

Narrator: Tom Hamilton (TH)

Company Affiliations: United Grain Growers (UGG), Agricore United, United Steelworkers Union (USW), Viterra

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Summary: In his second interview, retired grain handler and former president of the United Steelworkers Union Tom Hamilton expands upon his work on the Thunder Bay waterfront. He first surveys a grain elevator and explains the different jobs on each floor. He recalls his favourite duties in the elevator which involved both physical and mental work, like grain inspection, grain cleaning, and grain blending. He also describes the process of grain cleaning and blending to meet customer specifications for niche grain varieties. He shares memories of working with a small crew at UGG M, and memories of grain-related mishaps that could occur in the operation. Hamilton discusses the period of company amalgamation on Thunder Bay's waterfront, and he describes the negative impacts on the workforce in numbers and morale. Other topics discussed include elevator audits, loss of logistics coordination from the Grain Transportation Agency, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool's troubled decade in the '90s and '00s, the dangerous job of bin diving, improvements to health and safety through legislation, his brief time working at Viterra before retiring, and the diminishing pride of grain handlers in Thunder Bay.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: It is November 14, 2014, and we are doing a second interview with Tom Hamilton. The first interview we did back in June of this year. I had a chance to go through the interview last night, and it was excellent. But we didn't get any of the questions

covered that we normally ask people. But it was a memorable interview. Before I go on, is there anything that you want to be sure that we cover today?

TH: Not particularly. You still had the idea that you wanted to do possibly Herb and I together at some point, and that will probably cover more of the specific stuff relating to the freight rate and the centering and all that stuff, some of which you will get from Mike Peron. That was their expertise for that whole period in the 1990s. Those should be really covered off by the dual interview with Herb and I, and of course with Peron. Ideally it should be all three of us.

NP: That is a possibility.

TH: Mike and Herb were a real team all through the 1990s right up until 2000.

NP: Why don't we plan that, and I think, given the topic, probably having that group is a good idea. I went through, as I said, yesterday just listening to the previous interview, and in the previous interview, we started out talking about the cultures within the elevators. We talked about not just the ethnic cultures but just the culture--.

TH: Operational cultures, the way the management did things and how it was.

NP: The introduction of the women into the workforce and the glitches there. We never really did talk about your career. We actually stopped when you started. Maybe we could just do a quick review of that now—your career with the grain elevators—when you started, what you did? We actually did cover how you had been in an apprentice program for an electrician, and then that was how you got on at the elevators.

TH: Yes, but I didn't get on as an apprentice, but I got on because my apprenticeship, I found it was a fraud. So, I left and went to the elevators at that point temporarily.

NP: Right. Then you moved west?

TH: No, I moved out west before that.

NP: Let's go then to when you really started working for the elevators.

TH: In August of 1978.

NP: In that instance, you leaped-frogged over the people who came in the car shed and went to work. There were two hirers apparently?

TH: Yes, there was the superintendent and then his assistant. Bob Antoniak, who was the superintendent, and his assistant was Ray Cousineau. When Bob was on holidays, Ray took the opportunity to hire a bunch of people that he knew.

NP: Are both of those people deceased?

TH: Ray is deceased, and Bob is still alive.

NP: Would he be a good person to interview?

TH: I don't think so, as he left, but I would have to ask his son who lives right beside me.

NP: If you would that would be great. When your career really started, what did you do at the elevators?

TH: You did everything. Basically, it was understood when you were hired, unless you were a technical guy, unless you had papers, you were hired to be a sweeper on shit gang they called it. Whatever it was. In our case, because they wanted to train people and put us directly inside the plant training, which lasted for two weeks until the superintendent came back and then reverted back to the old way.

NP: The old way being seniority?

TH: Where you were starting at the bottom because you were only in training. There were only two people on each job. Whereas normally there is one person on each job. Ray wanted us trained immediately, so he moved us around the plant training us. So we did that.

NP: Getting a taste for everything, for the most common positions, what did you like and dislike about if you started at the basement floor even at the car shed and worked your way up?

TH: The car shed was outside, and they had the dust control system in there, so it was good. You were fairly busy, but not as busy as you would be now because there are less people. You were fairly busy, and there was a good routine. You were dumping

boxcars, so there was active, physical work to be done fairly quickly. It was a nice atmosphere. Inside it was noisy, and the car shed was noisy, but not to the same extent.

Inside, if you were on a cleaner deck, it was actually pretty boring because there were five people sitting in there, and the work wasn't constant. So, there was a lot of sitting around and waiting. You didn't have to, but that was basically the way people worked. You did some things and then come back in and waited and went back out again. Then you were always inside in the dust.

There was a particular belt in the basement that ran 3 Belt, and it had this really low base hum. It would drive you nuts when you were in the cleaner deck. But places like the distributing floor upstairs for moving the spouts around for different bins, that was interesting, and you were active and very busy. You were closer to seeing what the operation of the plant was like. It was more interesting, and you had access to the annexes and the scale floor. So, you could see really how the plant operated, loading of the vessels and all that kind of stuff.

The tunnels is where it got to be interesting because then you started blending grains and things like that in conjunction with the inspectors, which has changed in the climate, probably starting in the late 1980s and early 1990s, where they just started--. The inspectors just told people what to do instead of telling someone that you were actually having some say into what went on. I think it was a mistake because we lost a lot of expertise.

NP: When you talk about inspectors, my understanding was that there were almost parallel teams with the government inspectors, and then the company had people doing the same work. They would be looking at the quality and weighing?

TH: They were doing different work. On the inward side of it, for the majority of my career, mostly our job was to get the cars in as fast as possible. We would do a fairly quick inspection of the cars coming in. We would grade it according to government standards but also according to what the needs of the elevator was. For example, with HBI written after them, which would be a house grade, so it might be a [No.] 1 Red, but it is HBI durum. It has a little bit of durum in it. Upstairs they would say, "Okay, well that's [No.] 1 Red kernel that are in there, but it has got so much contrasting classes in there. So they would de-grade it. They would just make that a [No.] 2 Red. We didn't care what they called it because we would blend it in as a [No.] 1 Red. So, they would call a [No.] 2 and the farmers would get paid as a [No.] 2, and we would sell it off as a [No.] 1 through our blending. Our job in the inspection in the tunnels was to make sure that we would maximize that profit margin.

NP: Who would be responsible within the company for examining the grain and deciding what the house grade was?

TH: Our inspectors.

NP: And they were inspectors?

TH: Oh, they are inspectors. I was an inspector. We were trained by government inspectors. But then you learned in each house. For example, Canada Malting, we had people who obviously knew nothing but barley, so they were inspectors only as far as barley was concerned. They couldn't do anything else. When they took the training, it was recognized by the CGC that was what it was as well, and that was all they were ever going to be doing. If they went to any other house, they were not going to be able to be certified inspectors. All they knew was that barley and malting barley and in some cases rye.

NP: You were actually certified?

TH: No one was certified. For a while, we took courses and were certified as grain inspectors, but the government courses you were basically certified at the level of Grain Inspector III, but we never received that certification. That was only for people who went through the government training and worked for the government. But it was that equivalent, that we had to be and that was the exams we wrote. That was what that was.

NP: What would be your comment about how well or not that dual system worked?

