

Narrator: Joe Igneczi (JI)

Company Affiliations: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Northland Machinery

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Summary: Millwright and grain cleaning and processing consultant Joe Igneczi discusses his long career in the Thunder Bay grain industry with Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. He begins with the story of his immigration to Canada from Hungary during the Hungarian uprising, and the various seasonal jobs in Thunder Bay that led to his work in the elevators. He recalls the various levels of jobs he performed in the elevators including operating boxcar dumpers, “banjoing” storage bins, shovelling boxcars, working on the cleaner and scale floors, and helping millwrights during the quiet winter months. Igneczi describes his schooling and apprenticeship to become a certified millwright, becoming a millwright foreman, and some of the main millwrighting challenges in the elevators. He details his involvement in testing new grain cleaner machines and the development of the one-pass grain cleaning system, and he describes how this led to his work as a consultant for cleaning systems in inland terminals. Other topics discussed include the grain elevator hierarchy of jobs, the language barrier to moving into senior positions, working with immigrants from around the world, his military education, and his enjoyment of the work’s challenges.

Keywords: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; Thunder Bay terminal grain elevators; Millwrights; Grain elevator labourers; Grain cleaning; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Elevator 7A; Grain elevators—Equipment and supplies; Grain cleaning machines; Elevator cleaning floor; Elevator car shed; Elevator scale floor; Boxcar dumpers; Boxcar shovelling; Grain bin banjoing; Bin diving; Skilled trades; Trades work; Grain weighing; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Elevator 5; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Elevator 6; Superior grain cleaning machine; BM&M grain cleaning machine; One-pass cleaning system; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Elevator 15; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Elevator 7B; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Elevator 4A and B; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Elevator 8; Immigrant workers; Immigrants to Canada; Inland grain terminals; Country grain elevators; Northland Machinery; Machinists

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: Good morning. It’s August 22, 2012, and I have the pleasure of interviewing Joe Igneczi at his residence on Hilldale Road. So I will have him introduce himself in a little bit more detail, and then we’ll explore his role in Thunder Bay’s grain industry.

Jl: Yes, good morning. My name is Joe Igneczi, and I have been in Canada since 1957, August 1st. I have experienced quite a few things, but before we go any further, I would like to mention that I'm a lot more Canadian than anything else. I love this country. I think this is the best country in this world. I say this many times to my kids and to everybody else I can get a chance to say that.

NP: Great. You came to Canada in the late 1950s.

Jl: Yes.

NP: Is that when you started working at the grain elevators?

Jl: Not quite. When we came to Canada, government immigration gave us \$5 stamped on the green landing card, and that was really something, \$5 in 1957. But that didn't last too long, and we had to look for a job right away. We didn't ask what kind of job. We just wanted a job. The very first job was when we went out to--. We had a chance to go out to Kashabowie Coldstream copper mine, but the mine closed about 6 months later, so that wasn't the greatest start. But I'm kind of glad that it closed because I came into town—since my background is a city boy—so being out there it was a little strange start. When I got into town, I managed to start with Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in May of 1958 in the springtime because the grain industry in those days it was set up to be seasonal. The springtime when navigation opened, then people didn't have too much seniority over people who just started. Well, we only worked a couple months, and then we got laid off. We got called back in the fall time when the boats started to come again before the lake froze and there was a rush of shipping and all of that. So we had a chance to go back for two months in the fall or so. Roughly around two months.

So the first three or four years, it was like seasonal work. Two or three months in the spring, two or three months in the fall, and in between I had to find other jobs. There were odds and ends, like Rosslyn, there was a brick factory there. There were other little things. Perhaps the most noticeable or worth mentioning was I worked in the papermill, Great Lakes papermill in those days, and I worked for the Department of Highways surveying. That was a nice job, but the hourly rate, the pay, was about half of what the grain elevator paid. I worked those jobs, actually, in '58 fall, and through '58-'59 winter, I worked right through the winter with the Department of Highways. We were doing land surveying, but we'd done also the highways up around Vermillion Bay up to, I think, it's Elliot Lake, that road heading up north, Dryden. I actually surveyed that road that is going from Atikokan to Fort Frances across the lake. I never travelled on the highway, and I surveyed it in '58-'59 winter. [Laughs] I never went that way because I usually travel to Winnipeg, but I worked on that for about a month and a half. I did get around in the first few years.

[0:05:53]

[Audio pauses]

NP: Anything. [Laughing]

Jl: That's okay.

NP: Yes. You had a very interesting first few years in Thunder Bay, and it raises some questions in my mind. When you came to Thunder Bay, first of all why Thunder Bay? And how old were you at the time?

Jl: Well, at that time I was 22 and a half years old. Don't forget, I was in the army. After high school, when I finished high school, I went to the military academy in Hungary. I wanted to be an officer, and I was very close to it, but the Hungarian uprising in 1956 October against the Russian occupying forces. So I had joined the uprising, and well, of course, it didn't take too long. A couple weeks later, the Russians started to come back with full-force tanks and all that, so I had to sort of get out of the way and hide for a short while.

NP: And there were quite a number of people who emigrated at the same time and probably for the same reason?

Jl: Most of them for the same reason. I don't know if I should mention this, but I always felt that people who came out by Christmas in 1957, they were sort of running away from the revolution, you know? From us being free again in Hungary, a new democratic state and all that. So this is just my own opinion. I have to underline that. The other thing is I went back to my folks. They were quite far away from the central action and all that. On January 10th, a friend of mine came—he was my classmate at the military academy—and he knew what I went through. And he said, “Joe, you better disappear because they are looking for you. The secret service is looking for you,” because I was involved quite a bit. So it took me four days from January 11 to January 15, four days to get to the Austrian border and cross the border. And once I crossed the border, I was safe, you know? But the last two days I was travelling only at night and alone. In January, everything was frozen, but there were reeds and all kinds of things to hide because there were border guards, and it was a bad tactic to cross the border. But thank God, I made it. Yes, I stayed in Austria for six months, from January 15 to July 31st. That's when we boarded the plane in the Schwechat Airport close to Vienna. Before--. This is funny. I had a chance of--.

[0:10:02]

[Woman]: Hi!

[Audio pauses]

JJ: Come in there. I have to stick in there, okay.

NP: Okay. So just--.

