

NP: Plank.

AH: Yeah, plywood. And it used to go--. It was so quick, and it was very dangerous. You had to be behind the wood because if you were in front, the thing had no mercy. It would just run you over. If it clicked, it could run you over. I heard of—I actually met—one man, Stan Pressenger was his name, and he worked at 7B when I was working there. He had a pegleg because years before that's how they emptied the tankers—I mean the boxcars. The cable wrapped around his leg. When he was pulling it back, he stepped in the loop of the cable, and it clicked, and it cut his leg off right away. Of course, they saved his life and put a little stump of wood on his bottom of his leg. But he worked there until his retiring days. He was never mad that he lost his leg or anything. It was just part of the job.

NP: It was a very interesting group of people, the generation even before your husband Bill. Their work ethic was very ingrained, would you say?

AH: Oh, yes. Definitely.

NP: Well, the story you told about Hans Christian walking--.

EH: Walking to and from work.

AH: It's different from nowadays. When you go to a job in the elevators nowadays, they've got so much protection and security that you won't get hurt compared to the old days, for sure. Lots.

NP: My husband, Ron, his great uncle died in an elevator accident. I think he got hit by some rope or something that came loose. You know, there's quite a history of dangerous work in the elevators.

AH: Very, very. Even when I was there in the '80s it was still very dangerous.

NP: What would you say would be the dangerous parts of--?

AH: Oh, jeez!

NP: And people would take chances.

AH: Oh, yeah. And they wouldn't even think about it, about doing it. One job was bin diving, is where they had to go down in a cage on the end of a rope. You're at the top of the elevator and they lower you into the top of the bin. Then you go down the bin, and you have to swing back and forth and pick the grain that was stuck on the walls of the bins out, and it would fall to the ground. Now, I don't know if they still do that today, but then it was just a cable. If anything happened you would have fallen right to the ground and out the bottom onto a belt, and that would have been it.

NP: Did you ever have to do that job?

AH: Bin diving? Oh, yes. I loved it. [Laughing] Why? Okay. Believe it or not, they give you a list of three bins. They would never let you have to do more than three bins in a day. If you got all three bins done, when you were finished you could go home. So, like if you worked your butt off and cleaned them out, you could go home at noon and get paid for your whole day. But that was your week job. You wouldn't do it more than one week in a row. They'd give you that for a week and then they'd get someone else doing that job. It's just dusty in there and everything else. So, if you have this pole, and you hit the concrete and a spark came

up, it would actually start a fire. It would blow up on you in there. So, you had to be careful how you scraped the walls when you went down.

NP: What kind of pole did you use? Was it metal or wood?

AH: It was a metal pole. Metal pole.

NP: Normally they tried to avoid metal things.

AH: That's right. They had wooden ones, and it wouldn't work. They needed something that you could get in there. They trained you not to sit there and jab it. You actually just pushed on it and pushed it down, so you weren't making a spark.

[0:30:05]

NP: So, how did you learn to do this? Was there some guy who taught you?

AH: Yeah. They give us a training course.

NP: Do you remember who was sort of the head?

AH: Oh, gosh. I can't think of his name. No.

EH: He will, probably in the middle of the night.

NP: Yeah. [Laughing] I know. I can't remember people I worked with years ago.

AH: No, I can't.

NP: It amazes me when people can. Now, you were a brakeman as well, and that wasn't without its hazards.

AH: Oh, yes. What a brakeman would do is after they emptied a tanker or a boxcar, they'd push it out. And how they pushed it out is they have this large cable with a hook on the end of it, and they hook it onto the tanker or the boxcar. Then they have a winch. Then it would reel in the cable and push the car out the car shed door. There's a grade away from the elevator, so the boxcar

would naturally—just the weight of it—would take it out on its own after you got it off the flat surface. A lot of times the brakes didn't work on these things, or you had box men for CP sitting on the railway ties at nighttime.

NP: Why?

