

Narrator: William Hryb (WH)

Company Affiliations: Lakehead Shipping Company Ltd., Thunder Bay Shipping Inc.

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Summary: In his second interview, former ship's agent for Lakehead Shipping Company and owner of Thunder Bay Shipping Inc. William Hryb expands on his career on the Thunder Bay waterfront. He begins by discussing the primary tasks of a ship's agent, like clearing foreign ships with Customs Canada, arranging doctors for sailors, coordinating with ship chandlers for provisions and launderers for cleaning, and taking captains out for meals. He describes scenarios that could cause delays for ships in port, like contraband on the ship, illnesses, sailor accidents, and insect fumigation. He also recalls a major issue in the 1980s of Polish ship defectors due to political strife. Hryb then describes his travels as a ship's agent to meet with shipowners and solicit his business to them. Other topics discussed include interactions with Mission to Seafarers, a story of near conflict between a Bulgarian ship and Canadian authorities, the elevators operating during his career, unique loading features of various elevators, and issues of water levels for ship loading.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: It is March 12, 2012, and I am again at 227 Southern Avenue in Thunder Bay interviewing Will Hryb. We ended off the last interview talking about some of the changes that were taking place related to ships crews, the role of the captain, the changes in paperwork, the increased regulations and oversight, and today we're going to continue with the role of the agent. When we last left Will as a career he had just started out as a water clerk back in 1975, I think, approximately.

WH: That's correct. Yes.

NP: So let's continue on from there, where your career went, and more importantly, the kinds of duties that you took on as you moved up the corporate ladder.

WH: Sure. Before we continue, welcome to my home. Thank you very much for coming. It's a privilege being able to talk about the grain industry. As you mentioned, yes, the role of an agent is something that I'd like to describe. When I started in 1975, I didn't know what an agent was from a Bozo the Clown. I really did not. As I mentioned in my last piece, I took the job as a water clerk as a summer job, but it turned out to be a long-lasting career which I really cherish and I'm still in the industry 37 years later. I'm bringing my son along. My son, David, who's 25 years old, I have seemed to have sparked some interest in the agency business in particular.

The role of the agent is broad. What the agent does is the middleman between the ship owner, operator, and the shipper or charterer of the grain cargo. Every agent starts off as a water clerk. A water clerk is a term used in the British maritime trade. They used to call them water clarks. When Captain Mann, my wonderful mentor and the fellow that is responsible for hiring me, along with Mr. Charlie Umpherson, who was his operations manager--. As you know, Captain Mann started Lakehead Shipping company in--.

NP: Right, you mentioned that in the previous interview.

WH: Everybody who's an agency goes to a ship and is a clerk, or a clark as the British call them. What a water clerk does, or clerk, is he attends the ship on behalf of the ship's agency, and he represents the ship owner as far as filing a clearance. The important thing--. That's probably the most important primary thing that a ship agent does is clear the ship in with Customs. If the ship is not cleared in, business just does not occur, so you have to clear the ship. As a--.

NP: Just for people listening, like me, what could prevent a ship from being cleared in?

WH: Oh, various things. Probably one of the things is if Customs feel that there is contraband on the ship. Sometimes they would get tips that there was some contraband or some stowaways, and they would process the ship to inspect that there's nothing wrong with the ship. They would examine the ship. They would inspect the ship, check every cabin, et cetera, et cetera. So that would delay things. The other thing that would delay the ship from clearance is if the ship's master did not have the proper documentation, in particular, a crew list that's filled out properly on an International Maritime Organization crew list. Or if he didn't declare his bonded stores, cigarettes or spirits, things like this.

When I started, Customs would attend the ship and make sure everything is properly presented. As the ship agent, you would make sure that they would know this before. But sometimes, the ship master would let his third officer--. And sometimes he would not do his job, and it would cause some delays. Then the master would be livid, of course, because he wants the ship cleared so that we could start inspection for the grain, and we could start cargo operations.

NP: What would happen if they found contraband?

WH: If they found contraband, they would write up a citation, and the ship would have to pay a fine that would be levied. In those days, you'd have to go in and pay the fine, present it to the Customs, and then the Customs would continue their process.

NP: Did they seize the--.

WH: They would seize anything that was not declared. I remember one time this Turkish captain—the ship's name I believe was the *Toucan*. This was back in 1976. The captain forgot to declare some linen he bought in New York. Some fine linen that he was going to give his wife, so she could make a wedding dress for their daughter. Well, he didn't declare it, and they found it after all the customs looked at all the papers. They go and check, and they found this linen. He had just forgot about it. He had it under his bunk. They found it and they said, "Well, what is this." He said, "That's my daughter's material for her wedding dress." And they were very strict in those days, I'm telling you. They confiscated it. It's a roll of this beautiful white linen.

Anyway, that was the bad part of it. The good part of it is that we convinced Customs here that there was nothing nefarious about this. He wasn't trying to smuggle it or anything, he just forgot about it. It was his daughter's thing, and he was so excited to buy it, and he just didn't declare it. So we managed to get it back because they took it ashore. We got it back, so it was a happy ending. But those type of things caused delays.

When somebody's ill on the ship for some particular reason as the ship is coming in, and if there's an injury, we stop everything dead in our tracks. As you know, mooring, or docking a ship, is quite hazardous and things could go wrong, people can get injured. There was one fellow in particular on an Indian ship who was, as they were coming into Pool 15—it was Pool 15 at that time, before it was the Mission—and they were coming in and a forward line broke away from the bollard. It sprung up, and the chief mate had his head down over the side and it came up and hit him in the jaw. Hit him in the jaw, and he was injured badly.