JJ: So I went to the Canadian embassy in Vienna, and I wanted to come here. I had relatives in the US, and I didn't say anything to them because they sent me an affidavit to go to the US. I didn't ever mention this to them, but I was a little upset with the United States. When we asked for help—and it was a bad taste in my mouth—that when we asked for some ammunition and guns and some supplies for fighting, they sent us chocolate bars. You cannot fight tanks with chocolate bars. [Laughs] So that was in my mind, and I said, “No, I'm going to go to Canada. It's a democratic country.” I didn't know too much about Canada, and I said, “I'm going to come to Canada.” Close to the US if I want to visit my relatives, but I didn't want to go there for that reason that they didn't help us. Thank the lord that I came to Canada! [Laughs] That was one of the things. When we came out in '57, July 31st, and we arrived in Montreal—I'm not 100 percent sure, but I think it's July 31st—and August 1.st From Montreal I took the train, or we took the--.

By the way, when we were at the Canadian embassy and we signed up to come to Canada, we signed an agreement that we will go wherever they send us or take us, and we're going to stay there for at least a year until we get to know the surroundings and find jobs. You know, in those days it was easier to find, even if it was a labourer. But we found jobs. Like I mentioned before, on the fourth day, I was working in the copper mine. We had to sign an agreement that wherever they take us, we go, and we stay there for a year. And that's where I was designated to come to Fort William. The first four days I spent at the Salvation Army. Not just me, but there were about eight or ten of us latecomers we spent in the Salvation Army four days. Even to these days, there are so many charities around here, but I only contribute to the Salvation Army and to the MS Society because my wife had MS. And the Salvation Army, it's always in my mind how they helped us. That's how I started out.

Once I started working in the mine, that was different. After that when the mine closed down when I came in, I started working for Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. It was a little tricky to get in because I didn't speak a word of English. One of the older Hungarians that they came out earlier—like I think it was shortly after the Second World War in the '49, '50, '51, those days—he took me to the grain elevators. We went to Pool 7A, and I got hired there. I sort of never looked back. I stayed with the grain business and the grain elevators. Even when I went to work the odd jobs in between layoffs because we were on a seniority list--. I had some odd jobs where it was the Great Lakes papermill or the other ones I mentioned. I always wanted to go back to the grain elevator because--. I don't know if I should say this, but there were quite a few immigrants in the grain elevators, and I almost felt at home.

Like in Pool 7A, there were quite a few Finnish fellows, lots of Italians, and some Ukrainians. I think there were only two of us Hungarians. I always felt at ease with those people. I liked the grain elevators, and it took a while to work my way up, but--.

[0:15:51]

Oh, yes. Before--. I didn't get called back when I worked on the highways surveying, Department of Highways, because I was out of Fort William in those days, and I didn't get the message. So for the fall time, I missed it, and I couldn't go back. So when I went back, and I went to Scarney Barnati--. Barney Scarnati, that's the name. See, my mind is half the time and half in English. [Laughs] Yeah, that was Barney Scarnati, the police chief's brother. But Barney was a nice fellow, and I went to see him, and I said, "I didn't get called back, or if I did, I was out of town." And he went up to the superintendent, and then he said--. Well, Barney was telling me, "Come with me." So we went up to the superintendent in Pool 7. I was with him, and Barney was telling the superintendent, "You have to hire this man back." And the superintendent was kind of, you know, shocked at Barney's talking like that. You know, he asked a couple of questions, and Barney said, "Well, he's a good worker. He's dependable." And the superintendent said, "Okay. You come back tomorrow." I was back working. So it was nice to be back with the gang again, yes.

NP: Now, the group that you came over with—the ones that stayed with you at the Salvation Army—did they all end up staying in Thunder Bay as well, and did they work in the grain industry? Or what happened to them, do you know?

Jl: No. After we finished--. Because there were about six of us going out. We went out to the mine, but I was the only one--. When the mine closed down, we came back into Fort William, but I was the only one who ended up in the grain elevators, and the other ones, a couple of them I know went working in the bush in Geraldton, and other ones they had odd jobs. One was loading the boats. They had quite a bit of business loading the boats in those days on the shipyards or whatever they called it. I don't know. Some went down to Toronto after. They had enough money. They didn't need any handouts, and they had like good trades. I know one was a machinist. I hooked up with him after a while when I was going to trade school. I stayed with him, and he was down in Toronto. So once they had enough money, and they could depend on themselves and not on government handouts, they sort of found their own way, and that's how--. "What have you done?" You know? And they look for their own job.

NP: So when you came to Thunder Bay and first became aware of the elevators, do you recall what you thought of elevators back in those days when you were just new to them?

[0:20:06]

JJ: Well, I didn't know. Since my background is, like I mentioned, my folks lived far away from the cities, my background is sort of farming, and I knew what grain was and the other things. I knew that. So that was one thing that, "Oh, we never saw big grain elevators like that back home." First, I just wanted to take a look what's inside and things like that. [Laughs] Yeah, I liked it. When this older fellow took me to Pool 7, I had a chance to look in there. I was just amazed when they were talking about how many millions of bushels of grain they can store in there. Yes, that was interesting. Of course, the wages were quite good in those days. If I remember correctly, I think I made \$80 a week. Something like that. When I worked later on for the Department of Highways, that was only \$40. Quite a bit of incentive there to go back to the much better wages, even if it was a shorter time. But in between I found little jobs, and I maintained that.

NP: So when you started off, you were unable to speak English. I would assume that most of the supervisors spoke at least some English.

JJ: Yes. The supervisors, well, of course, they had to because they had to communicate somehow. I didn't speak that much English, hardly any, and Barney put me with--. Actually, I've seen the name. Rocky Torsitano. He passed away a few years ago. We were working on the back winch at Pool 7A. When they unloaded the cars on the dumper, we had to pull in the cars. I hooked up the cable to the car, and Rocko was handling the winch and the back winch. We had five dumpers to spot the cars, so that's what I was--. We got along very well, and we had lunches together. We hardly spoke. He didn't speak much English even in the later years, but we got along well. I guess, you know, when that little incident happened that I missed a call back, that's why Barney probably saw that I was not a bad guy, and I got along with a lot of people.

Jeez, I knew so many Italians. The Cavas, Johnny Cava. He was on the front winch. He used to pull out the empty cars and knock them out. There were quite a few. Then the other Cava—not Johnny's son—but he was a grain commissioner. He played hockey also. Buddy? No, Buddy Cava was a millwright. This was a younger fellow. He was a grain commissioner, and at that time, yeah, he worked inside like a grain inspector or a weighman or something like that. So there were quite a few people, and some of the Finlanders—three or four of them—they were dumper men, and they didn't have to speak to many people. When the car was spotted and locked into position, they just started the dumper, and they were doing their own work. Yes, I enjoyed those days. Yeah, it was nice.

NP: That can be dangerous work.

JJ: Not so much. I mean, everywhere you had to be careful and be on the safe side of what you're doing, but that wasn't bad. Probably the--. Oh, there were some dangerous things later on. Like--.