TH: Very well because the farmer was getting the true grade from the Grain Commission. They were not necessarily getting the true value of the grain at all because all the dockage and everything was removed. They got the weight of the grain and whatever the official grade was. That is what they got paid as, and they could go through a dispute resolution process and get it changed or come in and have it re-inspected.

NP: Did that happen very often?

TH: We have had farmers in taking a look, and in fact, irate farmers coming in and yelling at us, "Look it. This is my grain!" "This is nothing to do with us. Go upstairs." Wherever they were sent from there I don't know. But they must have gone through CGC downtown.

NP: Where would these farmers have come from?

TH: Out west.

NP: Out west and they had actually come--.

TH: With samples of their grain right into the plant.

NP: Really?

TH: Yes, because they would have taken it to a UGG country elevator and been told it was one thing, and when it got to the elevator, and however they were paid or whatever that final payment came in it wasn't at that level of grain. Maybe there was a mixing on the way or whatever it was. I am not sure how the process worked because, like I say, we didn't deal with that. The CGC did.

Anyway, it worked very well because CGC did their job. Then we worked within their parameters to maximize the highest grade possible. When audits came along of course, there was overages and underages. We couldn't do too much of that because if CGC said we had so much [No.] 2 Red, we had to have that much [No.] 2 Red, so you had to balance things off that way. Things did end up balancing in the end really. A lot of our profit was made on how we used the dockage materials.

NP: What was the process at--. Which elevator you would be dealing with here, McCabe or A?

TH: Both McCabe and the A House.

NP: Okay. Were there separate bins for--.

TH: Everything was separate.

NP: The dockage went into bins, and then would have to--.

TH: It went into what we called the "money makers." They were the machines upstairs above the cleaner deck. Grains go to the cleaner deck, and all of this other stuff would go up to what they called the by-products, would go up to the machines upstairs. So whether it would be screenings--. And those were all saleable products, but we reclaimed all of that. Everything was reclaimed including the dust, so there was very little waste.

NP: What happened to that?

TH: That was all shipped out. Sometimes there would be orders for that specific stuff. If we had screenings—just little bits of broken grain, certain seeds—we would sell off. At one time we were selling actually straight canola refuse because it still had oil in it and things like that. That would not be determined by us, as we would be told, and we would run our machines accordingly to maximize what we could get out of them. You are always working in conjunction with the foreman and the millwrights to what combination of sieves, what machines, and what are the rotational speeds, all this kind of thing, to get the best out of it.

NP: There must have been, given all you are talking about, a certain—not asking you precisely—but how many different kinds of sieves would there be depending on whether you are trying to get canola seed out or broken--?

TH: Run tests even as far as an indent-type machines, like the Superiors and the Uniflows. The ones I was showing you at P&H where they have the rotational, which is a different type of sieve as well, or a separator as we call it. The more accurate it is--. It is better to say separators, I guess. You had triangle, round ones, and all kinds of different sizes from minuscule, to tiny, tiny size, to that I could practically put my finger in it. Some cases, depending on the size of the kernels for example. If you are doing fava beans or something like that, you are going to obviously have a larger kernel. You are going to want more dropping through, just leaving the beans on their own. Then you would break it down getting smaller as you went down, right. You might sometimes have four separate separations. If we were trying to mimic a machine upstairs. Those machines, some only have one separation, and that is how we would test it downstairs. You set it up so that we get a round sieve, triangle sieve or a screen with little--.

NP: Scale that you would test it?

TH: The ones that you saw at P&H, those round ones that are about 14-inches wide, just different combinations of those things. You could run it over similar through what you have seen before with the Carter dockage testers. So, you have mini machines that you mimic what was going on in the plant.

NP: The ones that were actually up on the cleaner deck and in the money-maker section, they would just be huge versions of these smaller ones?

TH: Yes, and often not exactly the same types of machines, and not exactly the same characteristics. So, you always had to adapt to what you wanted. For example, McCabe, they would tell us, “We want this product.” Then we would fool around with different combinations and see. At certain times, we had some leeway to fool around with those machines ourselves as operators. Everyone is working together to get that product and that was what it was. Later on, a lot of the companies just went to, “Do this. Run it.” Which, again, took away a lot of the thinking that went on in the plant about what it actually was you were doing.

NP: The precision that would be required?

TH: Precision and problem solving. I think I told you before about the example of Richardson when I went on a tour and took the union guy after I retired. Gerry Hendrich said that we will go through the whole plant. So, we went, and they looked at the guys in the car shed, and they were in this little machine, I guess. They just came along and opened up the bins. I said, “Where is your list of what is coming out?” They had no idea what was supposed to come out of those cars, none.

Our places, you always knew. You knew exactly. If you opened it up and saw something different you would stop it. Why they took away those checks and balances or the involvement of the workers in the actual operation of the plant--. It made no sense to have automatons running around when you could have people who were actually involved in the process, and for all kinds of reasons—interest, motivation and--. [...*audio skips*] At various times to us and to his own company. They talked about automation. He said, “We have a tremendous asset that we don’t want to lose,” and he meant it. At that time—I think I told you this before—we had 130 different, separate types of grain in the plant. There were 500 bins and there were 130 separate types. They would all be worked and blended into each other to make the best of what we had.

NP: In a sense you were like recipe developers?

TH: Definitely, yes, we were recipe developers. And I think I told you before like Warburton wheat actually would send us a recipe of exactly what we had to have and what the proteins had to be and the types of wheat that had to be mixed in. We shipped it out, and we had to ship to those tolerances.

NP: Do you recall what that Warburton wheat recipe was? What made it different than just shipping off--?

TH: Characteristics? They didn’t care if it was [No.] 1 Red or [No.] 2 Red. The government as a general rule would call Warburton wheat [No.] 2 Red, mostly. We didn’t care about that. It didn’t matter what the government said, we just took that. We tested the milling characteristics of the wheat or that would have already been determined by people out west. Something called Barrie, that was one of them that had certain milling characteristics because Warburton wheat is all for baking. It is baking the Queen’s bread, basically. It is the Royal Bakery. They would know what the milling characteristics were of this very specific wheat. We would have that into the plant segregated—very seriously segregated—just like you would for any other valuable product. They would basically tell us what the mixture had to be, and we would adhere very, very strictly to that mixture of proteins and actually varieties.

NP: How and who are the team that is brought together to get it mixed?

TH: The order comes into the management. The management comes in to the inspector, and the inspector sits down and looks around to where he has the various types and what size, design that the bins are, and if it is a big bin with a certain type of opener in the bottom a smaller side bin or whatever. He knows he has to get so many tonnes out of each bin to make the product that they are asking for. But he also has to know—and the tunnel people have to know—the characteristics of how fast that grain runs out. That is where you now start to get back into the thing where people had to be involved in the whole process all the way through, which for years they hadn't.

That created a problem at the start because we had people down there that just would go and open it. Wheat is wheat. Then we would find these bins open and, all of a sudden, you have got 500 tonnes of this that has already gone out, and 40 tonnes of this, when it was supposed to be 200 and 350. So, you are all screwed up. Now you have to start again, figure it all out and hope it is not all in one hold, and get that recipe back up, so the final shipment--. Because in some of them they did a total shipment break down instead of a hold breakdown.