We had phone radios in those days, so we were able to use a phone and a radio. One of those big, long things, quite ancient in today's standards. [Laughs] Anyway, the captain--. We were in the captain's cabin, and we were watching them tie up because I came up on the ship really quickly. While they were still tying up the gangway, came down, I scampered up there. I shouldn't have

but I did. I always wanted to get up there first. The captain, as he was looking through the window, observed this, "You have to call somebody really quick! This fellow's injured." Because he had a report from the second mate. He was just lying on deck. Anyway, to make a long story short, he ended up in the hospital here in a trauma unit for about seven months. He had a very severe brain injury. We understand he went back to sea two or three years later after that. Those are the type of things that cause things to delay.

NP: So to get him off--.

WH: To get him off, the crew would--. Actually, they took him on a stretcher, and they took him down the gangway, and the ambulance was there in about six minutes. We're way out on Mission. It was just so quick!

NP: Did you have to do paperwork before he got off or they just--.

WH: No. He left. Customs says, "No problem," because they understood and were aware of the gravity of this, thank goodness. So they took him off and took him down on a stretcher. Then the ambulance guys met him on the dock and took him to the hospital.

NP: If there's somebody who's ill to the extent to, let's say, was there ever a situation where they were quarantined? And if that's the case--.

WH: In my career, a ship was never quarantined, ever. In those days, the Department of Agriculture would check for general cleanliness in the galley, make sure that there's no cockroaches. Some ships were not very clean at all, and really it was disgusting at times. But generally, the Agriculture would order the areas fumigated. They would have a spray in there, et cetera. But to quarantine the ship for some illness, no, I haven't seen that. We've taken off crew to go to the hotel when we had to fumigate the entire ship, the holds of the ship, because they found insects in the holds.

As you know, a ship has to present itself clean and free of insects, free of residues behind the pipe casings, and the various structures in the hold. Fellows like Vic Bel would look at the holds very meticulously, and if there was a sign of infestation, they would take the sample ashore. It would stop everything. The whole inspection process would stop, except perhaps the port warden would continue working on the stability. The Customs would've had all their work done. But they would take the sample. They would take the insect, and they'd have an insect spec sheet. If it matched it and if it was an insect that was not indigenous to this area, they'd order fumigation with methyl bromide fumigation, which is a lethal gas. We would have to bring somebody in from Winnipeg or Toronto to do it because there was no stockpile of this bromide.

These people would come in and put these canisters in the holds, everybody would leave. They'd leave a crew member as a watch, but everybody would have to leave the ship. They'd seal the hatches, and they would fumigate the ship for 24 hours while the crew was ashore. Usually, the crew liked this because they could get a little bit of R&R time in a hotel because they were at sea for days and weeks and sometimes months. But it was a very expensive process—methyl bromide—and very dangerous. If somebody went into the hold not knowing, they'd die within seconds. This would effectively kill any insect on that whole ship. It would also fumigate the other areas of the ship, the galley and those areas, so the ship would be clean.

They would stop things for two or three days, sometimes more. When we had to do that, it was quite complicated because you had to take the crew off, and you had to tell the owners to bear them these bad tidings because it was very expensive, and they're responsible for their ship. It would cost \$30, 40, maybe 50,000 to clean the ship. It was very costly. That was always a very sensitive thing and being the agent, you'd have to make sure everything's arranged. Call these people, arrange for rooms. And some of these crew members had dietary situations where they couldn't eat meat, and you had to ask, "Does he eat this or what?" Because there's some different religions onboard. It was a complicated thing.

NP: Did they have to stay in the hotel, or did they have free range?

WH: We had to clear them off with Customs. No, they didn't. Well, they could go out the hotel, if the captain gave them permission, but they could not leave the confines of the port. If he knew somebody in Duluth, for some reason, he couldn't go officially. There were some cases where some guys just went and came back on the sly. They would do that. As an agent, you say, "Oh, gee what are these guys doing?" because they would totally complicate the situation further. But anyway, they would have perhaps a day or two in the hotel and come back and start the inspection all over again.

NP: What about the residues of the methyl bromide?

WH: If the insects that fell, they'd be on the tank top, and it would be the responsibility of the fumigator to declare the holds gas free. They'd have these very sophisticated sensors that would determine that there's no gas because guys like Vic and Bill Hunt and those fellows would have to go down, and they're risking their lives. They'd make sure that it was gas free. So once they determined gas free, they'd go down, look, and then the crew would sweep up these residues and hoist them up in big drums and leave them on deck.

NP: The other situation that you mentioned that they would look for beside contraband and obviously the infestations is stowaways. Ever a situation with stowaways? If so, what happens to them?

WH: We've never had a stowaway in Thunder Bay, as far as my experience is concerned. We've had deserters on many occasions, in particular in the early '80s. In the international shipping business, we had ships coming from all over the world. Literally all over the world. Russia, Poland, Korea, some Japanese ships, Romanians, British ships. But if you recall in the '80s when Solidarity in Poland the political situation in Poland was becoming quite sensitive in terms of people leaving, and a lot of Polish seafarers didn't want to go back home because of the President Jaruzelski, I believe his name was. The fellow with the dark glasses.

Anyway, he set up some very stringent rules. Of course, he wanted to suppress the revolution, and a lot of young men would want to leave. They didn't like the political climate. So I believe in 1981 we started seeing three or four deserters—that's what they call them officially, deserters. They would leave the ship, and a lot of the Polish nationals in Thunder Bay here would encourage them to leave because they knew what was going on back home, and they sympathized with this whole thing. The seafarers were young guys, 21, 22, now they'd be in their late fifties I suppose. They took a chance. They wanted a better life because they knew from people they talked to that life in Poland, in particular Gdańsk and those seaport towns, it was not very good. A lot of those people came from these areas, so they decided to leave, and then you'd have 4 or 5 crew that are not there.