NP: Such as?

[0:25:00]

JJ: In most of the elevators on the waterfront, the bottom of the storage tank, it's tapered so the grain will not settle there. When it gets to the end when it starts to empty out, it empties out on its own. But Pool 7 tanks, they were flat bottoms. So when the grain emptied out, as in a 45 degree angle, the grain settled there and stayed there. We usually done that every second year when there was a weigh over checking how much grain we have because-- Well, we always tend to have a little extra grain leftover. [Laughs] I don't want to go into that. You can talk to the grain inspectors about that. They know what I'm talking about. But anyways, at weigh over time, we had to empty out those bottom half, and we had to go down there with one guy standing on just-- It was a chair, it was just a piece of wood with one frame around it, like a three-inch bar, and there was a cable hooked up to it. And he'd sort of crank you down there. That was a little bit touch and go, you know? Some guys didn't put on the safety belt. I always did. And there was the other guy was feeding the rope down with a safety belt, and the other guy was cranking the winch letting you down.

Once you're down there—oh, this is something—once you're down there, it gets so dusty. This guy, he was a little nut. He was a heavy smoker, and the dust and all that, and he lit up a cigarette down there, and he was puffing with all the grain dust and all the smoke and everything. He was hacking and coughing, but he was still smoking. They wouldn't bring him up before the tank was emptied because it took about a good half an hour to scrape that down. Yeah. He couldn't wait that long, so he had to have a puff. [Laughing] And he got real heck when the supervisors found out.

NP: How did you get the grain out? You're lowered down from the top of the bin floor?

JJ: Yes, from the top of the bin floor, from the annex floor. You were lowered down, and there was quite a few tonnes of grain in it, maybe about 10, 15 tonnes. But because it was in the slope and you were close to the bottom valve, and the valve wasn't open wide, just enough in case somebody slipped and then slid down. It was enough for the grain to empty out of the tank. We actually had it was called a banjo. Nobody will understand this but the grain handlers. [Laughs]

NP: Describe it.

JJ: Some of the grain handlers in the old days. A banjo, with a wider steel plate about three feet wide and about 12 inches in width and arms welded to it. One guy on one side of the banjo, and we were pulling, and the other guy on the other. So two guys was

pulling a lot of grain, actually. That moved a lot of grain. That's how we emptied out. Then when it was down to about four or five inches of grain on the bottom of the tank, then we just used a shovel and a broom, and we swept the grain.

NP: So they lowered two people down?

JJ: There had to be two because for the banjo.

NP: And would you just stand on the grain?

JJ: Yes. That's how it was. You lowered the first one down and then the second man, and you're on your own. They walked away. Even if you hollered to pull me up, until you finished, you had to stay down there and finish your job. [Laughs] Yes, it was quite--. But we didn't mind it. We'd done it. There was a lot worse experience. Yes, in the first few years, I mentioned that it was a seasonal work. There were times when they started cutting back and cutting back manpower, and Sask Wheat Pool owned a few elevators up the river. When you were close enough to get on the seniority list, they always made a point of sending people up the river to Pool 5. Now Pool 5 was something else. Everybody, when they heard "Pool 5," they sort of turned around and walked away. They didn't want to hear about it. They didn't want to go up there. It was almost like if you survived Pool 5, then you got on the seniority list.

[0:30:50]

NP: What was it about Pool 5 that put the fear in peoples' hearts? [Laughs]

JJ: Well, I guess not knowing what was expected. The second was it was a shovel house. Now again, Pool 8 had a sort of a dumper but not the greatest, but you still didn't have to shovel. Pool 5 and the Fort William elevators, they don't belong to us anymore. They did, anyways. Sask Pool 5 had a shovel house. What a shovel looked like was about--. It was a hardboard piece of wood. It was about three feet wide and about three feet deep. Three feet by three feet. The cable was attached to the bottom half of that board, and the top part had two handles for your hand. And when you yanked that board, it kicked in a winch, and the winch started to curl up, started pulling the board out. So you had to hold the board in a certain angle, certain position, that you were pushing the grain out.

Now, I went through it with another Hungarian fellow, Les **[0:32:28 Gluck]**. He was in Pool 7 also, started the same day or almost the same day. We were up there, and the car shed foreman was not the friendliest fellow--not the friendliest fellow. I don't want to mention his name. I know his name, but he passed away a long time ago. God rest his soul. We were shovelling. The first day we

finished shovelling, and it was just terrible. I got home, and I laid down. I passed out. I slept. I was just aching everywhere. No supper or anything. Next morning, I got up, a friend of mine was picking me up with the car. We went to Pool 5 again. I grabbed something, a sandwich, and we went. Next day was the same thing. It was just terrible. It was very hard until you knew how to do it. It was very hard. So the third day, this--. I don't remember his first name—an Italian fellow again. He was a winchman up there. Campanero. He passed away also. I don't remember his first name. As we were shovelling, Leslie and I, he come to the door, and he says, "You guys are a little slow, again, the second day, and you still--."

So he came into the car, and he showed us how to do it. He said, "Don't start climbing to the far end of the car because you're going to be half dead by the day's over. It's too--." Walking in the grain, you need so much energy. And he said, "Just stay close to the door. Make sure you have a big pile in front of the shovel, and it will be you don't walk too much in the grain." Once we got a hang of that, the third day was easier. The third day was easier. It was an unwritten law that when you do ten cars, when you shovel out ten cars—two men, one for each end because we had two shovels coming in and out of the car—when we shovelled the ten cars, then we can go home. Leslie and I, we saw a few people that they finished 3:00 and then they were going home. When we were there still shovelling until Campanero showed us how to do it, and that started to get a little easier, so I could sleep a little better. And a week later, it was just another hard day's work and nothing to complain about. And we'd done okay after.

[0:35:42]

So about a week later, I mentioned—I might as well say—Jack Canal. He was the car shed foreman. He was a rough character. [Laughs] A week later, we finished the ten cars, Leslie and I, about 3:00, 3:30 in the afternoon, and we started to walk into the lunchroom. So Jack hollered. He hollered, "Where do you guys think you're going?" And he starts swearing and things like that. So we stopped. You can't talk back because then they wouldn't take you back on the seniority list, you know? If they thought you were a troublemaker or you weren't listening to your supervisors and all that, then you never made it on the seniority list. And we didn't want that. So he caught up to us, and he was still hollering, and he says, "Where do you think you're going? It's only 3:30, you can't go." "Well," we said, "we finished ten cars, and we thought we can go." He said, "Oh, no, no. You come back here. You start picking up the papers. You sweep the tracks here. Cleaning up." We couldn't say no.