AH: They were sitting there waiting to go empty the box, the boxcar doors—clean up the boxcars. On one occasion myself, sometimes they actually push these boxcars and tankers out without any brakemen on them because they had five or six empty ones already there with full brakes. So, when they'd hit, they'd only move an inch or so. This one day when I was working—I was working 4:00 to 12:00s—and it was dusk out, and we had a lot of lights on at night. They pushed this boxcar out. As the boxcar was going down, it was picking up speed, and I noticed that there was two guys sitting on the railroad tracks that worked for CP to clean the boxcars out of the grain doors and the cardboard. They couldn't hear you yelling at them because they were so far away, and the noise of the elevator was just deafening.

So, here I am. I'm racing after this boxcar, caught it, stopped it, braked it, and I stopped it within 30 yards of these guys. I went and gave them hell for sitting on there. I told them what happened. So, they never sat on them after that again because it would have crushed them dead. On more than one occasion, a boxcar or a tanker had slipped out of the yard, and it goes wild down the train tracks until it hits something—another train or car, whatever. But that didn't happen very often. It only happened twice in the four years that I was working there, where they got away.

EH: If I may say, I'm glad I didn't know this 50 years ago. Thank you, Alan. [Laughing]

AH: The thing about when I worked there is every week was different. Where the job that I have is one week I'd be emptying boxcars or tankers, next week I'm bin diving, the following week I'm a transfer man—testing grain on the boat, making sure it's all the right grain going on there. One time I actually caught them throwing the wrong grain on the boat. They shut it down right away, and then they had to back the boat out to a leg that came out from the elevator onto the boat. Because I found it, they sent me onto the boat, and I had to use the old method of the board—that was 5 feet across with a cable on the bottom—and they put the leg into the grain. They manually turned it on for that, so I was in no danger in doing it. You just held onto the top and it was like a little slide, you know? And you push, pull the grain to it, and you'd empty the wrong grain that was on there. Then they move it back up and fill her back up again.

NP: We've interviewed a few people who, like you, spent a lot of their summers working in the elevators. Some of whom went on to continue to work in the elevators, and others that decided, "Nah, I think I'd rather go back to school and do something different." But most of them did start in the track shed, and many of them were unlucky enough to be in what they would call a

shovel house. And they were old enough that it was boxcars more so than hopper cars. But they talk about just how physically demanding that work was.

[0:35:32]

AH: Yes. Upper body strength for sure.

NP: So, if you think back to your first days on the job, what were your first impressions of being in an elevator? Or did your dad use to take you to the elevator when you were young?

AH: Well, yeah. He used to take me on occasions. When I was, I don't know, I think I was about 8 or 9 years old, they were going to tear down an elevator where Great Lakes Paper is right now. Now, I can't remember the name of the elevator or why--.

NP: There were two there, so let me tell two names and see if you glom onto either. One was called the Electric, and I think it became, maybe, Lakeland. There was one called Purvis.

AH: Honest truth, I couldn't tell you.

NP: Then there was the Northwestern, and it may have been Federal at one point. Were there two elevators there at the time or just one left?

AH: Just the one that I see. It would have been the last one that was coming down. My father and a couple gentlemen he worked with got a contract to strip copper out of the salvage—copper out of the elevator. Monday to Friday when they did this—they did this because they were laid off at the time—Monday to Friday they worked there, and they'd strip and split the money. But if you went on a Saturday or on Sunday, and you worked and stripped that copper out of there, it was yours to take home. My father, he went on Saturday and occasional Sunday, but I don't remember too many Sundays that he went there. I think mostly on the Sundays it was just to pick up the boxes from Saturday. But he used to bring it home, and he actually built an addition to his garage and filled it with scrap copper from that elevator. And I'm talking cables that were, oh, the size of a big plate round. He had it chopped into about 18-inch lengths, and these things weighed 50 pounds, easily. He used to keep them in the shed, and it was his beer money. [Laughing]

NP: So, that's why, Edith, you were shaking your head as if you didn't know what was going on here.

EH: Yeah, yeah. [Laughing]

AH: Yeah. And like on Saturday and Sunday he would take what he could that he salvaged, and he stocked it away. He had free beer for, oh god, 15 years.

NP: Who would he sell it to?

AH: The scrapyard.

NP: And if he were around now and they were doing that, he'd be a rich man.