As an agent, you have to post a bond, or the ship doesn't go anywhere. Immigration Canada, the law, it was mandatory that if somebody left a ship, the ship owner would have to post a \$5,000 bond. I think it was \$2,000 in those days and they jumped it up to \$5,000 per crew member.

NP: Per jumping crew member?

WH: Per deserter. Or per jumper. The fellows didn't like to be called deserters. It was just the maritime term for it. I remember that year, in 1981 in particular, we had ships called the *Żemia Tarnowska*. Actually, there were five of them built in Argentina—five-holed ships. *Żemia Suwalska*, *Tarnowska*. Oh, I forget the other three. Anyway, we had eight voyages from Polsteam. Polsteam were the operator.

There was Polsteam in Poland, and you had Polsteam, New York. So New York was the North American office, and you'd apply for the funds through New York. You'd get the money so that you'd post it. But the bond would have to be given to the immigration, as I mentioned, and then crew would have to be put back on board. The company would have to send somebody to replace somebody. If you had the first mate that defected, or left, you needed a first mate, and you couldn't sail that ship without a first mate because of Transport Canada rules. So you'd have to wait for somebody to come in.

It sort of puts a damper on things for an agent because you'd have to scramble to get people. You'd have to pay the fine, and it's all the bureaucracy that's involved. That year we had about, I'd say, at least 14 deserters on seven ports of call on three different ships,

the same company. So obviously the owners were saying, "Hey! We got a big problem here." So they, internally, were always very careful to have crew members that they thought that would not do this, that would not desert, because it was costing them money and time and all that other stuff.

Poland was a communist country, and they were able to put the squeeze on these guys and make sure--. Perhaps, they'd make them sign a waiver or some kind of document saying that they're not going to do this or else they'd be fined if they ever got back to Poland. So there were repercussions.

NP: I have a couple of questions about the communication. First of all, you mentioned that because there's a Polish community in Thunder Bay, along with others, they were encouraging to people. How did they link up with them? How were they able to be encouraging?

WH: Well, through the Mission to Seafarers. God bless them. They would go on ships, and the Mission to Seafarers would have a little trailer at the Keefer Terminal. They still have it to this day. At the Mission to Seafarers, they would be able to talk to people in the community to use their own telephone or use their telephone. We had on a couple of occasions some people came on the ships who were living here in Thunder Bay and the captain welcomed them, not thinking that they would be promoting them leaving. He was perhaps too naïve for his own good at times.

Anyway, their position would be, "Well, yeah. You're allowed to come onboard, but don't talk about politics or anything. If you want to take them home to host them at a dinner or go to church, that's fine." So they connected that way, and they connected through the Mission to Seafarers communications. I'm not saying that Mission to Seafarers were--.

NP: Subversive.

WH: Yeah, they were not promoting this, but they understood the problem in Poland. It was all over the news, airwaves and whatever. But they weren't complicit in it. The Polish community, they were very helpful. When the ship left, of course, these guys would be in hiding because it's an offence. "You're not on the ship. You should be on the ship. Immigration is looking for you." They're hiding someplace in somebody's home, and a lot of them ended up going to Toronto and big areas where they got lost in the shuffle. Some were identified and caught and shipped back. But most of them stayed and became very productive citizens here. Between 1981, I think that's when it started, '84, he probably had over 30 crew members leaving the ships between my company and Lake Superior Shipping because they handled some Polish ships too.

NP: Talking more about the work of the agent then, so when a ship came in, it was obviously sort of the legal stuff to do as far as getting the papers that are necessary to clear and to load and to take off again. What other kinds of things did you arrange for the ship sort of as a matter of course?

WH: Okay well there's various things. Crewmen to the doctor. If somebody's ill coming up to the Seaway and it's not serious that he has to leave, he'd want to see a doctor. You'd arrange with Dr. Dodick. He was our waterfront doctor. Dr. Cecil Dodick was recruited by Captain Rollie Mann when he came here. Dr. Dodick was only practicing six years at the time. He was interested in international seafarers. He had that penchant--. He was just very curious about these people. He was an immigrant himself, Dr. Dodick. He took on a role as a waterfront doctor. He would see the patients. He would put his patients aside and see our guys.

If a fellow had a rash or something, you'd call Dr. Dodick. I'd radio to the office. We had a radio. Before we had a combination of radio and telephone. You'd have to radio, and I'd say, "Okay we have three crew members to the doctor. Would you please make those arrangements?" So they would immediately make the arrangements, and we would set up a taxi. The taxi would come. We always used Lacey's Taxi. I remember the proprietor there, Iris, very, very pleasant, courteous woman. Actually, she's still alive today. She's about 91. That's one of the things.

Then provisions, ships need to acquire food to put on a table for them to eat fresh vegetables, meat. Some of these ships would come direct from overseas and that would take maybe 12-14 days--. Well, nine days across and another five days here, 14 days. They would try to replenish some of the fresh provisions. We would call the ship chandler. That's what a ship chandler did.

NP: And who were the ship chandlers in town?

WH: You had Frank's Locker Service in those days. We dealt with them. Actually, they're still in existence today, too. A lot of the ships now, they recognize that everybody is penny pinching. The captains want to save every penny, and they would instruct the cook to go to the Superstore or a big Safeway or whatever, and they would buy their groceries on sale because the ship chandler would mark things up quite high. But still, you would need a ship chandler for other things too, for perhaps some technical things. They would have to make up some nuts and whatever they would need to do to fix something. They'd have to get some of these things machined, and a ship chandler would take it and do it.

What else would we do? We would make sure the captain is very--. In those days we had a pretty good budget, so we would take the captain out for lunch or dinner. A favourite place was the steakhouse on Memorial Avenue, which today is the infamous other place. [Laughs] Which will remain nameless, if you'd like. But anyway, that place was a very important maritime meeting ground for lunch. A lot of the people in the maritime industry would go there for lunch. Uncle Frank's, too.