So we went back, and we were doing it. When the time came, 5:00, we punched out, and we went home. Next day, you never know what happened. I'll tell you. We were shovelling, and we said to each other, "We're not going to hurry. We're not going to hurry if we have to. We're not going to start doing that baloney again." But the thing is when you shovel the car, the car had to be elevated up to the scale floor, it had to be weighed, and then it went through the cleaners also. So when you shovelled the car, and it was going up, elevated, weighed, and they took samples. The government guys, the company fellows, they took samples. They had to check it. And we were just shovelling, shovelling. It was 4:30, we were still shovelling. Quarter to 5:00 we were still shovelling.

And at quarter to 5:00, the guys started to run out from the cleaner deck, “What’s going on?” He’s not getting any grain and all that. That means they didn’t weigh it off on the scale floor, so the government guy--. Anyways, at the end, they had to pay overtime for the government fellow because he waited too long, [Laughs] Jack Canal, the car shed foreman—the one who was giving us heck to going early—he was there, and he was watching us, and we were just going. Five o’clock, we finished the car, but by then, they had to pay overtime for the government guy. We found out later on what happened.

So Jack got heck because they found out also that he was hollering at us when we finished a little earlier and chased us back to do some more work. So we heard later on that he got a little bit of heck over that. Next day, Jack comes there, “When you finish your ten cars, you can go home.” [Laughing] We said, “Okay, thank you, Jack.” And we went our way. After that, we never shovelled until 5:00. By 3:30, we were finished with the ten cars, and we started to get cleaned up and go home. So that was a side story. I don’t know where we’re standing here. [Laughing]

NP: That’s fine! These are great stories. A lot of people did the work--. [Audio pauses] So I’m going to--. I like that. When we paused the tape, you had proved that you were the kind of worker that they needed to put on the seniority list. You did your time at Pool 5.

JJ: Yes. [Laughs]

NP: So what happened then? What path did your career take after that?

[0:39:57]

JJ: Yes. When I got on the seniority list, I was assured that when it was my turn on the list, I got called back, and I did. After a couple years, I started to--. Also I was going to night school, so I was picking up English quite well, and after two or three years, I thought that I should go and see what’s going on. Maybe the cleaner deck is a little more interesting job. A lot of equipment in there and things like that. So I have asked to work on the cleaner deck, which was not a big thing. At that time, I didn’t think too much of it, but I did get to know the cleaner machines and started to see how it works, and how we had to adjust it in order to clean grain. The separations and all that. That was a stage in my, if I may call it, a career in the grain business. Later on, I found out that in order to become a general foreman, you had to work on the scale floor. So I stopped the superintendent, and I think it was George McMan, but I’m not sure of that. He was in Pool 7A, and I was asking him, one day I was asking him that I would like to get on the scale floor and see if I could. He says, “Well, we’ll see about that.” “Okay.” About a week and a half later, I got on the scale floor.

NP: Now, how long then would you have been working with the Pool when you made that move?

JJ: That was in--.

NP: You know, generally.

JJ: '62-'63, something like that. So from '58, about four, four and a half years or so. So, yes.

NP: Can I go back? And I don't know if you have any comments to make about it, but--. Well, two things. First of all, was there Pool 7A and B at that time?

JJ: No.

NP: When did Saskatchewan take over the--?

JJ: The old Stewart?

NP: Stewart or Bawlf. I keep getting them mixed up.

JJ: Yeah, Stewart Elevator. I really couldn't tell you, but that was a few years down the road. I couldn't tell you that.

NP: Okay, fine. That at least tells me that when you first started, it narrows down my area of focus. We try to follow the history of these elevators.

JJ: Yes.

NP: Now, the other thing was, did you have a sense of the organization of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and its connection to the farmers? Was there any sense that--. Or was it you were doing your job, you were loading ships and unloading cars, and something was going on up there, but you had no idea of--?

JJ: I really didn't have too much idea, or I didn't pay attention too much. I noticed--. And this was maybe when I got on the scale floor. I noticed that there were other people, and they didn't belong to the company, Sask Wheat Pool. They were the grain commissioners, the grain inspectors. So at that time, I started to see a few things, and well, okay, where the grain was coming from,

and there's a Wheat Board, and there are the grain commissioners there. And I said, "Why do we need the grain inspectors or the grain commissioners, the weighmen up on the scale floor?" It was a different entity, different company. The older ones started to say that they don't want us to cheat on the farmers. It has to be weighed properly, and the inspectors, when they're checking the samples in the government offices, they have to give the proper grade. The company like Sask Pool, if it was a [No.] 1 Red, they had to pay for [No.] 1 Red and not [No.] 2 Red, and things like that. Then I started to realize, yes, there is more involved. Then I started, when we were shipping from the scale floor, then there was another outfit, the grain trimmers, and they didn't belong to the grain elevators. It was another company again. So I started to notice things and be a little more interested.

[0:45:43]

Because after three or four years, as I mentioned, I started to talk a little better English, and I understood more. I started to focus on things that, well, just for a short while, I said, "Maybe I could make a general foreman." General foremen are management, and one fellow was saying that--. He was an old guy. His name was, I think, it was Merkley. He says, "No, Joe. When you want to become a supervisor or general foreman, you have to speak very good English. You have to talk to people. You have to explain things to them, and they usually like it if somebody speaks to them in almost perfect English." So that was another awakening for me. I started to think about millwrights. For the other reason that if I cannot make it as a general foreman, then I'll try to be on the millwright gang just even to upgrade myself to that stage.

NP: In the hierarchy of the elevator then, you would have the general labourers who were either there because they wanted to be or because their language skills were such that it was difficult to move beyond that. And then--.

JJ: Most of the time--.

NP: What was the rest of the hierarchy?

JJ: Most of the time, like 80 percent of the people had a language barrier, and they started in the car shed, and a lot of them retired from there. There were quite a few who retired from there. The next step in the hierarchy was to get into the cleaner deck, and if you got on the scale floor, well, that was a special move. You had to be, well, whatever. It was further up.

NP: You had to be what?

JJ: Not just physically. [Laughing] Further up on the--. Well, more dependable. They could send you to do a job and give you a couple of guys to help. "Joe, you look after these guys." Most of the time, whoever they give you, well, they didn't speak that much

English either, so it was something like that. From the scale floor it was something like that. There were the annex men. The annex men usually they were the ones who set up the trippers where the grain will go and what bins, the number of bins where they had to put the different grades. They usually got in there, and they were nice and quiet and read the paper a lot and had a shut eye once in a while. The younger fellows, they were running the trippers. They retired from there. In the old days in the grain elevator, Sask Wheat Pool, anyways, and probably the other grain elevators--. And I'm talking about the '70s and even the '80s. Not so much the late '80s. But in the mid-'60s and '70s, once you were on the seniority list, they didn't lay you off. Or if you were quite high on the seniority list when there were no cars, no boats coming, well, they put you to help the millwrights.