AH: Yes, yes. For sure.

NP: And you thought Alan wasn't paying any attention, eh?

EH: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

NP: Alan was out there picking up the clues on how to make beer money, and--. [Laughing]

AH: That was the thing, eh? Even back then, no one threw away nothing.

EH: No.

AH: Everything was saved and used for something or something else. When I started my career at Sask Pool, my father was already out of Sask Pool. He had to take an early retirement, health reasons. I ran into his friends that he worked with on that job where he salvaged all that copper.

EH: Superior. Superior, wasn't it? Superior Elevator?

NP: Well, if it was Superior then it wasn't near the Great Lakes.

AH: No, it was Great Lakes, right next to Great Lakes.

NP: Yeah, right next to the Great Lakes?

AH: I could tell you, show you.

NP: Now, Superior was another elevator that's right beside the one--. It was Elevator E.

EH: Oh, okay.

NP: That was bought by--.

EH: Well, E was close to F though.

NP: Right beside it.

EH: Yeah.

NP: And they just changed the name.

EH: No, that wasn't the elevator. Scratch all that. [Laughing]

AH: So, the two gentlemen that I met when I was working, they were millwrights at 7B. When I worked there, I didn't want any special treatment, so I never mentioned my last name to nobody while I worked there. I just wanted to work, make my own name, and everything. Then these millwrights found out who I was, well, they just started talking about the old days all the time—about how they did this and that.

[0:40:31]

NP: Do you remember any of those stories stick in your mind?

AH: Basically, the stuff I was already talking about there, about a guy losing his leg here, another guy there.

NP: What kind of—how can I put this?—what kind of chances, or stupid things, did people do while you were working? Other than sitting on railway tracks with moving cars close by.

AH: Well, stupid would be standing out when they're yanking a boxcar. When they yanked out a boxcar, they'd throw a hook on it with this cable, and the cable itself would pull it out. Well, a lot of people just stood near the cable, you know, as it's going. They're hooking it at the back end, so you've got about 75 feet of cable. On more than one occasion, myself, I've seen it break with all the force. The cable was very thick, and you could hear it pop. You knew exactly what it was as soon as you heard it pop. Then you could hear that *whoosh* of it winding back up and springing towards the guy that had the control of the cable's power. Of course, he was behind a shield of metal, so he's protected, but the guys that were opening up the tankers or the boxcars—cleaning them out—would occasionally get hit with this thing when it came back. I seen two guys get hit. It didn't cripple them, it didn't break a bone or nothing, but they had black and blue marks, like wicked, wicked, big marks from these things. And they'd just throw them, like nothing.

NP: Just to add to your--.

AH: Another thing that's happened too is on one occasion there was, on the transfer floor—which is the top of the elevator where the grain would come up on the leg and go out to the belt, and the belt would carry it to the top of the bin, and then the grain would go into the bin. Well, once you filled that bin up, you'd move it to another one. Sometimes the guys forgot to put the lids on the top of these bins, and if guys weren't paying attention when they were walking, they'd fall right into these bins.

NP: Did this happen often?

AH: It only happened one time in four years I was there. He only fell about 15 feet. But when you fall into a bin of grain, you've got to stay still because if you move, you sink. It's like quicksand. So, you just stay there and start yelling, and hopefully somebody will hear you before they put grain back on top of you and bury you. Usually they were covered, but it did happen one time when I was there that a guy fell in. He fell about 15, maybe 20, feet, but someone seen him fall. If you got caught in there, you can't move. The more you move, because you're heavier than the grain—one piece of grain—it just moves, and you slowly sink, and slowly sink, and you just end up buried in grain.

NP: What years were you working at the elevator?

AH: 1980 to 1984, approximately.

NP: Okay. Now, just to add to your anxiousness Edith, we'll now talk about drinking and drug use in the elevators. Was that something--?

AH: Never seen it.

NP: No?

AH: No. All the years I was working there.

NP: Did it happen as far as you know? Stories?

AH: I've never--. Honest truth, I never--. If they were drinking, they were drinking after the work. By the time I was there in the '80s, there was more work-safety ethic at the job, so there was no horseplay basically. The drinking was after the job. They'd go to a bar and drink, and that's about it. I didn't see any, and I was around the elevator lots.