You had more leeway because they would blend all in at the end, then, when they were bringing it out. They were not loading and segregating in each hold or unloading and segregating each hold. You had a chance to fix up the recipe. But the inspectors and management would just go nuts about it. There was no way these guys have to know two notches is two notches, not four. Sometimes it wasn't the tunnel people. Sometimes it was the inspectors not knowing themselves. They would say, "Put so and so bin on," and they wouldn't quite know what the flow characteristics of the bins were.

NP: Would they rely exclusively on what they saw on the bin diagram, or would they do an actual physical investigation of each bin before they opened it?

TH: Most of us knew—because the people we are talking about are all senior people—most of us knew how the bins ran out.

NP: To somebody who needed time, or are several operated onto one belt?

TH: Some places that didn't have the confidence in their people would only do one at a time. Like Viterra for example. When our people went over there, they couldn't believe it. They would start with one bin, and they would run 100 tonnes of that, and then they would run 200 of something else instead of doing it all together.

NP: Where would they be running it to?

TH: They would be running it to the scale and then right out to the vessel.

NP: Okay, so every scale hopper could have a separate blend?

TH: Yes. If you were all running into 1 Hold, and you had to have that recipe for that hold, obviously you had a lot less leeway. You only had 45 tonnes to play around with, so you had to be much more careful in those things. When you were doing a whole shipment, you had more room of course.

NP: What implications would this have for the government inspectors? It was all going to come out visually as [No.] 2 Red?

TH: Generally, as a general rule, they called it [No.] 2 Red. We didn't care what they called it. It made no difference. But, of course, if one of them said, "Okay, we are finding heated," or something else in the thing, and somehow we missed it, well thank god, we still had a working relationship with them. They would still do stuff like that. But it was more between, as it is more and more these days, more between the customer and the company.

NP: We stopped as you were heading up the elevator talking about the different positions and what you liked and didn't like. Obviously, you enjoyed the floor where you actually had to do some thinking.

TH: Any positions where you were able, yeah, you had to do some thinking, made the job interesting. The elevators can be tremendously boring places as any place can be. It can be a tremendously boring place to work. So you had better find some way to take an interest when you are spending 8 to 13 hours a day at the plant.

NP: The scale floor, what did you like and not like about that floor?

TH: The scale floor, the receivers, basically, ran off fairly early on computerized machinery to assist in elevating, weighing, and distributing grain, and so did the shipping. At both plants I worked at, it had gone past the manual scales by the time I got there, so they were fairly modern.

The job I liked there was the cleaners because you had again the combination of physical work, and in our case, we had seven banks of cleaners all possibly running different things, and again, you were involved in blending and stuff like that. Plus, you were running around opening everything manually. You're working cooperatively with the cleaner deck and with the inspector

downstairs, where these things went with the receivers and shippers because you had to coordinate the belts and what they wanted to get to next, and what was shipping in the boats that ran some stuff in there. So, they were all active and very dynamic positions.

You had to listen to everything that was going on the radio, whether it was the D-floor guys, the annex, and what they were doing in the tunnels. You were fully involved in all aspects of the work! Plus, you had to remember seven and eight different things all at once. It was a tremendous exercise in your head. I heard one time that people can only do about seven different things and lots of people can't do more than one or two really. It was a really good multi-tasking exercise. That went on for years, and your day was a very good day. You were happy at the end of the day! You were stressed out lots of times too. A combination of physical work and being very involved in the operation of a plant.

NP: Did we talk about the shipping floor?

TH: That is part of the scale floor. Any of the control positions at UGG, whether it was McCabe's or at A House, or Pool 1 for that matter, they were all on the same floor. At Richardson's, it was split. All of our control-room or scale-floor functions were always together, and we were never separate. The same as our government people, we worked on those floors. We worked side by side. I mean literally side by side with the government people, mainly the weigh staff. Downstairs we worked basically shoulder to shoulder with the inspection staff. That also was different from other plants, so it made for a very good--.

NP: In what way? They didn't work together, they were quite separate?

TH: No quite separate. Pool 7, you were in totally separate offices, and the only thing they saw was paperwork. Lots of times people working in the elevator would not even know who the government people were—if they were inspectors or weigh staff—which again doesn't make any sense because you are partnering with these people.

NP: Was that a philosophical difference between UGG and other operations other than just the physical plant set up?

TH: It was easier to have them sitting together for one thing, but everyone is together, and everyone knows what the other hand is doing. If you are running a boat and running into problems, they are well aware of what is going on at all times. You are constantly working together with them. Sometimes it was an advantage for the government. They could immediately tell us to cease and desist, or alter, or whatever. They were doing and it worked very well. In audits, the government people were critical to us in helping out.

NP: Critical in a good sense?

TH: Yes, in a good sense in our experience. I can't speak for the other elevators, how they worked. Our company, we had a really good working relationship with the government staff.

NP: What did an audit entail?

TH: Basically, it took every bit of grain that was in the plant, all types, and ran it from one bin into another. If we had to make up—if we knew on our old audits that we were short of [No.] 3 Red—we would have to do some blending in there so that we would come up with [No.] 3 Red, and the government would grade it. Everything we shipped out, the government would grade. They didn't care where it came from. They just knew where it went to. They would grade and say it is [No.] 3 Red. So, we wanted to come out with so much [No.] 3 Red, and the same with [No.] 2 Red and [No.] 1 Red, durums, or whatever it is. Every bit of grain was turned over. We tried to blend it so we could, number one, not lose money by being short on various grades. But being over was good too, but not too much over. Our company would make money that way, if we came out with more than we actually were supposed to have. But you didn't want to really go too crazy on that stuff. The government was monitoring us, and in that case, we relied on their grade for all of that stuff. Then we were back to our own separations at that time.

NP: How long would it take you to shift a bin?

TH: Not very long. The overall audit in the old days, sometimes we would work two to three weeks running two to three shifts. It was slower in those days. In the more modern era, they could audit some cars coming in, and you could audit to a vessel, and you could do this and that. I remember working on one audit where I think we only had something like 100 tonnes of grain left in the plant that had to be audited and turned over. It didn't even take a day.

NP: There was an improvement in the whole paper-working process?

TH: We didn't have to shut down the operations. The company's argument was, "Why should we shut down operations to do this? We should be able to find a method to do it," and of course there was some method found to do it that way.

NP: Was this a yearly thing?

TH: No. There use to be a fixed term, and you could get an extension on that. But then that was it. You couldn't get any further extensions. I think the maximum was four years between audits including the extension, and then after there wasn't any fixed term. In fact, at the end, I don't know how they determined when we should have an audit or not, or whether it was up to us to do

it. I think it was, because I can remember our company saying that they were going to choose to do the audit because they knew we were in a good position to do it. So, they were going to do the audit at that point.

NP: You tried out every floor. Did you eventually become a specialist in one area?

TH: Well, you never did because it depended on the workload. I had postings fairly early on in my career because I asked Bob Antoniak, my first superintendent, I said, “As a rookie, should I apply for everything?” And he said, “Apply for everything that comes up. There are always a chance people don’t apply. They think they are not going to get it.” I did some jobs that way.

NP: What were some of the jobs that you had that were official postings?