[0:49:59]

I remember in Pool 6, there were about 22 millwrights, seven oilers. Quite a number, yes. In the wintertime when we started overhauling the chutes, the spouts—when they wear out we had to put new liners inside, steel liners—they gave us helpers from the rest of the gang in the elevator. They didn't lay them off. They didn't send them home. “Go with the millwrights.” So we got maybe another 20 helpers. So it was a big gang overhauling machines and lining spouts and things like that. I got a chance to work almost, I think, two winters just helping the millwrights. I said to myself that, “Okay, this will be nice. I want to be a millwright, and I have to start working that way.”

NP: What did you like about the work that the millwrights did?

JJ: Well, for one thing, they didn't stand behind your back. They didn't holler at you. You were almost like your own man. There was an older experienced millwright and a younger one with him. It was an unwritten law that you never send one millwright to do a job. In case he was on a ladder or had to climb up on the top of the machine or something, there had to be two in case for safety reasons. Holding the ladder if he's climbing on top of the machine or something like that. So when I saw that, I started, and I did take some time off, and there were some that I got laid off. So I turn around, and I went and took the welding course in Hillcrest High School, and that took quite a few weeks, but I finished it. When I finished that, I came back to the elevator, and they put me with the millwrights anytime I was there. They didn't send me back to the scale floor. “You go as a millwright helper.”

Now, I still got laid off once in a while, and when I got laid off, I went to Can Car. In those days it was Canada Car. Now it's Bombardier. And I was welding there, putting together those trailers and things like that, welding them together. I worked on there. There was this old fellow, his name was Mike. I don't remember his last--. I worked there at once in maybe about four or five weeks when I was laid off from the elevator, and then they called me, of course, I went back. I went back to the elevator. Next time, I went a couple of times to Can Car, and he started telling me, he said, “Joe, why do you have to go back? It's such a dusty place,”

and things like that. I said, “Mike, you don’t understand. It’s like going home when I go to the elevator.” I had these little jobs, and there was something else. When I worked as a millwright helper, every once in a while, I’d done other jobs.

[Audio pauses]

NP: In a spot.

JI: In other certain little spot, yes.

NP: Okay. So when we paused, you were talking about what it was about the millwright work that you found appealing.

JI: Well, it was the variety probably, and like you didn’t have to sit in a cubicle all the time. It wasn’t in an office. You pretty well had the whole elevator to look after. So one you may have worked up in the annex or on the top floor, the scale floor. So you were moving around, and it gave you almost like, if I may say, a little freedom of movement. [Laughs] That was appealing. After I got my welder’s certificate, they sort of looked at me that, well, they can keep me in one place or send me over to the other elevators. If I may say that I was a little more in demand than most of the other guys, but I wanted to advance and to become a millwright, a certified millwright.

[0:55:20]

When I approached the personnel superintendent at the main office, in the old PUC [Public Utilities Commission] building, he said he wasn’t that anxious. So I called him again a week later that I wanted to sign up to be a millwright apprentice. Didn’t like the idea. I asked him, “Why don’t you agree with it?” He said straight out, he said, “If you get your millwright ticket, you’re not going to come back. You’re going to go on your own, and you’re going to make more money and things like that.” I said, “No, it’s not like that. I’m going to come back. I’m almost like married to the elevators.” [Laughs] Finally, he agreed. And I was the very first man in Saskatchewan Wheat Pool to sign up for a millwright apprentice. In those days, I had to go down to George Brown College in Toronto three different times. Like one year the basic, the intermediate, and the advanced classes in the apprenticeship. Six weeks at a time. Six, seven weeks at a time had to go down to Toronto. The very first year, I had to take my vacation because the company said they’re still not crazy about me taking this course. They didn’t trust me.

So anyways, I took my vacation, sacrificed it, and I went and took the course. And three years later, I got my construction and industrial millwright, both tickets. They’re two different items. So that’s how I became a millwright. When I completed the apprenticeship, and I came back with the ticket, within half a year, they made me a millwright foreman in Pool 6. That was a step

up. To me it was a step in the right direction, and I enjoyed it. Probably in my mind, I was always a sort of organizer, overlook things. "Don't do it this way, or maybe it's better that way," and things like that. I never had any complaints from my guys. Yes.

NP: So I noticed on the certificates here that you've shown me that you finished--.

JJ: They're different years there.

NP: At 1975, I guess, was your last year.

JJ: Yeah, that came out--. Yes. I think it was in '74 already that I was a millwright foreman.

NP: You mentioned that the first year you had to do it on your own vacation.

JJ: Take my--. Yes.

NP: And you were paying for it yourself as well?

JJ: No, I didn't pay for it, no. That was, no. Well, now that I think of it, they certainly didn't provide anything. No, I was on my own. You know what? I actually had to take a leave of absence from the company at that time when I took my vacation or the second year, but the third year, yeah, they coughed up the money. Yes. When I finished after the second term, I was a millwright foreman at Pool 6.

NP: So you were moving up through the system, and a lot of the people that you probably started with had not made the same choices you did about education and improving your English and so on.

JJ: Or the same desire.

NP: Or the same desire, yes.

JJ: Yes.

NP: Some people are quite content. So was it easy to move up in the organization? Were they an equal opportunity employer if you had the qualifications?

[1:00:13]

JJ: I think it was equal opportunity. The company was more than fair after when they saw what I can do and help the company in many ways. Because that-- I don't know if I should even bring this in here. I don't like to bring the union in. Because when I got the promotion, there were a couple of other older millwrights that they said, "Oh, they've been on the millwright for a long time," and they got a lot more seniority than I do, and they tried to bump me. Actually, in Pool 6, one of the fellows actually got to the point where they had to give him a chance because the union was protesting, and the union wanted to let this other guy try out and see how he's going to do. So he came out for a-- He was there for a week, and I had to step back and let him do the job. After a week, he went back on his own to Pool 7. He says-- Oh, he was complaining that the guys weren't listening to him and all that, but I was there, and the guys weren't listening because he wasn't saying the right things—when to overhaul a machine or what to do or what to adjust. He just didn't, how should I put this gently? He didn't measure up to the job, yes. After a couple of those tries, nobody bothered me, and they let me go.

To sort of connect everything, because of my experience from down in the car shed to the cleaner deck, I got to know the cleaner deck and the scale floor and the millwrights, it was almost natural to go to the point where now we have to start thinking of, "How can we improve the cleaning? Or how can we improve if we install another machine?" Or something like that. I started giving a few ideas, and they started listening.