NP: What was the name of the steakhouse?

WH: It was called the—oh my word—it was called the Steakhouse. Does that ring a bell? Byron Hill. Byron Hill Steakhouse. It was pretty fancy in those days. It was one of the fancy places. I remember Captain Mann, he didn't skimp on treating these masters very well. When he wasn't able to do that, when Charlie Umpherson wasn't able to do that, I would do that later on in my career, in the '80s, as I got more mature in the business. [Laughs] But, yes, that was always fun to do because the ship master would spread the word and he'd say, "Well yes, that agent was great!" And that would be a great marketing tool for us.

NP: So you talked about the different things that needed to be taken care of just for day-to-day functioning, food, medical, I assume there was dental, and what about cleaning?

WH: Yes. Dresswell. Good thing you brought that up Nancy. Dresswell. Cleaners would do the laundry. That was always really tricky to watch because they'd have these huge, big white sacks, probably around a metre in diameter and another metre high, two or three of them. They used to lower them down on their crane, and Dresswell would come and put them on a cart and take them to the Dresswell Cleaners on Syndicate. So that was a pretty good business for Dresswell. Of course, that would all go on the ship disbursement, on the owner's account. In the shipping agency, you'd have to make sure who's account is what because what you do as an agent, you pay the bills for the ship while it's in port for every bill.

Sometimes the captain had cash, if he preferred to pay cash. A lot of them didn't because it came out of his budget, and he'd have to account for that. A lot of them said, "No. I want to sign for it." Then when I started in the business, I remember they always told me, "Make sure you don't order anything until you tell us because we have to get the owner's permission because we don't want to get caught with not having it paid." But that was one of the things we did.

Oh, one time we had to call the authorities on a fellow who died on a ship. He was a guy in his mid fifties, and he had a heart attack and he died. I think this was at P&H Elevator. We had to get the coroner there. He succumbed to a heart attack and then, of course, there was a lot of bureaucracy there with Customs, immigration, the police. You have to get the local undertaker here and I think we had Jenkins handle the affairs. The sad thing about it, the family didn't have money to repatriate his remains. He was buried here.

NP: Do you know where?

WH: He was buried at the—my goodness—the cemetery, Mountainview. He was buried at Mountainview. The ship owner did not want to pay the money to get him back for the family. They were very poor. They were a poor Indian family.

NP: Do you know approximately what year that was?

WH: I would say that would be 1983/84, I would have to look at my records. It's just off the top of my head. It was quite an experience. About 14 years later in the '90s, one of the relatives of the guy called and wanted to know where he was buried. They believed they had enough resources to bring him back, to exhume him and bring him back. So we connected him with the authorities here and with the Jenkins people and with the Mission to Seafarers. At the time it was Dave Bradford. I wish you would've had a chance to interview Dave Bradford. He was a Mission to Seafarer fellow for a long time along with Reverend Alvin Thompson. But the outcome of that was it was too costly, as it turned out to do that. When he visited the gravesite, he thought it was a very fine place, and that's where he is today.

NP: There was a headstone there?

WH: I believe there's a headstone there, yes.

NP: So sad.

WH: Yes, it was a sad thing. But anyway, those are the types of things you deal with as an agent. There's a lot of different things that come up that you don't expect. [Laughs] I remember one time we had this one fellow, and he was a real ladies guy according to a lot of people on the ship. He went missing. We had to find him, right? And one of the guys says, "No I think he's at one of the houses here." [Laughs] So as a water clerk, I had to find out where Lacey's Taxi took him. I had to do a little bit of an investigation through whatever sources I had. We found that he was on Pearl Street. [Laughs] I didn't want to go inside, to knock on the door and say, "Hey we've got a crew member that has to come out. We have a ship sailing." I think what happened was we had one of the taxi drivers go in and say, "Hey," because he was there for, I don't know, hours! It must have cost him a mint. [Laughs] Anyway, we had Lacey's Taxi go in there and say, "Hey, the captain wants to see you." So he finally made it back to the ship. That was one of the more funny tidbits of this business.

NP: How much of an effort did you take to find people? Were you responsible for actually tracking down--? This fellow probably easier to find than the ones who were trying not to be found.

WH: In those days, we had enough staff where I was able to be--. As a water clerk I was in my mid-twenties. I started in the business when I was 26. Before I was 30, my main stuff was running to the ship and maybe finding a crew member someplace who didn't recognize the time. Charlie Umpherson would say, "Hey. Go down to the mall and see if he's there." You'd have to go and

find this guy. You'd put him in your car. I liked that because I got car allowance in those days. Everywhere I went I logged my car allowance, so I didn't mind searching around. Those times, too, as a water clerk Captain Mann paid \$5 a visit per shift, not counting my salary at the time. This is when I was learning the business. I found that the more times I went to a ship the more money I made, so I would make a lot of trips to the ship. [Laughs] Not only because I liked the life—and I liked what it was—but it was making me some money. I learned quite a bit, a lot of stuff doing that.

NP: The people that did not want to be found, did you have to put up any effort before you knew it was futile?

WH: People that I knew—because you'd have the indication that somebody jumped the ship like these political, Polish guys—I wouldn't be looking around the Polish community or phoning people up saying, "Hey, you've got our Polish third officer. We want him back." Forget it. It's up to the police now. It's a police matter. Didn't want to get involved with that. We weren't supposed to. [Phone rings]

[Audio pauses]

NP: We paused a bit for a telephone call. At the time you were saying it was a matter for the police when somebody jumped ship. If you could just briefly say how the police operated, especially how it-- Did they have to interview you?