[0:45:14]

NP: And I think it was probably, yes, after the time when a poor gentleman fell in the slip and drowned, and that sort of caused them to take it seriously.

AH: I heard some stories about guys gambling in the elevators. They would gamble on their paycheques and play poker hands. The numbers on your paycheque, if you got three 3s, you got three of a kind or whatever. It was just for small change, a dollar or two. But there was this one gentleman—I can't remember his first name, but he was a Pressenger—and he had made a wager for his whole paycheque against another guy's whole paycheque that he would not jump off the top of the elevator into the slip. And he did. He jumped off—that's got to be 200 feet easily—and he went in. He jumped off, he went in feet first, and he got stuck in the muck when he went in there. Everyone figured he was dead, but about a minute and a half, two minutes, later, he popped up. You could see he went in right up to his crotch because the muck stains was all the way in there. But he fought his way out. He never did it again. [Laughing] But he did get that guy's paycheque. [Laughing]

NP: It would be interesting to see, if that fellow was married, the comment from his wife when he came back without a--.

EH: Without a cheque.

NP: "Where's the cheque?"

EH: A little bit, another story that I remember about them taking the copper out of the elevator.

[Audio pauses]

NP: To the microphone, just so that we're sure to get this. Okay.

EH: Another story, adding to Alan with the copper in one of the elevators, pulling it out. A friend of Bill's that was there helping him do this, he always said the comment that that's how he paid for his daughter's wedding.

AH: Yeah, from all that copper. Yeah, for sure.

EH: From all that copper that he had, he said. Yeah.

NP: So, let's switch over to you Edie because, although you didn't work in the elevators, you did--.

AH: I've got to go.

NP: Okay, so Alan is leaving the building. [Laughing]

AH: I have some chores I have to do at a friend's house right now.

NP: Okay, well thank you so much! It's been wonderful getting your remembrances, and thanks for showing me that book. That is a real treasure, along with our grain door work of art here.

AH: If you do get a museum together, you can come and talk to me or my mom about that.

NP: Well, the other thing we could do is we could scan it in and have an electronic copy, if you would trust us to keep it for a day or so to scan.

AH: Well, once this--. I know my sister wouldn't really know anything about it, or my brother. I mean, after me and my mom pass, it's just going to end up in a garbage can anyways. And we don't want that.

NP: Yeah, we're trying to prevent that for a lot of things.

AH: And that's why I actually went down and got this because this was part of his schoolbook record from how he ended up getting to Canada, working on the ships, and ended up coming to Thunder Bay.

NP: Well, especially the Owen Sound connection because at that time there was no Seaway, so the ships would have been going between Thunder Bay and Owen Sound. So, yeah.

AH: It's just amazing how--.

NP: And is it in English?

AH: It's all in English.

NP: Okay, so he had--.

EH: And there's a connection there with Bill's dad too in Owen Sound and Perry Sound, that his mother, she came from Perry Sound. So, that must be where they met originally.

NP: Okay. So, there was a stop-off there that we're not familiar with, but it would be interesting if there's old records of the elevators down there, maybe he was working there first and moved up here.

EH: Yeah, yeah. So, that's probably where he started, but, however--.

NP: When were you and Bill married?

EH: 1951.

NP: And he was working at the elevators already?

EH: Yeah, about a year before, yeah.

NP: What do you recall about anything that he said about working in elevators? Did he like it?

EH: Oh, he liked it, working in the elevator. Yeah. Yeah, he liked it. Now, I forget what the man's name was, he taught him the electricity. He taught him how to do that. He said, "That's what you've got to do Bill." That's what got him through his whole career. Then when he left the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and went to work for the Board of Education, that's what he did there too and retired from. It's what he learnt in the elevators.

[0:50:33]

And another story that's funny when he worked in the elevators. He worked with a Scotchman, and he loved his tea. He had tea dozens of times a day. But he had a clothesline in the elevator and used to have his teabags up on the clothesline and reuse them again. [Laughing] I always thought that was kind of funny. Well, I guess he had so many in a daytime, he made good use of them. Yeah.