NP: A couple of questions, and this one goes right back to the very beginning of your training as a young man in the military. And skills that you developed training in the military that you think contributed in some way to your success in the elevators?

JJ: [Laughs] I'm kind of chuckling because I think it made a big difference. But first of all, in the army, they teach you character. They teach you to listen. When your supervisor tells you something, you can only-- How should I put this rudely? [Laughs] What they told you in the army that when you get an order, you cannot screw it because when you screw something it multiplies. So you're way better off to do the very first thing and be done with it because if you don't do that, then you're going to have 10 or 15 other orders. So in the army, they teach you character. They teach you to listen to your supervisors, and they teach you not to question any orders. Just do it. [Laughs] And I was heading in that direction that if I would have become an officer, I would have had to teach the younger generation to be respectable and good citizens. So it does teach you to a certain degree to-- How they told you in the army, you go in the army as a little boy, and they make a man out of you. In many ways. Like you follow, in civilian life, you follow the law and so on.

[1:05:35]

NP: Now one of the dangers, I would think, in that—I can certainly see the benefits—but one of the dangers in that is that as you move into a supervisory position, the expression we have is, “My way or the highway.” So there would seem to be a balance there so that you keep the troops happy, and the troops being, in your case, the other millwrights.

JJ: The millwrights, they were very satisfied from my point of view. They were very satisfied with my workers. I called them my men. They gave me Christmas parties and things like that and took me out for lunch. It’s not just that, but they respected me when I told them what has to be done and how it has to be done. Something I’d done it even when I was a millwright foreman, those bucket elevators, they are big. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen one. Those huge belts with buckets on them, some of them are four or five feet wide, and they’re going straight up from the basement all the way to the top floor. Sometimes those belts they busted and tore and had to be rejoined. I didn’t expect that the fellows do that. I’d done the joining myself and clipping together so it was perfectly right. Because if it wasn’t done right, if it was a little out of shape, then the belt would run sideways, and it would scrape one side, or if it was coming down it would scrape the other side. We’re talking about steel casings, and the buckets are steel. They can spark when they scrape again, and they can cause fires. So I didn’t expect them to do that. Or how should I put it this way? I didn’t trust them. I shouldn’t say that I didn’t trust them, but I felt more at ease if I’d done it. So I wasn’t the one who would step back and holler at them that, “Hey, you do this, You do that.” No. I sized up the job, and if I was needed, I was there and started doing it myself, and they helped me.

So they respected me. Let’s put it this way. And the proof for that, that some of those millwrights--. And most of them they were Canadian kids. I shouldn’t pick out--. They were all younger ones, and in order for an immigrant to give them--. In order for them to listen to me, I had to know what I was talking, and they had to realize that I know what I was talking, and I was giving them the right information and the right guidance. That is the bottom line. Even to this day, if I meet one of them—they get together in the mall every Wednesday 11:00—they say hello, and they like me to greet me and, “Hi, how are you, Joe?” And things like that.

NP: What was your biggest challenge in the millwright department over--? How many years did you spend there? Because then you moved onto a speciality area, which we’ll talk about shortly.

JP: How many years? I was from probably about ’65 I was in the millwright department to ’81. That’s including the worker--. From 1965 to ’81, that’s quite a few years, yeah. Yeah. Like I say, they would have never taken me, they would have never listened to me, if I didn’t give them the right--. And I never treated them that they are below me or anything like that. No, it’s not my style.

[1:10:33]

NP: One person had said in an interview that it was very important for you to get along with your workers in the elevator because if you didn't, it could be a dangerous place. Anyway, moving on from there, what were the biggest challenges, even from the standpoint of a mechanical challenge, that you faced over that time as a millwright?

JJ: Well, for the first--. No. I never experienced anything like that. I never heard that one guy would hurt another, even if it--. No, I never.

NP: No, I don't want to leave the impression of hurt, but it was things could go wrong.

JJ: Well, it could go wrong in a way that they would have done something, and you got blamed for it or something like that. So they wouldn't have helped you to get ahead any further or help you or make your days easier. Yes. [Laughing] I've seen those things happen. No, it's just like that fellow who came over from Pool 7 and tried to bump me because he had more seniority. You know, when he started saying things how to be done and this and that, one of the fellows told him, "F off," because that's not the way we do it, you know? There are certain things for safety reasons you cannot do that. Yes. I've seen those things happen, so they didn't help him in that case. Yes. But other than that, what was the other question?

NP: The question was--.

JJ: Oh, the biggest challenge.

NP: Yeah. Because I would think at this time, as I'm looking at it here, grain shipments really skyrocketed during that time when you were a millwright. So things had to be really operating well.

JJ: Well, things were going well, and it had to be maintained because sometimes they were shipping 16 hours a day. Yes, it had to be. If something broke, we had to fix it in a hurry for ready for next morning. We answered the challenge, and we'd done it. Even with the cleaners—I'm going back to the cleaners—the cleaner machines are probably the most intricate little part of the--. And probably the toughest machines. They're thousands of little parts in every machine, and you have to know the sound or what type of grain they cleaned or produced and things like that that something is wrong. In those days, we manufactured our own parts most of the time. I don't know if you know the screw conveyors. Yes? The spiral things?

NP: Like the augers?

JJ: Augers. We call them screw conveyors. On the shaft, that had to be machined, and we'd done our own machines. We had--. And by the way, I did take, even for a machinist in later years, I took that as a millwright. Now in the later year, that's something else. So I did try to keep up to the work and the challenges the work demanded. Although my English is not the greatest even today, that you can sense and tell the accent, but to tell the workers to my fellow workers something, I had to know what I was talking.

[1:15:10]

NP: It helps. [Laughing] Builds confidence.

JJ: Yes. It does. These are those screw conveyors I'm talking about. We had to install ourselves. We had to put everything together. Sometimes they wear off when you put on the bearings and all that, take them out. You had to weld it up, build it up, and then machine it down to the perfect size. Things like that.

NP: So Saskatchewan Pool elevators then were operating how many elevators by this time?

JJ: Well, in those days we had Pool 4A and B—two houses—Pool 5, Pool 6, Pool 7, and Pool 8 up the river, 5 and 8 up the river. So you're looking at about six or seven elevators, and then came on the 7B and the Fort William elevators. Now, I think they operate everything. Well, not everything. There's Richardson and Cargill and P&H [Parrish & Heimbecker] still. But yeah, I can't really tell you exactly how many. But the old Empire, they tore that down a long time ago. It was on the East End. That was all wooden. I was there already. I saw it a couple of times, but it was just too old to be repaired, wooden elevators.