WH: Let me clarify that. It would be an immigration matter. The immigration matter would extend to the federal police because obviously he's here illegally. Canada Customs have their rules and regulations, and there are legal ramifications. If the fellow-- And they do a search on him, and they find he's got some kind of a background, then it becomes really a police matter. But by and large, the Canada Immigration would be the policing entity.

NP: Okay. It sounds like you've had a number of stories during your career that help keep your interest in the industry alive. Let's just step back a bit and look more at who was your company agents for and how does somebody build up an agency?

WH: Lakehead Shipping Company as you know was developed by Captain Rollie Mann. He had a catalogue of ship owners that he knew from his dealings with people in Hamilton when he came ashore. He was such a gregarious guy. He would travel, and he would develop contacts. He would travel the world, and in those days, you had to visit ship owners in Hamburg, England, Norway, Sweden, New York City in particular, and you'd have to cultivate your clients. You'd have to do that. That's the way he garnered the reputation for Lakehead Shipping because of his travel and him knowing that the personal contacts were so important.

NP: Now, when you talked about the different places that you visited and my understanding—very limited—of the shipping industry is that there's been a real change over in where ships are registered, who owns them, and so on. Did that have any impact on Lakehead Shipping?

WH: No. Ships registered in countries of convenience, like Liberia, Marshall Islands, but that didn't say that the operation was there. The operations were in their head offices in Greece. We were the agents for Olympic Shipping, which was Mr. Onasis. Everybody knows him. We were agents for them, and Captain Mann knew their contacts in New York. Captain Mann, every spring, would visit in particular New York. He'd make a beeline to New York because that was the hub in the late '70s, early '80s and before that, the '60s. New York City, right downtown Manhattan you had all these shipping companies. Of course, he would make trips to Europe and talk to a lot of these people in order to advertise Lakehead Shipping.

NP: Is New York still the centre?

WH: New York is a very important shipping hub today. For an agent in Thunder Bay really is Montreal. The charterers offices, the shippers like JRI, you would go to Winnipeg because sometimes charterers have the privilege of choosing who they want as the agent, so important to get both sides. Sometimes where ship owners have the prerogative of choosing an agent and in their charter party, or their contract--. The charter party is a contract. That's a term we use in the maritime industry. It's the contract between the shipper and the owner—charterer or the ship operator. So in the contract, they'd say, "Charterer's agent," which means the owner has no choice. The ship would choose the agent.

NP: So who were some of the major charterers that you would be dealing with?

WH: JRI would be a major one. When I started off, we had ConAgra Grain, Continental Grain, AC Toepfer, Dreyfus. Of course, Dreyfus now--. A lot of those offices, the shippers' offices were in Winnipeg. It'd be one-stop shopping if you want to do a solicitation trip, as it was called. First, what I used to do when I took over the company in 1989, I would visit the owners first. I would go to New York, visit Polsteam New York or Polish Ocean lines, various other ship owners. I'd do two days in New York, visit those people, then I'd shift to Montreal to see all the ship owner operators there. In particular, guys like Fednav.

Fednav is the largest Canadian international ship owner here, and they're got a worldwide reputation. They've grown so large and so big and they're family owned by the Pathy family. Captain Mann, I remember him going to see Mr. Pathy. I remember seeing correspondence way back from the '60s that he would visit Montreal to see the ship owner representatives there. Ship owner reps like Colley Motorships, Robert Reford Inc—Robert Reford the oldest shipping company in Canada from 1868, I believe. But those are the things that you would see the ship owners, and you would say, "Well, we're alive." What you're really doing, Nancy, is

waving the flag. You're making sure that you're there and you want the privilege of representing them. So you would do that. You would take--. And it's one big entertaining thing. It's one lunch after the other or an after-hours thing. You'd be in one bar or somewhere having dinner and do the whole thing the next day.

NP: So why don't you weigh 400 pounds?

WH: My predecessor almost did. [Laughs] He was a big guy, but God bless him. Charlie Umpherson was a very, very big guy. He loved life and he liked to eat well. He liked to drink, he liked to smoke, and he liked all those things that you really shouldn't be doing. He paid for it in the end, unfortunately. But he was my mentor, too, Charlie Umpherson. But getting back to solicitation, you would do that. You would go back to the ship owners and make sure they're aware of what you're doing because there's a competitor here. My competitor was Lake Superior Shipping, Mr. Sandy Henderson, who's still here with his son. He's still my competitor.

After that, you would go to Winnipeg. Winnipeg, of course, you would see all the grain companies. You'd go to the Canadian Wheat Board. You would go to various XCAN Grain, United Grain Growers in those days, which morphed into Viterra, which is morphing again at this day into another sale of this British outfit. It's not official but a British company, one of the biggest grain-trading companies in the world is reputed to have put a bid in for Viterra. It has to go through government approval. They had, with this potash controversy a couple of years ago, but I think it's going to go through.

So you would wave the flag to the charterers because the charterers would have, as I mentioned, the choice in picking an agent. If you did your selling job well, and if you convince them you're the right guy for the job to represent them, then you're in their books. And sometimes they would try to play fair where they'd say, "Okay, well, we'll use you on one ship. We'll use the other fellow—your competitor—for another ship." That happened sometimes. But we usually had our clients, and we respected the wishes of the charterers. We never called down each other as agents because that's just not the way to do things. You respect who your competitor is in every regard.

NP: So what changes have you seen over time then from when you first started and your mentors were doing the contacting and now?