TH: Inspector, annex, head cleaner operator from the scale floor, D Floor person.

NP: D Floor being?

TH: The distributing floor, moving the spouts around to different bins. All of the jobs except the dryer and except for dumper man in the car shed actually tipping and emptying the boxcars. Those were the only two jobs I didn’t do.

NP: When you take a look over that time period and the various positions, what are the most memorable situations both positive and negative related to the grain process? We talked about cultural stories but just--.

TH: Working in McCabe’s overall, when it was struggling, when it was automated in the early 1980s. When we worked at McCabe’s, you do so many cars, and you go home. It was much more relaxing, and there were a lot of people. You just went there. It was like going to any other elevator, except it operated a little differently than UGG A House over in Current River. In the 1990s and just about all the 1990s, it was always under threat of closure. Those of us who worked over there—and it was a very small team that went there—when it was operating and doesn’t mean every time it was operating, I was there because I may have that or another job over at A House. You had little teams trying to do all these interesting things to keep the place going. Everybody was in the same boat. We were, and management was—it didn’t make any difference—the union was, and everybody doing the same job.

NP: Who was the manager of McCabe’s at that time?

TH: Billy Green was the superintendent of both houses. He ran both houses. He was the actual guy who we would deal with. There was a number of different superintendents. It didn't really make any difference, and some better than others. Rob Hollingsworth was one, and Derek King was another one. Derek King is still alive, and Rob just retired but he has been off sick for years and years. There could be some other foremen like Greg Eby. He might have been sent over there every now and then. It could be Bill Green himself, or Laurie Powell who committed suicide, and Kenny O'Connor.

NP: They were operating as a team to try and keep things going?

TH: That was the way you worked there. You didn't want to go over there, unless that was what you wanted to do, and whether it was in the car shed, or whether it was running the cleaning machines or doing whatever, you had a really good crew that worked together. It was a smaller crew and a sense of purpose in it. Whether it was with A House, it didn't matter. A House was going to run, and it was running, and it was healthy. We had all the grain for it, up until there were buy-outs and everything and our acquisitions came up.

But McCabe's was a different thing. I remember us being called at the end of June, I guess it was, and they told us, "That's it, no more. It is finished. You are all going over to A House on Monday." We knew that there were boats the next week, and we knew that there was this and that. But this guy, Gary Katoll, who was the superintendent at that time running both houses, and he said, "No there is no work." The foreman and superintendent over there just looked at us, and he didn't know what the guy was talking about. "We know there is work. Where should we report to on Monday?" He said, "Well, come here, and we will figure it out after because we know there is a boat on Monday. We have to work all weekend to clean the canary seed for it." We never left McCabe's, but he called us all in and told us this thing, that it was done as of the next day.

We worked there four more years after that. We always said about him whenever he said there is doom and gloom, that was a banner year. That was nice because, again, in all of the work at the elevator you needed to—my opinion always was—you had to be involved. Whatever it was you were doing, you had to be involved. You had to take interest just like in life, or else you are not going to have a very good life, either in work or anyplace else.

NP: I started my question with wondering about things that happened. For example, having to unload a ship that has already been loaded—any of those kinds of instances occur? Leaving a bin open and grain all over the place?

TH: Lots of those types of things happened. We came in one time and couldn't see the back end of the tunnels. I saw all the guys and turned the light on, but a bin had let go at the roof. There was a slide right up at the ceiling, which is basically the top of the hopper. It was below that bin and somebody--. It had either fallen out, rusted out or whatever it was, and it came out, so all of the

grain filled up right to the roof. So that is why we couldn't see back there. The guy couldn't start the belt or anything. Nothing could be done about that. We just had to go back in a little wee space, smaller than this room, with no room to move, and you had to shovel all that grain out of there and put it somewhere and get it out and over to another belt and [inaudible] by hand. It was another one doing it with shovelling it off.

NP: How do you do that because you are down in a hold? How do you actually shovel it out?

TH: Into pails and things like that and up it went. Shoveling, thank God, that was only a little bit. With the evacuator most of plants would only do maybe seven tonnes an hour. The last one they did, they had a Dutch fellow come in. I can't remember his name—a very nice family. I think his capacity was 150 tonnes/hour. I think we got 60 tonnes/hour—a huge improvement. We worked all day until about 10:30 at night getting grain off in that one. Because there was no marine leg, we could go to Sask Pool's marine leg that had not operated in years.

The situation like at Richardson's last year—I guess, it would be 2013—where, if you remember, they had the wrong grade. Those things happened in the elevator all the time, not as a regular occurrence but enough that it wasn't all that strange. It was funny. Pool 1, the superintendent looking out his window and looking over at McCabe's and calling Laurie Powell, who was the superintendent at that time at McCabe's, and told him he was loading a boat. "What do you mean?" He said, "Well you are pouring mustard right into the slip." Somebody had turned the distributor dial to the shipping spout. He thought he was shipping into the annex [inaudible]. But mustard was very expensive, as you know. And out it went right onto the dock and into the slip!

NP: What kind of sanctions for that behaviour, just considered mistakes and that was it?

TH: In that particular case, we knew who did it, and it wasn't one of the workers. It was a management person who did it. He was touching a dial that he should never have been touching. He couldn't really deny it because no one else--.

NP: I would like to do a side trip to talk about the Current River area where UGG A was. When you started, was Alberta Pool 9 still there?

TH: No, it had just been taken down, Pool 9. I started after that. It must have been taken down mid to late 1970s. I never saw Pool 9 when it was there. Our pellet plant was not there. You could see parts of the tunnels, but the actual building had been taken down. I can't remember what year. I had nothing to do with the elevators prior to 1978, except that I was hired to play hockey.

NP: That particular plant, UGG A, had toppled over. Was there any lore about that?

TH: Not really. I didn't find out. Norm Nuttall and probably a number of them had. It was funny, there was very little talk about it. I found out more about it after I retired or on my own later on. All of the people that I started with, all of the senior men, were all part of that, and were part of the recovery, and were certainly around when it had fallen it. It was amazing how little was said about that. Even the Pool 4 explosions—there was very little said about it, and a lot of our guys were there when it blew up. They were right beside it. They knew all about it and were involved in—and families were involved in it—but it just wasn't discussed.

NP: You said you learned more about the UGG situation after the fact. Is there anything you can add to it?

TH: No, there was hearsay stuff I had from an engineer, but I would rather that he talks about it. He may have already talked to you. I don't know. He had already made preparations to rebuild that plant. The decisions and the plans don't happen in a week. That was very fast. So they knew at some point they were going to have to redo that annex. Whether they intended to knock it down at some point and rebuild I don't know. It was amazing the whole process was a year—from the time it went down it was September to December. September one year to December the next year. Can you imagine that happening today? It was wonderful. The company could make that decision and spend that money and commitment. But to have those plans in place and to start it that quickly, something funny there.

NP: Moving on to talking about--. And I know that your time might is limited too, the time that--. The whole configuration of companies along the waterfront changed. Could you take us through that and how it felt to be in that at the time? First of all, just talk about what happened and what kind of--?