NP: So, what do you know about the people that Bill worked with? We had talked in preparation for doing this interview about when you mentioned the Marks family—well, that was my family that we lived kitty-corner across the back lane. Were there a lot of people living in that neighbourhood—it would be near St. Elizabeth's church—that worked in the elevators? Did a lot of them from that neighbourhood work at--?

EH: Well, there was a few there—like your dad was there, Bill was there. The boys, they ended up in the elevators, too. I can't really think of anybody else at that time around there that worked in the elevators. Can you?

NP: Not close by.

EH: No, no. We knew of lot of the men, whether they were government men or whether they were elevator men. They were still grain men.

NP: Was there sort of a difference between the elevator men and the government men? What was the--?

EH: Well, I think some people thought there was a little bit of elite-ness in the government men. I have never heard it, but I imagine there was a little bit about that.

NP: When Bill would come home in those early days, did he ever talk about working in the elevators? Or he came home, and work was there, and home is home?

EH: Yeah, he would tell about stories, yeah. They were very close, the elevator people. Like Alan said, the beer was good after work. And how often they use to go to work, and a bunch of them would meet, and if he never came home at 6:30, I knew he'd been at the hotel.

NP: And which hotel did he hang out at?

EH: Westfort Hotel. Westfort Hotel, yeah, that was the place to go. Yeah. Another story I can tell you about Bill when he worked there. He was working there at the time that they were working three days a week, and they always had Thursdays and Fridays off. A group of them used to always go fishing, ice fishing, at that time. The one particular time, we were hoping to get another child. I had had one and we wanted another one, and it wasn't coming. So, we decided that we would put in for an adoption. So, anyway, we did, and two years later, finally got a phone call one night. She said, "I'm from the Children's Aid," she said, "I'm coming tomorrow afternoon to visit you for the child adoption." "Oh, okay, that's fine." That was a Wednesday.

So, she came, and we talked and whatever. She asked me what I had, and I showed her, whatever. She got up and she left. Just going to the door, and she said, "Oh, by the way," she said, "I'll be here tomorrow morning at 11:30 with a little Anglo-Saxon, Norwegian boy." So anyway, she came, and it was Alan. He was, at that time, about two months old. We loved him ever since. Without him, I don't know what we would do. That was in March '62, and at the time I suspected I was pregnant—and I was. So, in November in '62 Luann was born, so I had two babies. Yeah.

NP: Be careful what you wish for. [Laughing]

EH: Yeah, yeah.

NP: You might get it. So, would you say Bill enjoyed his work at the elevator?

[0:55:02]

EH: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, he did.

NP: Were there ever any rough spots that--?

EH: Oh, probably. I think no matter what job you're in you have rough spots, you know.

NP: What parts of it didn't he like?

EH: Oh, I don't know. I don't know. He didn't like some of the men weren't happy with their wages, or this that and the other thing. At that time then, he got into the union and whatever and helped everybody that he possibly could. And he did.

NP: So, what led him to get involved in the union?

EH: Men, you know, complaining about one thing or another. He thought, "Well, you've got to start from the bottom, so we'll go there." And I guess that was about the time they were only working three days a week, too. Things were hard at that time, right? So, that was about his story and the cooperation between them and the elevators. I was saying that when he had his heart attack when he went back to work, they tried everything they could to get him working and be healthy at the same time. But it just putting him on a 4:00 to 12:00, they figured they were doing us a favour. But he couldn't get his sleep at that time. Then he was back on days again, so he'd get in that and then you're in a rut. So, the 4:00 to 12:00 is not good for work today, never mind then. It's just one of those things.

NP Shiftwork is hard.

EH: Oh, sure it is. It's hard. Hard for you to do that. But Bill enjoyed his work, and he enjoyed it when he was working for the union. Then at one time—I forget what the story was behind it—but him and Don McMillan, who was working for the elevators, and he was working kind of with Frank Mazur at the time. What the name of it was, I really don't know, but him and Don used to spend a lot of time working at one thing or another all the time. Their office was over in Port Arthur on Court Street across from the Eaton's, upstairs. But like I say, I don't remember too much about that other than they were working. It seems to me it was quite a period of time that he got a leave of absence from the elevator. Hopefully, the elevator companies as well as the men got good things from them.