WH: You see a lot of change. A lot of companies have spread all over the country. A lot of the charterers have gone from Winnipeg. Viterra is in Saskatchewan, Regina. Louis Dreyfus is in Calgary. They've got a big office there. There's office shippers in Vancouver now. So you got to be all over the place. It's a bit of a chore travelling like that. You're up and down in an aircraft all over the place, but you have to do that every two or three years. You don't want to do it every year, but you could if you've got the

resources, if you wanted to do it. Mainly, you would go to the clients that you know that you had to perk up a bit, that you wanted to try to have them. We knew they were using the other agent, but we always went in and said, “We’re here for you if something ever happened over here. We respect your client. We think he’s a darn good agent. Great. However, we’re here for you.” So those are the things you’re doing.

NP: In interviewing people in various parts of the trade, personal relationships were always a major issue in getting a contract, not getting a contract.

WH: Very important. Very important, the personal contact. You become friends with these people, you know. First, they’re contacts, then they become acquaintances, and then over the years they’re friends. You can count on these guys for giving you business and confiding in you, giving you some inside tracks to some important information you require. They’re very helpful and they provide you the livelihood on how to succeed in your business. A lot of these guys I’ve known 30 years, 35 years, and they’re still in the business.

NP: How important is the price?

WH: That’s become very crucial lately because the bottom line is the dollar. As an agent, the poor agent is always getting pecked away at his fee. Everything else is going up. Tug bills are going up, fuel is going up. The agency fee, although the Shipping Federation of Canada puts out a guideline on what agents should charge, it’s only a guideline. For example, the guideline for a ship loading over 20,000 tonnes, the agency fee would be about \$5,800. But, in the last few years, you see that ship—even though they like you and they think you’re a real great agent—it’s money that counts, too. This word rebate, it gives me a shudder down my spine, but you hear that. I’ve been hearing rebate for all my career. Usually it could be a 10 percent rebate. It’s all legal, you’re just giving a rebate to the--. It’s like when you go shopping, they give you a rebate. It’s fine you keep on going there, right? So to stay in the game they request a rebate. That’s a request, it’s not a demand.

Of course, if you say, “Sorry,” well, they’re not going to be such a--. They’ll be your friend, but they’ll say, “Hey. We’re going to have to use the other agent because he’s offering something a little bit more attractive.” This is an industry of dimes and nickels now. Really, it is. We try to make that money back by charging for the use of a cell phone or communications and you know, those things add up. You give the rebate, and then there’s things you can develop, legitimately, car allowance per day, gas is going up—what’s gas today, \$1.31?—agent typically would charge \$150 a day just for the use of a car while the ship is in port. So those things add up. Rebates are anywhere between 20 and 50 percent. It’s a really money-oriented type of business today.

NP: Before we move onto the elevators, are there other stories that you can think of, “Gee that's a good story. Didn't want to forget to tell that” Or anything else that you want to say about the business?

WH: Well one story that I think should be told is—I told it to you several weeks ago—it could've been an international incident. It almost was. This goes back to the early 1980s. I'll be brief. It was a Bulgarian ship that had to go into the Keefer Terminal for grain. She was going to be loading flax I believe. She came into the Keefer Terminal. One of my responsibilities was to call the Customs, of course, to clear it in. In those days, they would come onboard. In this particular case, we had two new Customs officers. Two guys that were quite relatively new because I didn't recognize them. So one of them asked to see the captain's safe. The captain thought, “Well yeah, just take a look.”

One of the customs officers said, “No, no. We want to take a look inside.” Captain says, “No. I can't do it.” And he looked at me and said, “Mr. Agent, I cannot do that.” He motioned to me, and he said, “You know, this is very sensitive. We can't do this.” I said, “Why?” He said, “I can't tell you now. We just can't do it.” Meanwhile, the Customs officers are wondering what's going on. They're getting more curious and curious, right?

So the Customs says, “No, you'll have to open it up.” And the captain says, “No. I refuse.” I immediately talk to my boss at the time, Charlie Umpherson. I said, “Hey, Charlie, we got a problem here. The captain doesn't want to allow the Customs to look into his safe.” It was a little safe, about two feet by one, like an old-fashioned thing with a--. What do you call those?

NP: The dial?

WH: The dial, yes. Anyway, so Charlie says, “Well you better get the captain to call his owners right away.” In those days, he didn't have a phone, but he could call from the bridge through VBA Radio was very costly. I tell you, they used to charge the call in gold francs, believe it or not. Gold francs. From Thunder Bay. You're calling and the captain said, “I'd like to have my charges.” And they said, “Well, it would be 185 gold francs.” Where they got that from, God only knows. Anyway, he talked to the owners. The owner says, “Nope. Don't open up the safe. We're going to call the embassy, and we will get a representative from Ottawa to meet you tomorrow.” Meanwhile, the captain said, “Okay.”

We went back down to the cabin where the Customs guys were. They were looking around here and there. So we said, “No. Sorry gentlemen, we can't. We have direction from the owner that we cannot open the safe.” “Oh. Okay.” So they got onto their superiors, their superiors got onto the RCMP, the RCMP got onto the OPP. We had been at dock for about five hours, and this is becoming a real international problem.

RCMP showed up, OPP, and I'm there as the agent. Good thing I was dressed well. [Laughs] But my business, I remember in my career you have to be courteous, and if you're mad at anything, you don't show it, especially to the authorities. You don't do that at all because you make matters worse. So we explained to them that there would be somebody coming tomorrow to open up the safe. He's not allowed to. They said, "Why?" "We're not allowed to tell you." They said, "Okay. When is this guy coming?" By that time, we knew he'd be coming about 10:30 in the morning. I had to pick the fellow up. He's a Bulgarian representative. I think the ambassador's assistant—name a mile long—and I picked him up. I said, "Well, we're going to meet at the ship, as we planned, at 11:00 in the morning. We have to meet there, and you have to direct the captain in what the authorities want." He says, "Okay,"

Very thick accent, very Bulgarian guy, you know, big bear of a guy. We took him down and everybody was there—OPP, RCMP. They had a police guard on the ship overnight. Just totally--. It was like a movie. So the guy came and the diplomat came. He says, "Okay, captain." He talked to him in Bulgarian. I could understand it because Bulgarian is very close to Russian and Ukrainian. I spoke those languages. I speak Ukrainian. Actually, one of the reasons I got hired was because I could speak more than one language. But anyway, he said, "Okay." Captain said, "Okay." And in his broken English the captain said, "Well, in one minute—it's all orchestrated—I'd like to have the Customs here and the police are here. I will open up the safe."