NP: Pool 15?

JJ: Pool 15, yes. That was the old Searle. Pool 15 has a special meaning for me because back in '79-'80, there was a new machine on the market—and you may not believe this—but that machine was used out in Burnaby, BC, shaking the dust and the fine little particles of the woodchips. You know how they make the chipboards almost like plywood? The four by eight sheets made out of woodchips. They had to shake out all the dust. They had some significant sizes to do that. Now, in those days in a grain elevator, it was very, very important to have the screen-type machines. They are in the same idea as those woodchip machines. They came on the market in a later year. In the elevator, they had the clippers, the S6 machines, these were all Monitors where the Monitors were in sizes probably the biggest. They were all screen-type machines. I don't know what word to use, but it was very important to shake out, separate, the round seeds from the wheat or the barley of the bigger kernels. That's what they used the screen-type machines for.

But while the cleaner machines they produced, you know, they cleaned many tonnes, these screen-type machines weren't able to keep up to the cylinder-type machines. So we needed something that had four or five times more cleaning capacity than the screen-type machines that we had for us in the elevators at that time. When we heard that, and I started to think about it, it would be nice to try out for wheat. It took quite a bit of convincing. And see, the only reason I'm starting to slow down to talk because I got a little bit ahead of myself, but I'm looking at the clock also.

NP: Don't worry about that.

JJ: I don't know how much you heard about grain cleaning and how much you heard about the one-pass clean?

[1:20:12]

NP: Nothing.

JJ: Well, one-pass clean is-- Well, first of all, a cleaner set. A cleaner set consists of Superior cylinder-type machines. And if you look at Pool 7A, you walk through it next time, you'll find—well, not today, but in those days—we had 52 Superior machines, individual Superior machines on the cleaner deck.

NP: So Superior is the brand name?

JJ: It was the brand name. I tried to show a picture of that, but I don't know if I got it. Nope. Anyways, in order to-- Cleaning meant everything. You see, the grain had to be clean. Canada was actually proud and depended on the cleanliness and the true grade of the grain. We have to thank the workers. We have to thank also the grain commissioners that they kept us in line. You see, we were talking about the screen-type machines. When you look the Carter dockage tester in the Grain Commission office, you're going to have the screens on it. This is a real shaker machine. The bottom screen is a four and a half round hole sieve. Anything that falls through when we're cleaning grain, anything that falls through a four and a half round hole is dockage. So the top screen was a number six, and number six box sieve, and the four and a half round hole. So Canada always maintained the good quality and almost like a top grade. It was recognized on the world market. So grain cleaning was very important.

One of those Superior machines, Superior cylinder machines, in Pool 7A I mentioned they had 52 on the cleaner deck. It costs thousands and thousands of dollars. Every third or fourth year, we had to tear every machine apart—not all 52 at once. Every year we'd done so many, and it cost thousands of dollars to overhaul again so they would run another three or four years. Still, what the biggest problem was-- It wasn't a problem because we didn't even know about it. The machine wasn't on the market. The biggest

thing was that the seeds on the four and a half round hole sieve had to fall through, and the Monitors that they had the flat screens or sieves, they were just not able to keep up to those four Superiors. When this new machine came on the market, I started to think that we should try it out because it could have a much bigger capacity.

NP: Who made that machine, the new one?

JJ: Burnaby Millwright and Machine Shop [BM&M] or something.

NP: Now before you continue with that story, I just wanted to ask you, you were saying that a lot of the equipment that you either made or repaired, did Saskatchewan Wheat Pool have a central workshop or did every elevator have its own millwright shop where they did their own work?

JJ: In the old days, everybody'd done their own. In later years, we did have a central machine shop, and I was involved with that because at that time I was working in the engineering department. I was the supervisor there.

[1:25:03]

NP: Okay. So I don't want to take you off finishing the story about the Burnaby machine. So you suggested that it might be something the elevator would like to try, and what happened? Just so you know about the pages and the--.

JJ: What happened was that it took about almost close to a year before we managed to get a little machine, and we installed it in Pool 15, sort of out of the way. We started experimenting with it. See, I start to think of other things and end this one. Let's shorten this down. We're not going to have enough time. [Laughing] I could talk until tonight.

NP: There we go! So let's agree that we'll have a second round so that you can take your time.

JJ: How to shorten it down and just tell the important parts? In Pool 15, I finally managed to get one of these little BM&Ms, and we started experimenting with it. But in order to do that, we had to take one of the Superior machines away from the main set and set it up as a different unit by itself. One Superior machine and one BM&M. One Superior machine can clean roughly 30 tonnes per hour. Then we started experimenting how much will this clean? What would happen if the machine was a little bigger or more screens in it? We were looking for more capacity. It took about six months, six months later. And that was quite a bit of money because when you have a new machine and you put in a separate, different concept, you had to have--. When those machines discharge product, there are going to be four or five different products once it's separated. So that means you have to have a

different screw conveyor conveying system in the basement that will collect all those things that went through the machine. Now the conveyor in the basement, that will have to have a separate leg, and elevating leg. So it wasn't a cheap venture for Sask Pool to do that.

NP: So they had to actually drill through the concrete floors to--?

JJ: Well, we had to do some of those things, and we had to buy a lot of new equipment to that machine. And actually, Northland helped us with that, but it took quite a while. When you try to spend some money on the side for these companies, they wanted to make sure that they're going to get their money's worth. And nobody was sure. I wasn't sure, but I said, "We should try it because there is a possibility." It just so happened that this thing, when we started talking about it, it took about a year. I was still a millwright foreman. When I started experimenting, that was the last six months, I developed the one-pass cleaning system in Thunder Bay.

NP: So the one-pass cleaning system in a nutshell, how would you describe it?

JJ: Well, how I'd describe it--.

NP: And what made that special compared to what was happening before?

JJ: Okay. I mentioned one Superior machine cleans about 30 tonnes per hour, but because that machine doesn't do a perfect job and the Monitors can't keep up with it—the screens cannot keep up to it—that meant that we had to put that same car of grain through the same machine second time again. So it would remove a lot more than just the dockage. When a car came in with a two percent dockage, when that car went through the same machine twice, you lost about six or seven percent of that car. So if it was 100 tonnes, you lost about six or seven tonnes into the by-product reclaim system.

[1:30:29]

Now, in that six percent—the six, seven tonnes—there are a lot of good grain in there, like, almost four tonnes. Now you have to reclaim that because you cannot afford to lose that. So what would happen if you--. And when you put it twice through the machine, so you actually are not going to clean 30 tonnes per hour on that one machine, you're only going to clean 15 tonnes. But if you get a good screen-type machine with a special set up on the machines also, you can do that 30 tonnes per hour. So you actually double your cleaning capacity. That's what we called the one-pass clean. It didn't have to go twice through. It didn't have

to lose a lot of good grain. It didn't have to reclaim it on the reclaim system. That was another thing. How should I say it? I've done that.