TH: When I started working it was generally thought that about seven to nine years before you would start to work fulltime. That was the way people thought. You would be there that period of time, and you would get to fulltime and then carry on like that. In my case, I probably started working pretty well fulltime, year-round probably in 1980. Then after about 1985, we started seeing what was happening when Mulroney was in power, and they lost the Russian grain. I think it was in the mid 1980s somewhere between 1983 to 1985. We didn't see it with Cargill, not with P&H, nor with Manitoba Pool, although Pool 9, they were no longer operating, and it was gone.

But Sask Wheat Pool started to disintegrate—a huge company that had, what, I think almost 1,500 employees all on its own. They had just done tremendous work on Pool 4, revamped the whole cleaner deck, et cetera. The next thing you know, it was shut down. Then we got into the changes in the 1990s which Mike will go through, he and Herb. Oh, I think, in the mid 1980s, the first hint we had was Continental Grain came in, and they wanted to lease and operate McCabe's. That was the first real hint, along

with the downsizing starting at Sask Wheat Pool. There was downsizing happening with all the rest of them, because there were efficiencies, but not like Sask Wheat Pool. Sask Wheat Pool was actually losing tonnage, and we were not.

Change in what work you did on different shifts, all of that stuff, that was all separate from that. It resulted in a lot of job losses. The first hint of consolidation for us would have been when Consolidated wanted to come in. They would take over McCabe's and operate that. Consolidated at that time was one of the top four, I believe. There was Cargill, Consolidated, Land of Lakes was up there, and I can't remember who the rest were. For some reason that fell through, but that was a bit of a wake-up call for us that things—along with the Sask Pool stuff—that things may not necessarily stay the same.

NP: Let me just stop you there. I don't want you to lose your momentum. When you started what was still operating on the Kam River anything?

TH: I wouldn't have a clue, wouldn't have a clue because we pretty well worked with the plants that you possibly might go to work in that handles grain or cars or whatever it was—Richardson to a certain extent, but very little attention to what was going on with any of that other stuff. It was very insular.

NP: Back to the first hint you had was this Consolidated one or Continental?

TH: Continental. There was consolidation there. There was different ownership coming in, how would it affect the terms of the collective agreement. Then ADM in the 1990s for us. I am talking about UGG. Then there was the issue of there not being enough grain to possibly keep McCabe's going until that took over much of our thoughts. Then Manitoba Pool wanting to take over UGG. That was I guess in the early 1990s. I remember Brian Mallon or Billy—I can't remember—but I think it was Brian, who walked over from Pool 1. I think it was Derek King at that plant, and when Derek came back from a tour of the plant, Brian was sitting in his chair behind his desk and he said, "You won't be needing this." That was the first hint we heard that there was going to be a sale to Manitoba Pool. Derek was shocked as were the rest of us. "Now what is going to happen?" And the whole deal. Then of course nothing happened there because ADM came in and there was a poison pill agreement and ADM came in and bailed UGG out.

NP: Archer Daniels Midland?

TH: Yes. That agreement was in place I believe from 1995 to 2005 for them. ADM continued doing shares right up until 2007 when they sold off to Sask Wheat Pool, when Sask Wheat Pool was buying at that time Agricore United. The next thing for us in the 1990s was the Alberta Pool takeover of Manitoba Pool. We saw 22 people at that time were terminated.

NP: Not Alberta Pool?

TH: Yes. Before it was Manitoba Pool, Alberta Pool had an elevator here. But they never operated an elevator here. Manitoba Pool operated their elevator. I don't think there was ever an Alberta Pool elevator that was operated by them. They took over Manitoba Pool. There were changes there. Around that time was around the time when Pool 3 was temporarily mothballed in the early spring. And then by August of that year, it was determined it would be shut down permanently.

Then you saw the combination of those two work forces there, two different cultures again coming together. I only know this part of it because I was involved in—but not to any serious extent other than safety—but just from people who worked for the various plants talking about what it was like with the two cultures coming together there and loss of work, and this and that.

The next thing would have been Cargill was going to take over Richardson's. The point with all that was—and there was another one in there too—is that the people at Manitoba Pool were the people who were affected more than anybody else, other than Sask Wheat Pool, on the waterfront because every year, in some cases a matter of months, there would be a new story about those people being merged with someone, bought by someone or whatever.

For me personally—both working at that plant, and I was involved as president of the union from 1999 on—it was very nice to go and talk to the Manitoba Pool guys because they knew exactly what all the implications were for these various moves, and how it would affect them or at least knew enough to ask the questions. Whereas the other people, the Richardson's people and that, were still stuck in “We're safe. We're in our own little castle,” type of thing. So, you could say Manitoba Pool people were prescient in that way. We really enjoyed working with them because they listened and asked questions.

Then something did happen because in July 28 or 30th, Billy Green came in 2001. It was supposed to be Cargill buying Manitoba Pool. But it was the two companies combining—Agricore and United Grain Growers to form Agricore United. The question that remained—and there was a labour board hearing that—was always “Who bought who? Was it a merger? Does the collective agreement kick in? Does protection kick in? Who was who first as seniority goes because one bought the other?” It was very important as to who the actual purchaser was and about where they would end up on the seniority.

The prediction made at that time was it would probably be another five years before something else happened, if Sask Wheat Pool at that point didn't collapse. If you remember all through that period of time, Sask Wheat Pool were just teetering from the 1990s on. It was just teetering day to day. At some point, if you talk to the managers including Pat Bushy, I think he would probably tell

you he would wait until 10:00 or 11:00 at night expecting the phone call to come, and he could go to bed knowing that he could work the next day. There was all that going on as well. And what else was happening then?

Anyway, our company that I worked for all those years, that became Agricore United looked to be doing very well. But in 2007 when Sask Wheat Pool made its offer, and Richardson's made its offer, when you actually looked at how our company was doing, it was doing okay. But it was more they were hiding their head in the sand a bit. They were the biggest and they thought they would keep on going like this and nobody could do anything about them. They had no reserves and nothing to fight with, and they had no cash. They never really realized all the synergies they should have out of the initial buyout.

They had, thank God, merged our pension plans. So that was one thing that was helpful to us for long-term security. Going back in 2000, in 2000 Herb and I and Mike Peron, that we would have no more than four companies operating on the waterfront within three years and basically what came out. We knew the consolidations were coming, and that goes back to what I said about talking to the Manitoba Pool people. They were the only group on the waterfront that actually believed what we were saying about that because they knew from our experience and their experience that that was going to happen.

NP: Just curious about how did the union get the reconnaissance? Were they in discussion with the various companies or do they have a special investigation group that--.

TH: No, we were a member of all kinds of different organizations out west. At that time, you were able to talk with Murdoch McKay, for example, came from our plant and cleaned bins at our plant. I cleaned bins with him. So, he was the head guy at UGG concerned with us. You were talking in a much more open way in those days about things. We would have meetings all the time. I would go to meetings with the railways, with the various companies, and with western groups that had nothing to do with here, other than that we are all involved in the agriculture and talk about all the issues that were coming up, whether it was Churchill, how Thunder Bay was going to be affected, and what needs to be done.

We knew we were well over capacity. Anyone could see that. If you are going to operate you didn't need that capacity. We were operating on a much lower efficiency level than we needed to be to get our costs down to where we were able to compete in some way with the west, with going south, with going through Churchill, with railing by—with the special rates that were given for that—or, I mean, with the little bit unfair competition, with the change in the freight rate. We knew there had to be consolidation because business could not go on operating. What other changes were there?