In one minute, it was like on cue, like it was a theatre arts thing, you know. Okay, minute is up. "Okay!" Captain went and he dialed, opened up the safe—a couple of clicks right, two clicks left, another couple of clicks right. He opened it. It went clink. Everybody was looking like this, looking down at the safe, inside, and there was a manilla envelope. We observed it. The Customs did not touch it. RCMP did not touch it. They were, I think, ordered not to touch it, like overnight. "We just want to see what's inside." So they looked. It was a thick envelope with a wax seal on it, old-fashioned wax seal. Looked like something from the 1700s, right? [Laughs] They said, "Okay. You can close it." And that was it!

It was just amazing. After all this stuff, all this bureaucracy, guy flying in from Ottawa, from the Bulgarian embassy, obviously they had some direction not to make some big federal case out of it because it would've been all over the news, and God only knows what. So they just, "Thank you very much. Thank you, Captain." They all left at once. [Laughs] I said, "Captain, what did you have in the safe?" He said, "We have orders in case of war that we get from the capital in Bulgaria. They would tell us to open up the envelope, and in the envelope are directions what we have to do in case of some kind of conflict." At that time, it was very--. The Soviet Union, which controlled Bulgaria, all those communist countries, it was very sensitive. You had the Cold War. The captain says, "No. If I opened up the fridge, I'd be in jail." So that was an interesting story I remember.

NP: Your intrigue, internationally.

WH: Very fascinating story.

NP: Well, we're over our time. I could go on forever, but I'm eating into your lunch hour.

WH: Not at all.

NP: But you did--. And I really want to talk to you about elevators.

WH: Right. Now, as you know, when I started--. If you don't know, I'll describe it. When I started, we had 17 elevators in the port, 17 working elevators. The first elevator I ever went to was Cargill, which was Grand Trunk. People called it Grand Trunk Elevator, and they still do today. I remember that was the first visit I made to an elevator as a shipping agent. Although I had worked in an elevator in 1973 for three days. My brother Mike, who started at Sask Wheat Pool 4 right out of university in 1971--. Those days, they were making a lot of money, and he coaxed me to join up in the car shed. He got me a job at Pool 4, so I knew what an elevator was. But the car shed was--. I just didn't like the--. It was just terrible working conditions as far as I thought. My brother thought I was too soft. I lasted three days, and I quit, and I went to go work someplace else.

NP: Was it hopper cars by then?

WH: No, they were grain-door cars. You'd have to go in there and take all that grain residue out of there. I didn't like that.

NP: So you didn't have a dumper either? A grain-car dumper?

WH: They did! Let me think. Well, in any event, I just didn't like the atmosphere, so I did leave that career. But, anyway, getting back to the elevators. When I joined you had all these elevators. A lot of these ships that we had would shift to three or four elevators, which was quite costly. In those days, it was very lucrative for a tug operator to be around because he'd be shifting these ships from one elevator to another elevator. At that time, when I started, then you had operating you had Searle. You had Pool 15, which has become the Mission Terminal. It was idle for several years and they brought that back to life. Then on the Kam River you had Paterson. That was operating. I think they tore it down or they stopped using it in '78/79. Anyway, you had also on the river--.

NP: Before you go beyond Paterson, were the two elevators on the turning basin still there?

WH: Yes.

NP: But were they operating?

WH: They were. Western 10 and Western 11 they called them. To this day, Western 10 is operating as Western Grain By-products.

NP: I'm thinking the other direction.

WH: No. They were not. That elevator was not operating.

NP: The last picture I saw one was called the Purvis and I don't remember the other. Purvis for Service.

WH: Actually, it's in this booklet that you could look at. But no. In 1975 when I started, those were the elevators--. These were the elevators that were working, I'll just list them. Western 10, Western 11. You had Saskatchewan Pool 5 and Saskatchewan Pool 8. Then across at Intercity you had P&H, Manitoba Pool 1. Then across the slip you had McCabe's. Those two elevators shared the same slip. One would be starboard side 2 the other would be portside 2. You couldn't--. If a ship was at Pool 1, you'd have to get the ship to shift up to--. [Phone rings]

[Audio pauses]

NP: Ready to go?

WH: Yes.

NP: We ended with McCabe. You were just talking about when a ship came in to McCabe's you had to--.

WH: Yes. Well, you had to be careful because the slip is very narrow, and you've got two ships that are perhaps 70-foot beam, and one ship would have to move up the dock to allow the other one in.

NP: So did you have to be, as an agent, did you have to be on the dock when they were loading?

WH: No. No. What an agent does as the ship comes in to the dock, you attend the ship. What you do when it's all passed, et cetera, you attend the ship every morning to discuss what the loading situation is and then--. It's a courtesy call, basically. But that's what you would do. Sometimes you would come back at the end of the day. You would visit the ship regularly. Anyway, sometimes it was difficult for ships to be loading at the same time at that area, in that slip. Of course, we have Pool 7A.

NP: Was Thunder Bay Elevator gone by then?

WH: By 1975, Thunder Bay Elevator was a dormant elevator. Just no use on that. Still standing today. Then of course you had Saskatchewan 7B and Canada Malt, at that time, which is still shipping malting barley out. You had Manitoba Pool 3. It was a good elevator. I remember they mothballed all that.