NP: Did he ever go on strike?

EH: Did he ever go on strike? Seems to me they did. Now, Nancy, I can't really remember. I remember saving stuff, buying extra groceries and whatever—canned goods and that kind of thing—for when they went on strike. But now whether they ever did or not, I don't know. They must have, but I don't remember. It must have been hard, or I don't know why I wouldn't remember. But I've really enjoyed this talking with Alan because I never knew all those things that they were doing.

He was always a little daredevil. He used to go skiing, and he would come home and say, “Mom, I broke a ski.” “What did you do today, Alan?” “Well, I was just going down the hill and I broke it.” Well, many years later, I found out why I had to buy three pairs of skis rather than one. It was because he was hotdogging, that’s what they call it, hotdogging it down the hill or whatever. So, that’s how he broke his skis. Yeah, he really enjoyed it. But Gregory, he went there when he was through high school. He worked for about four years on the weekend, and that’s what put him through university. I think at that time a lot of kids made their money to go to university by doing that.

NP: Because at that time, things were really bustling here in the grain industry.

EH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. So, he went there and that caused him not to have too big of a case at that time for student loans, you know? Anyway, and when he got through university he went to work for—oh, what was it—an elevator company in Winnipeg. They were way, way over in Port Arthur along the line there.

NP: Richardson?

EH: What else was there?

NP: UGG?

EH: Yeah. UGG. He worked for them in Winnipeg. He said that they gave him a job one time to do something with the elevators, and he kept telling them what it was and whatever. The guy said, “Well, how do you know so much about the elevators?” He said, “Because I worked for them for four years.” But that’s what made his job and gave them a lot of information that they never knew before.

[1:00:21]

NP: Yes, because even though all of the head offices—pretty much I would guess—of the elevators were in Winnipeg, oftentimes the people who worked in Thunder Bay knew nothing about Winnipeg, and vice versa, unless they had had that experience.

EH: Yeah, I think he worked for UGG for about four years. But he enjoyed that. He enjoyed that work. He was, at that time, a programmer, so he--.

NP: Okay, yes, because they would have been just bringing in all of the computerization of the elevators.

EH: Yeah, yeah. But he mentioned something one day, and Greg told him what it was, I forget what it was, and he said, “Oh! How do you know all about that?” He said, “Because I did it. Yeah. I did it.” [Laughing]

AH: Another person you might want to talk to is my mom’s brother. He was a grain trimmer, and these are the guys that loaded the boats.

NP: And who is this person?

EH: George Strey.

NP: Would he talk to us?

EH: He probably would. He likes talking.

AH: Oh, if it has something to do with his own job.

NP: Okay. We like to talk to people who like to talk. It’s really hard if you have to pull teeth. [Laughing]

EH: Yeah, yeah. He’s in pretty bad shape now. He’s full of arthritis.

NP: Ah, but he can talk?

EH: He can talk.

AH: He’s catching up to me is what it is.

EH: He can talk.

NP: How’s that last name spelled?

EH: S-T-R-E-Y.

NP: Okay.

AH: Bye-bye!

NP: Okay, bye Alan! Thanks very much!

EH: Goodbye.

AH: You're welcome.

EH: But he was a trimmer for many, many years.

NP: Okay. I'd love to speak to him.

EH: So, he retired quite a few years ago now.

NP: Now, before we--. Are there anymore notes that we haven't covered? Because I do want to talk a bit about Mr. Mazur.

EH: No, I don't think so. No, I think I've--. I just wanted to tell you the man about the tea and about Alan, that's all.

NP: Yeah. Bill was a very safe worker? He never had any incidents? He was--?

EH: Oh, that's one of the reasons he went to work for the union, to try to get more safety for the people. Yeah. And having to work in all the different elevators, he knew some of the problems that they were having.

NP: Yes. The people who actually moved around from elevator to elevator, they learn how things are different. Some elevators are well run, others are--.