NP: There was computerization.

TH: There was computerization. The union was very afraid the companies were not going to be able to respond to the new climate that was created in the 1990s. We were proven right in that, in a number of ways. When we go back in negotiations, we talked to them about them at practically every negotiation. We set up in one set of negotiations an interest-based negotiation, so we could deal with, “Never mind what is in this little book. We are facing problems here as an industry. Let’s see what we can do about it, and what can we do about it, and what you can do about it.”

They had gone for years and years, and I don’t know any other business that operates that way, where they didn’t have to worry about profit or loss or anything else. Like our company, everything was given them. The grain was all given to them. They guaranteed that grain every year and they had so many country elevators out west. Nothing was pooled, but it was all sent out to us depending on the shares we had. We had allocation meetings every week with the railways. The CWB was involved where we had the Grain Transportation Agency. There were meetings every week, so you had a good idea of what was going on all across the country and what was coming into the plants. So, we would know a number of weeks ahead or months ahead of different things. When that structure all started to deteriorate from 1999 on, so there was less and less and less of that sure thing.

NP: Was that less and less and less just a result of lesser products or were there other things happening?

TH: No, lots of product, but it was just the whole structure of how grain was being gathered and shipped to the export points, and how it was going to go, where it was going to go, what companies were going to get what, and everything, and all the very close working together of all the parts—where they might be sitting and fighting all the time—at least at the end of the day. Some of these were weekly meetings and everyone had a good feel for what was going on. All of a sudden, a lot of that was taken away, so it was left to your own logistics department in dealing with the CWB.

NP: Why was that taken away do you think?

TH: I don’t know why all of that stuff was taken away. Like the GTA, why was that taken away? The car allocation policy, why was that taken away? You sit down and deal with the issues as they come up with the railways. You knew you were always going to have ongoing problems with logistics—the shipping companies, less and less vessels on the waterfront. You wanted everything to work to be more coordinated, not less. When you say with the CWB coming down, the possibility there could be some inefficiency in how things are being shipped out right to this day.

We could see all of this stuff as a union, borne out in what we discussed in our negotiations starting for sure in 2000. Actually, it started in 1993, to tell you the truth. What we never understood why the companies would not, didn’t seem able to react. What do they call it? Inertia? It is like things will right themselves eventually, and maybe they will, but there has to be some---. We were

very concerned with the CWB left because we knew there was some positioning taking place with other companies outside. We knew the CWB itself was positioning itself in such a way that it could survive, which I thought was doing a very good job of. Then all of a sudden it was going to be thrown to the companies. We didn't have any faith that the companies were going to be able to source the grain, get the logistics going, and everything else. No faith in that at all.

Some of the companies have. Richardson's were really proactive, really, really proactive. They were proactive in the whole thing. It doesn't matter what you talked about, whether you were talking about inspection services being changed, Richardson immediately went into training long before it ever happened and were very, very proactive. That was what you wanted to see. Anybody does. If you are running a company and an employee of that company, I want to see that is what they are doing. Not stick-in-the-mud as you see with Viterra or people like that—not head-in-the-sands stuff.

So it was always puzzling to us, as people who worked. They would say, "It is not your business." We would say, "Yes, it is our business. We are the ones who work here, and we have been here for years and years. This is our career. We are not just parttime, fly-by-night people. We are very concerned, and we want to see that something is being done about this stuff." A lot of that stuff was less and less communication exists to this day. Right now, Herb has very little communication in any meaningful way as the USW staff rep with the various companies or agencies out west or anything like that.

NP: We are running out of time!

TH: Another day.

NP: I just want to wrap this up with what kind of toll did that take on--? I mean, as an outsider, I have interviewed people at various times who had started their careers in 1940s through to people like you and even later on. It was fun to work in the elevators.

TH: Oh, a tremendous amount of fun. It was fun to work in the elevators for most of us, and I say most of us, because it is like parfait. It is all separate. The group where Stefan Turgeon, who you interviewed earlier on, was in and a lot of the time it wasn't fun for him to work in the elevators because they were stuck in a bubble of people who were hired—they still needed them—but they were not going anywhere. They would spend 20 years on the shit gang—no opportunity to go anywhere. But thank God he was able to get something and get into the CGC in the end of his career, which at least gave him some opportunity to spend the last 15 or 20 years of his working life in a good way.

Thank God some of our other people left when they saw that happening. There was a tremendous amount of people who were squashed down by people like us who were just maybe a [inaudible] and that make a huge difference. There is a guy one below me who never in 30 years worked a full year. I worked a full year almost every year of my life and the opportunities to work in different places in the elevator and to be involved and to work with the millwrights and things like that. They never got those chances.

NP: Was it a situation, then, when it stopped being fun—correct me if I am wrong—but I can't imagine that when you are sitting there, as you mentioned Sask Wheat Pool person at 10:00 at night wondering whether he is going to have a job tomorrow, that must do something to the whole working atmosphere?

TH: Definitely. The working atmosphere at Sask Wheat Pool for years and years and years—and I am going a long time going back at least 20 years—was absolutely terrible. The morale situation has been terrible. I know people who worked there who would come in and do their job and then go up and sit in the lunchroom. I asked specifically, “How does it work?” and “Who sitting beside you?” And he'd say, “I don't know. Some guy.” That is unheard of where I worked, just unheard of. You would at least know who you were working with. You would take some interest in [inaudible] just going in.

I used to watch them going into work and it was like they were going into the gulag and coming back out again at the end of the day. There was not a smile on anybody—terrible atmosphere in the lunchroom, very odd. We didn't know and we would ask people in Sask Wheat Pool—we had some of them in the union executive—how things were, and they would say, “Good” and “Everything is fine.” And then you would find out later what actually was going on. We would tell them that we just don't do that and that is not the way things are done for your health and the company's health or the whole deal.

NP: For an example of “That is just not how things are done”?

TH: The way they worked overtime distribution possibilities, how posting were done, how people advanced in the elevators, there were side deals made and different deals. Like our union steward would make a deal with a foreman here about doing some kind of work, and it was a lot of behind the back stuff, very little of which happened where we worked in it was wide open and we were just lucky.

There were terrible problems with management all the way through right from Bob MacKinnon who was in the 1990s. I would say people hated him then, but he probably over the years was one of their best managers. So, you can imagine what the rest of them were like, including this idiot who is there now, Bushby. He is absolutely terrible. But they don't have any attachment, and there is no ability to work with people. It is terrible, terrible, terrible, and that is the way it is.

But half the time they don't know it. Some of the guys that I brought into the union from there have their eyes open now, and they look around and see different things. Even at P&H, where you see a guy like Steve who now is tremendously interested in all kinds of things. He is coming in to take over my computer work and that kind of stuff. I never have had a Sask Wheat [inaudible], one person from Sask Wheat Pool I have had to do that.

NP: Was there a difference in companies that the management of the company supported the union? There is always a pull and push between management and union, but there is philosophies of yes union?

TH: Sask Wheat Pool is a backwards organization. In 1978, the Canadian Labour Code put out a guideline for dust and how you deal with blow down situations and things like that. Every other company developed procedures to go along that way, and as you developed procedures you deal with the Canadian Labour Code people, and you deal with those people depending on what the circumstances of what you find out and everything else. You come up with a policy at the end of it.