NP: What makes something a good elevator?

WH: You had a good load rate. I think you had about 1,400 tonnes an hour, three loading spouts, I believe. Just very efficient.

NP: Which elevator was notoriously slow and fast?

WH: Depending on the commodity you were loading, you'd have a different load rates. By and large, all of them were good. Very good. One thing really astounded me was when you asked for figures for elevators up the river like Western 10, you'd get them in a minute. They'd be very quick. "You want it to four decimal points or three?" They were very mindful of what information you needed. Some of the bigger places, they would say, "No. Call me in a half an hour," or whatever, and you'd get that. By and large, they all operated efficiently in terms of trying to get the grain out of the elevator because they were storing it. The quicker you had it delivered to the ship, the quicker you could get more cargo grain into the elevator. So timely loading would be very crucial.

Just to give you another, the other elevators that were in existence at that time were Richardson's. Then you had Sask Pool 4, and on the other side you had Alberta Pool 9. So they shared the same elevator slip, if I recollect correctly. Alberta 9 I think stopped shipping grain in '76—the year after I was there—or late '75. I'm not quite sure. Then of course, you had UGG A, which was a great elevator to load at. You had six loading spouts, a lot of water, great to get in right from the north entrance, straight in there, portside, too. No shifting at the dock. A lot of these elevators you would have to shift at the dock because they had maybe two loading spouts. You'd have to shift at the dock to facilitate the loading in the holds.

NP: Did you have to do anything as far as the logistics of slip depth or was somebody else doing that?

WH: The depth was always the knowledge of the port. When I started in the business, we would have a description of the elevator, what the depth was, and, of course, the depth would be recorded on an official chart. But you have to be mindful, too, these charts sometimes aren't accurate. If there's any question of water depth, the ship almost always takes soundings to make sure they have enough clearance under the keel, under the hull. So they would take soundings and it would give them the safety knowing there's

enough water because if they touched bottom, then that's a problem. Who knows? They could damage the ship. The ship has to be afloat at all times.

NP: So did you ever have to do some quick footwork to when things weren't accurate and you were expecting to get a load of a certain amount at a certain elevator and then all of a sudden, "Oops"?

WH: Over the course of a season or a few seasons, when lakers load, they touch the bottom. They can move a lot of stuff around. They could create a berm or something. When saltwater ships come in, they could be loading at a particular position, and they could hit this berm and it would--. The quirk is they wouldn't be doing down, submerging, it would be a problem. They would say, "Oh. We don't have enough water. We can't do this." There's a big protest. The ship files a protest to the charterer, and he makes a big case out of this thing. He's not been here before. Usually this happens with captains that are not familiar with the port.

Captains who are familiar with the port, ship owners, they would say, "Okay. We would come off the dock, get off this berm a bit." They would certainly try to facilitate the loading with the elevator. But no, there's been cases where captains just refuse to load a certain amount of cargo.

NP: So what are your choices there as the agent?

WH: As the agent, you would try to convince the captain that this is all a bunch of malarkey. [Laughs] By and large, it depends on who you're working for. If you're working for the charterer you say, "Well Captain, no, you got to load this. You got to load this ship." [Phone rings]

[Audio pauses]

NP: We're okay.

WH: Are we?

NP: So I was asking you what your options are. You had mentioned that one is to persuade the captain that all hell is not breaking loose and something could happen but--.

WH: Right. We would probably say--. And invariably the ship has been loading there successfully. We would point that out. We'd say, "Well, this ship loaded no problem. So why don't you slacken the lines off, just come off the dock a bit, the grain trimmers will

get the pipes in the hold, and you shouldn't have a problem. You've got a lot of water in there." Because we would ask them to give us a sounding depth illustration. Basically, you would draw a diagram of the ship, and at different points of the ship, he would define how much water there is. So we would say, "Well, no. You've got enough water here, so just get off a bit and you'll be fine." Sometimes that works, sometimes it doesn't work.

If you're the ship owner representative, and if he says, "No. I'm not loading," then you go to bat for him. But it's been sensitive in the last five or six years because of the low water level issues in the lakes, especially in Lake Superior. Ship owners have to be very cognisant of what could happen if they do touch the bottom and if there's damage. So they have to be mindful of that, and they have to be mindful in particular of the bottleneck we've got in the St Mary's River, because we've got to pass through the St Mary's River. You could have 10 metres of water in Thunder Bay, but if you only have 7.9 metres in the St Mary's River. What good is that? So the ship master has to be aware of what prevailing water levels are at Sault Ste Marie in particular because those fluctuations could go two feet either way.

NP: So climate change then has implications?

WH: Climate change has a lot of implications in our business. As you know, the port in 2006 dredged to 8.5 metres—dredged various elevators to 8.5 metres at the elevator's expense, plus they had some subsidy money. They didn't do anything up the river much to the chagrin of Western 10 and Mr. Mailhot. He's got a point to argue. He's a bonafide elevator, and the unfortunate thing is, they're not going to dredge the Kam River. It's going to cost a lot of money. But anyway, water levels do play a very important role.

NP: More excitement for you. So you've started your own company.

WH: I've started my own company. I operate Thunder Bay Shipping Inc. My son David is on board with me. Actually, we're just planning for a trip to Montreal next week to introduce David, and to wave my flag. We'll be ready to compete with the other two fine agents we have in the port of Thunder Bay.

NP: Okay, well this has been wonderful. Great addition to what we're referring to the big jigsaw puzzle of the grain industry and all of these pieces that have to come together in order for it to work. So thank you very much.

WH: I'm very glad to be a part of it. Thank you, Nancy.

End of interview.