EH: Okay, sure. Shipshape.

NP: Shipshape. Some are, not quite death traps, but certainly leave a lot to be improved.

EH: Yeah, yeah.

NP: So, Mr. Mazur, he's almost a legend, I would say.

EH: That's right. That's right.

NP: So, what can you tell us about Mr. Mazur? When did you come to know him? What do you recall about Bill saying about him?

EH: Well, I really don't know too much about Frank other than, like Alan said, "Oh, that Frank Mazur!" It was something Frank would have been under his skin about or something, you know? We used to sometimes travel with them socially, too, so you got to know Mary as well as him, and whatever. He was a man with his own opinions, and he wanted them his way, not somebody else's. Frank was a good guy, though. He did things for a good reason, you know. I think he earned his money, and he travelled quite a bit. I think he used to go to Winnipeg a lot, and I think he went down east someplace for something all the time too. I don't remember what that was.

NP: Negotiations?

EH: Probably, probably.

NP: Yes, because of the elevators down there.

EH: Bill was secretary of the union for a long, long time, and then he went to International Labour, and he worked as the secretary for them for three or four years, I guess. He set up meetings with them, and they would meet at different places or whatever.

NP: Do you know if he ever took part in negotiations with the--?

EH: I don't think so, Nancy. I don't think so.

NP: That would have been Mr. Mazur.

EH: Yeah, yeah. I remember one time they were setting up an international meeting here in Thunder Bay, and Bill was going to be responsible for this man who was coming in to be the head speaker. I'm sitting here trying for the life of me, trying to think of what that man's name is. But anyway, it just don't come. He came here, and his wife was a white woman, and he was as black as

you could tell. “That’s what his name,” that’s what I said to him. “I bet you he’s a black man.” “Oh, no, no, no.” “Well, I bet you he is.” But that was a man with his own opinions, too. [inaudible] So, I was responsible then for looking after her for the day. I remember taking her up the mountain. And I drove, but I’d never driven up the mountain before. But that was a long trip going up that mountain.

[1:05:52]

Then I had her at home for lunch—and this is kind of a funny story. So, I made lettuce salad for her. I got the salad, the green lettuce, from the garden. I washed it good in salt water and whatever. Anyway, we were sitting there eating lunch, and I looked down and there was a fly flying around my lettuce. I thought, “Oh my god! Of all things to happen, that’s happening!” She never, ever said anything, so hopefully she never got a fly in her lettuce. [Laughing]

NP: The things we worry about. When you think about it now, who cares, right?

EH: Oh, what was that man’s name?

NP: Doesn’t matter. It’s probably in the records somewhere.

EH: Yeah. He was from--. Hm. It was down in Wisconsin someplace, he came from. She was telling me the stories about getting apartments and whatever. She’d go and get the apartment and be all happy about it, and then they would arrive, and they said, “No, I’m sorry. Can’t have a--.”

NP: The racial discrimination.

EH: Yeah, yeah. So, she says, “We ran into that quite a bit.”

NP: So, just to wrap things up and to go back to the beginning of the interview, Bill must have been very proud of his ancestors’ involvement in the elevators.

EH: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. He was. He always wanted to go back to Norway. Or go to Norway—he’d never been there. So, one night he came home—we belonged to the Odd Fellows and Rebekah’s—so he came home one night from a lodge meeting, and he was so excited. I said, “What are you so excited about?” He said, “Edith, look at this.” It was a magazine that the Odd Fellows was putting out, and there was a trip to go to all four Scandinavian countries that was for three weeks and affordable. Anyway, I

phoned his sister, and “Oh, yeah! Sure, we’d love to come.” Then I thought, Arnie Arneson, he was from Norway and always very proud of it too. I phoned Betty and told her the story, and she said, “Oh, sure. We’ll go. I won’t even ask Arnie.”