After I retired, when there was an issue that came up with Sask Wheat Pool, one of the guys came to me about it. They brought me their policy. The policy was the recommendation made in 1978 or 1977 by Labour Canada. They had done absolutely nothing from that day to 2012 to develop any policy, to think about what--. [...*audio skips*] All they did was to take that and put it in their file box and say, "That is what the policy is." That was never what it was intended for in the first place. They never understood it.

I talked to Bob Antoniak, who was the superintendent and managed all of the Grain Growers operation in Thunder Bay I'm going to say until around 1983—but I could be wrong there—I talked to him within the last five to six years and told him some of the things about Sask Wheat Pool, and he says, "Tom, when I was the manager in Thunder Bay for UGG, we never could get them to deal. I am not talking as a competitor, but I am talking about trying to deal with them. Never could get them to deal, never do anything progressive. They just did what they did. It was their way." I said, "What they call now--." I said, "Bob it's the Viterra way." He said, "That is what they said then. It was just the way we do it." That was their answer to everything, "This is the way we do it."

Whether it is wrong. Whether you have a millwright—and this is true—you have a millwright downstairs in 2007 with a hand snipper snipping. Have at least a lever cutter, a drop shear or something like that. They wouldn't do it. That is the type of work they have their people doing—a waste of management's time, a waste of their time. When all the rest of us changed to progressive materials, they stuck with this [inaudible]. I don't know where that philosophy came from. I don't know if it had anything to do with the co-op system. I don't know if it was just the nature of the managers in Thunder Bay, what it was. They are, and have

been, a stick-in-the-mud organization. Lots of time the people who worked there don't have a clue because they don't know what the other plants are doing. It is the oddest thing.

NP: I also have a sense—and again this is just my take on things, which could be absolutely wrong—that it used to be a far more cooperative waterfront. I am not just talking union/management, but I mean even just companies communicating--.

TH: Yes, we did cars, et cetera, and even out west. I remember the small elevator that UGG had in Vancouver. Then, there was a trade off where we sent our cars to Sask Wheat Pool. They did our cars. And then UGG said, “You know, we made more money then, paying somebody else to do our cars.” They were still getting some revenue from them, more profit than when we operated our own elevator. Whether that was totally a joke or not, I can't remember.

Yes, there was lots of cooperation. These people in those days met at least once per week on various matters dealing with allocations, dealing with what was coming up. If Richardson was going to be shut down in August to do some maintenance, Cargill would take over some of their cars. We would take some of Sask Wheat Pool, things like that. These were always payback things, too. So if we did 200 cars, they would always try and cheat them a little bit or whatever it was. Like two farmers out west, they do the same type of thing. One looks after the other guy, does properly what his job is. It is human nature to try to get a little more out of the deal than was originally contemplated.

NP: I am going to ask you a couple of quick questions and in case we don't get to do anything more than just our follow-up with you, Herb, and Mike. I know it would be a hard thing, but does anything pop into mind when I ask you what is the most significant memory that you have about your time on the job?

TH: There isn't any one thing. There are lots of exhilarations. Being in a bin and looking up 25 feet of pellets over your head and hitting that last bit with the shovel hoping that what you have done in undermining is enough that the grain will go this way instead of this way onto your head and kill you. Being exhilarated like Churchill said, “The most exhilarating thing he ever had in his life was to be fired upon without result.” Those type of moments when you are doing things like that. Stefan, when he was talking about his bin-cleaning career, he and I had similar attitudes about being down in that situation. You are on your own. You've got a team that is responsible for saving your life, but you are doing things down there to get the work done. It's just I knew a little bit more about where to stop than Stefan did. Stefan would go over the line because he was a crazy Frenchman! Both of us were definitely breaking the--. You couldn't get the job done without going out on the edge on that set.

NP: Which is probably why I think Gerry Heinrichs said this, and not on tape, but I think he said to me once, “We don't do that anymore. We farm out the cleaning.”

TH: I think it was the liability. They think they are farming it out, but not totally farming it out because they are responsible for how those people work in the plant. They can't avoid the liability, but that is one of the reasons they get rid of it. We were the only ones who did it for years and years. Gerry was never in a place where they did their own.

We had people who poisoned, who were temporarily poisoned, with the acid in the old days because they didn't do any testing. All they did was throw an oxygen thing down there. It read the oxygen but didn't read it fine enough to tell of any displacement of oxygen or whether there was poisonous gas being released once you opened up the hot bins. Sometimes you are standing in burning bins. You are standing there with your boots burning in hot canola! There were all kinds of gases that were released.

We had one guy who possibly may have some issues to this day when he was continually exposed to heated flax and that has—I am forgetting the chemical right now—the chemical comes off of it. It creates a pulmonary problem. But you don't notice it at first. You may not notice a second time, but the third it gets worse each time. So the effects are much worse.

NP: Almost like an asbestos thing then?

TH: Yes. But the people who were actually injured-- We had pretty good crews—anybody that I have ever dealt with in confined spaces. The thing was in confined spaces, if you have an accident, it is basically fatal. We were very close to that, but it never happened.

NP: Yes, there have been real major advancements in safety procedures in confined spaces.

TH: It took us 18 years to get those. I worked on it all during my career. For 18 years I worked on it. It was worked on by people including one of our general managers, Stan McKay, long before I was there working on these things. Labour Canada was just ridiculous in trying to get any safety changes in. Then they became amenable to it because they saw that there were things on the market they could actually use. Everything else prior to that, they regarded as an adaptation and had to be individually engineered and certified.

It was 2005, I believe, in October-- [*...audio skips*] Passed and hadn't come into Royal Assent, and the head of maintenance came up to me, and I was working on the scale floor, and he says, "Tom, we are going to change the way we do the confined space." He handed me a list of changes they were making. It was the list we had been asking for all those years—all new equipment. We had looked year after year after year—Mike Kachur from Pool 1, and Mike Katusa and a bunch of guys from Sask Wheat Pool, and some guys from Cargill, managers—we were all on committees looking at different equipment, and when you

got it there was always some reason to stall. So it wasn't until early to mid 2000s when there was the threat of direct criminal liability for that stuff. The next year, I mean before Royal Assent even came in, we had that modern equipment.

In the meantime, we managed to put in some of our own illegal adaptations that Labour Canada would never agree with. We had to do to make the equipment fast. At McCabe's, we actually hooked up a--. [...*audio skips*] So we could run it. It was hydraulic. We could run that thing and pull the person out, hoping never to have to use it. But the fact is we had to get the person out from the bottom within four minutes, and that was the only way you could do it. We couldn't do it with the old chair and left the old farano chairs. We ran it through a pulley in the ceiling—totally illegal. Totally, some people would say, irresponsible. In our case no it wasn't, we could get the guy out. To us it was safer than not.

We developed procedures over the years—and again our company did—always ongoing, changing, and growing procedures that reflected what the working conditions were in both places. We had certain crews that were the only people authorized to go down the bins. I was a trainer myself, called a qualified person. I always went down and always picked our crews to see out of that group. A foreman assigned crews that needed to be out of that group. We got people with--. [...*audio skips*]

Air testing, we got that early on in the 1990s and improved that every single time. It wasn't perfect, but we finally got the multi-testers and doing that kind of stuff. I would say both us and the companies did pretty well in making it as safe as it could be. Labour Canada was a huge obstacle for us, especially in the 1990s and the 1980s. The last huge improvement came because of the Westray bill. On the other hand, the people like Viterra--.

NP: The Westray Bill?

TH: Bill C83 I guess it was. 1983 I think it was. It was after the Westray Mine disaster in the 1990s and Steel Workers fought for 11 years to have that passed, and it was finally passed—criminal responsibility for corporations that ignore safety issues.

I remember one year, it might have again been 2005 again, and John Malcolm was our maintenance superintendent. We had done our work. It was done in two days. They had just misread the job. Then he had us on there, and he had to find work for us. So, he sent us out to check out these spouts on the D Floor and various things like that. Each thing we looked at needed repair. So we went ahead and did that for that entire time, until we were ready to do the rest of the job, which would take four to six weeks down the road. John came to us and he said, "Tom"—and not just me, but he was talking to me—"Quit looking up." Because every time we looked up, we would see another thing. Because of this new condition in the workplace, once you told them that a safety thing existed, they needed to follow through on it. It had to be seen that they had followed through on it. Really it would create endless work!

What Viterra did was the opposite thing. Our company and Richardson kept their people working on this stuff, except for the bin cleaning. Viterra went the opposite way. They just said, “Okay, we will just remove all that work out of the union’s bailiwick,” moving of the grain and shipping and all that stuff. Any other type of work was taken away. There were some good things that came out of it and some bad things, depending on how the companies reacted.

NP: Did you have any sense of your place in Canada’s success as a grain trader or were you just--.

TH: Oh, definitely we did! There is tremendous pride, there certainly was, right across the waterfront about how well we did in shipping and all that kind of stuff. Again, that goes back to the question of involvement. The companies lose that when they take that ability away from the individuals who work there, where you just say, “You come in, and your job is to go and clean that wheel,” that doesn’t help them. We used to have competitions. You ask anybody in the waterfront in shipping, at least the people I know, and you talk about their tonnage per hour. They don’t talk about milking it and doing 1,200 tonnes per hour. They talk about if you can get as close to 2,000 an hour. [...*audio skips*] But Viterra, they don’t. It makes no difference to them. It is the oddest thing.

I’ll give an example. I don’t know if you know anything about shipping spouts coming on off the scale? Sometimes you can have two scales running into a shipping spout. Sometimes you can have three, depending on how the elevator is set up. When I worked my last December at Viterra, they were running two scales into a single shipping spout. They ran them both at full capacity as if one scale was running into the shipping spout. All the time they end up building back up into the scale and garner and shutting off in the basement. I talked to Bill Elchuck, who was one of the managers who was around at the time, and I said, “Bill, this problem happened at McCabe’s all the time, and what we did was we cut the scale openings down because you have to maintain air space in your shipping spout so everything can float. In any pipe you have to have air in the pipe for things to run through.” I said, “Your overall tonnage, even though it looks like it is slower on the scale, your overall tonnage per hour is quite a bit higher.” He said, “That is not the way we do it at Viterra.” He was serious. Here they were.

I was there for a week, learning the shippers was my last week working there, and this is what they did. They just ran it and plugged. You know how grain slowly coming out the end of the pipe, instead of that shooting up? The trimmers are going crazy because they need the force to come down there and move it around. That was the way they operate. It makes no sense because they know the answer. They know what they should be doing, but it doesn’t matter because, “That is what we do.”

NP: Not our way.

TH: I don't remember what your question was now?

NP: Did you have a sense that you contributed to Canada's success of the grain trade?

TH: Oh no. When you go back to even when Herb had said in the early 1990s in negotiations when they were talking about problems and talking in the Senate, we were talking to the companies, and we always said to the companies that this is something we are absolutely committed to. This is our livelihood. This is Thunder Bay and our grain port. This is not fly-by-night. Whatever the problems are—and he always said at every negotiations since then, if not before—we have always said we wanted to be a part of the solution not the problem. And that has always been the truth. Always been the truth. Trying to get people to believe that, and I know Richie's does to a certain extent. The way they treat their employees, you can see it and how they are very proactive about it, and they are extremely proud. Our company certainly was that way as well. It is sad when you see other ones that aren't. It has really been taken away. There is a lot of pride here.

One guy asked me on the street the other day—he knows who I am—he said, “I didn't even know the elevators were still operating?” I said, “We could probably still ship—if we were shipping three shifts—we could ship close to the capacity of Vancouver.” We were always able to ship more than Vancouver. We could ship 18 million, and they could ship 14 million. Even with the plants that we have now, if you had the logistics, which you don't have—so it is a ridiculous statement—but if the logistics were there, we have the capacity and the knowhow to ship far, far more than 6.5 million tonnes. We can easily be up to 10.

NP: Logistics, for those of you listening who might not be aware, logistics would be having the right product in the right place at the right time.

TH: And the right amounts, have it there.

NP: Could you say it instead of me?

TH: No, you did it very well.

NP: You need to say it because we won't have a snippet of Nancy, but we might have a snippet of Tom! Logistics would be--?

TH: The right amount of the right product, in the right place, in the right amount, at the right time. The transportation—a way out of the elevators—the shipping ability out of it. It gets down to the ports is all part of it, the inward and the outward part of the logistics. It is never going to be perfect, but Thunder Bay port, we were real high potential for maximizing the logistic potentials.

NP: Monica McNabb, who is here, any questions that you would like to ask that Tom could answer in two minutes? We need to talk at some point about what you are still looking at a list of possible people. You think of all the people's names that you have named here today, and I have got Mike and Steve.

TH: The other guy who could be very interesting interview is Randy McCrae. You decide what you could use.

NP: Can you find him out?

TH: I think in the CGC his name was G. Randolph Morgan.

NP: Can you track him down for us?

TH: I can see, but I can't contact him by phone or anything. I have to physically see him.

NP: Or somebody who knows him?

TH: I know people who know him, but it doesn't matter as he doesn't have a phone. He lives with his girlfriend towards Amethyst and sometimes he is in town. He has a house in Current River. When I talked to him, he was very interested. He is quite a drinker, so it depends when you get him.

MM: What is Mike's last name again?

TH: Peron.

NP: Did his dad work--.

TH: Mike is out of Red Lake, and his dad was in the union and in the mines in Red Lake. That is where Mike started out.

NP: Thank you very much. It has been another whirlwind, chuck full of information. We will get the three of you and maybe the group will grow even bigger. Bob Antoniak, is he somebody you could contact?

TH: I could ask Mike if Bob would be interested in doing an interview. But Bob is pretty old now, as you can imagine. The last time I saw him he was doing okay, but I will have to ask his son.

NP: It is really week-to-week.

TH: I will have to ask his son. He is a very private man, whether he would be interested or not.

NP: Tell him from your perspective just how important this project is to have this--.

TH: I will talk to Mike for sure.

NP: Thanks again, and we will try to get the three of you together at once. What are the chances of that?

TH: It would be at the very least Mike and Herb should be together.

NP: We are officially ending.

End of interview.