So, anyway the six of us took off for Norway. We went to Copenhagen, we went to Sweden, and, of course, Norway. We didn’t get to Finland. There was another one that we went to. Anyway, it was very, very nice. We went back to Copenhagen a couple of times. I got a gift that I brought home from there. But when we got to Bergen—his family came from Skanevik, which was south of Bergen. So, we had made arrangements to take this—I forget what—some kind of a boat that skimmed the water. We got on this boat, and they stopped at Skanevik. His family was all sitting there waiting for us. They took us to their home, and then they had arranged that we were going to stay at this little village that they lived in. We went to meet her mother and dad, had a nice chat with [inaudible] to be with her mother and dad—because they couldn’t talk English, but [inaudible] could. She was taught English over there. And her husband, he couldn’t talk English either.

Anyway, it was raining, so she got us all rubber boots and rain hats, and off we go. So, we went down around here, and the first place we stopped was where the grandfather’s house was. So, I’ve got a stone that we picked up there. The house was built on the top of a hill, and at the bottom of the hill they had another house that was attached to the house, and the house was built over this attachment. That’s where the animals slept was underneath the house, and that’s what kept the house warm. But the house was gone. It was the most beautiful scene standing there overlooking the lake. So, anyway, that was fine.

[1:10:39]

So, then we went around, all the way around, and whatever. All the relatives was all standing outside in the yard waiting for us and whatever. One of the families invited us for coffee in the afternoon. So, we went in and were talking, and met everybody that was there. We met a son of the people that were there, and his wife, and a baby—this adorable little girl, two years old. Anyway, we went in and sat down, and had a nice conversation or whatever. Then they brought in three beautiful cakes and set them on the coffee table and brought in the coffee. Everybody’s sitting there twiddling their thumbs kind of thing and waiting for them to come in and cut the cake, you know, serve everybody. So, finally [name inaudible] came in and said, “Edith, you’re the oldest visitor here, and it’s up to you to cut the cake and serve it.” “Oh, okay.” So, that’s what I was busy doing, serving the cake.

But anyway, a sad part of the story is when we got home, the next Christmas we got a letter saying that the little girl was in having a bath, and the phone rang, and the mother went to answer the phone, and the little girl drowned in the bathtub, yeah.

NP: Oh, my goodness. So, was Bill’s grandfather the only one of the Halversons that immigrated?

EH: That I don't know. It's the only one that we ever heard about. But there must have been more because there was a lot of cousins over there. Well, there would be a big family, but, I mean, whether they immigrated or not, that I don't know.

NP: No knowledge of why--?

EH: Why he did?

NP: Why he did?

EH: No, no, no. It was a very big fishing community because this gentleman that had invited us to coffee this afternoon, he owned a fish farm. We went down to see his fish farm and that was quite interesting because they've got these great big cages with different fish, and they're at different stages ready to go out to sea and whatever.

NP: Now, your family on your side, any grain handlers other than your brother who was a trimmer?

EH: No. No, no.

NP: How did your brother get involved, do you know?

EH: Well, he met somebody. When he was just a kid he used to--. He was only about 16 years old when he started to work as a grain trimmer. It was a job, and he just went to it and whatever. Of course, at that time, there was a lot of drinking in the grain trimmers. So, he ended up an alcoholic. When he decided to join AA, it was at Christmastime. I remember him--. My mother always had a big party Christmas Eve and whatever. I remember Beaver being there—his name was George, but we always call him Beaver—that he was serving all the drinks that night. He hasn't drank since. That was a lot of years ago, but they had a hard time, of course, up until that time.

NP: Well, we've been an hour and fifteen minutes at this, if you can believe it.

EH: Have we really? And didn't know what we were going to talk about.

NP: And we didn't know what we were going to talk about. Great stories. I'm so glad that when I was looking at the records of local 650, I came across Bill Halverson's name and then made the contact with you, because otherwise--.

EH: It wouldn't have happened.

NP: We wouldn't be having this conversation. I wouldn't have learned about that crib.

EH: Okay, yeah. Yeah. [Laughing]

NP: And Alan's remembrances as well.

EH: It was a beautiful, big crib, and he made it.

NP: Do you have a picture of it? Of the babies in it? Well, anyway I'll say goodbye and we'll close this off, and you can see if you do because that would wonderful.

EH: Because I got lots of pictures, yeah.

NP: Okay.

End of interview.