NP: So when you talk about 30 tonnes per hour--.

JJ: Per machine.

NP: Per machine. What would be--. Let's take a bigger elevator rather than Pool 15 where you tested this out. So let's go back to 7A. Replacing the existing systems, the Superiors, with the new system, what does that work out to? So how many--. Like 30 tonnes an hour sounds like a lot, but that's just one machine. So what would be, in the busy season, how many tonnes were being cleaned?

JJ: Well, as I mentioned, that doubles your cleaning capacity, but also—you can kick me in the behind—that will cut out some manpower. This is how it happened. This is how it happened. I don't exactly know. Like, that was more than enough for them when they heard this. Actually, in 1981, when I became management in the management team, part of the management team, we still had to sell this to the board of directors in Regina. Because they wanted to see some of the set up and the machines, they came down, and we went through the--. First, I put on a sort of a presentation about the one-pass clean to all those people in the Airline Hotel—me, an immigrant! And well, when it was finished, I didn't remember what I said or how I begin with the thing, but they liked it anyways, and then they wanted to go down to the Pool 7 and size up the situation there.

We did get the money after that. The board of directors agreed to go big on the system. So the little Burnaby machine at Pool 15, it still stayed there, but we started buying the big machines, big screen-type machines. I can't remember exactly, but they were like over 100 tonnes per hour cleaning capacity. What we'd done in the elevators that--. I mentioned that every set, it's a cleaner set has four Superior machines. That means that you have a big pot, and there are the house bins going into that pot, and that pot feeds four machines, four Superior machines. Now, we remove one Superior machine and replace, put the big screen-type, a big BM&M in its place. So instead of four Superior machines, we remove one, and we put a BM&M. But that meant that now we're feeding three Superior machines, and we had to have a small elevating leg to feed the BM&M, the fourth machine on the set. That was producing the nice, clean grain.

[1:35:45]

NP: So eventually were all the Superiors replaced?

JJ: Not all because you had to have three machines, three Superiors that were still doing the job as they did before, and the one screen-type machine that helped to remove the seeds. I don't know if you say those Carter dockage testers, those little machines?

NP: I didn't look at them closely, but I did see one. So let me get this straight. Because the bottleneck with the Superior machines was the final, you were calling it the Monitor, wasn't able to keep up, the new Burnaby--.

JJ: BM&M.

NP: Machine was--.

JJ: Not just keeping up, but cleaning capacity was much higher than required.

NP: So if that's the case, why not replace all of the Superiors? Is it because the Superiors were doing fine for a certain level of cleaning?

JJ: Okay, okay.

NP: But the shortcoming was--?

JJ: Okay, now you're going into grain cleaning, and the separation.

NP: Okay, should I be--.

JJ: I haven't got my proper book to show you. Darn it! Now, here is an indent cylinder. One is a Superior. This one is a Superior, and this is a Uniflow cylinder.

NP: Okay. I would like to make a suggestion here because of the time. We are coming up on noon, so here's my suggestion if it works for you. Let's follow through the rest of your career, and then we'll spend time in a second interview talking in depth about cleaning. Does that work?

JJ: It's very important. It's very important--. Is it on?

NP: Yes.

Jl: Very important to know the very basics of cleaning because the cylinders, the indent cylinders, you cannot cut out of the cleaning.

NP: Right. So let's spend a separate interview just concentrating on cleaning.

Jl: Okay.

NP: So if we can just--. I don't want to lose track of the flow of your career by going into the technical discussion, which we won't have time for anyway. So in 1981, you became part of the management team. What was your title then?

Jl: It was a grain cleaning and processing foreman.

NP: Okay. Now, you mentioned that there was a cloud to the silver-lining, and that was because of the increased efficiency, there was also less need for people. Did the company switchover completely for all the elevators that it operated? Did it, because of the increased processing, close down certain elevators?

Jl: I don't think it affected that way because for many years we were still doing the one-pass clean, and the equipment was there, the people were there. But this is just my own opinion. What really affected--. Well, it might be just up to a very small percentage that affected the grain trade on the Lakehead, this advanced cleaning. There were other things, and the other things I'm thinking about the big ships, they could not come up on the locks, and they had to go to the West Coast or down to the Mexican part there.

[1:40:31]

NP: Gulf of Mexico?

Jl: Yes. To load the grain. So they had to go down there. Like I say, this is just my own idea. I don't know if this is what happened, so don't hold me to that. But the shipping was a bit complicated as the big ships they started to get bigger in size. The locks were not able to hold them or let them come up here. Some of the grain started to go to the West Coast because they had bigger boats. And those boats, actually, got loaded from BC, like Vancouver, with grain, they went down to the Panama Canal, and that's when they went to Europe. So Thunder Bay started to become a little bit--. Well, you know, the locks were holding us back. That's just my--. I have to keep emphasizing that this is just my way of thinking. And the politicians and the other ones, the unions, they can read into it whatever they like, but that was the main factor first of all. When the grain had to go towards the West Coast and down

the Panama Canal, that was one item. The other one, they started going down across the US, down to Mexico, and that gave an idea to the farmers. They were thinking, “Why can’t they clean out there and ship straight down or just ship it to the West Coast and not to Thunder Bay?” Because the shipping was getting to be a little more complicated. Like I say, this is what I think. Many other people will think differently, but this is what I think,

NP: From my experience in listening to interviews from several people—Winnipeg, here, union, non-union—it’s not a simple story.

Jl: No, it’s not.

NP: There are all kinds of factors. The Crow rate comes into it, there’s changing markets. There’s a whole slew of issues.

Jl: Yes, many issues that affected the grain handling or transportation, actually.

NP: Now, I was just talking to someone who worked for Lake Shippers Clearance Association, and he was especially proud—and deservedly so—of the 1983 shipping season where he said they loaded 800 ships with 17 million, I think, that was tonnes.

Jl: I don’t know the numbers.

NP: I may have that quite wrong, but he said it was unsurpassed in, he said, probably to this day in getting so much product out in such a short time onto so many ships. That must have had an impact on your operation because everything was called into action to get a lot of product moved. That would have been, I think he said, 1983, so that’s right about the time you’re making the shift to--.

[1:44:36]

Jl: There is a man in Pool 7A right now, he is a millwright foreman, Gordon Martin. You could talk to him. He’s still working. At that time, he was a salesman for Northland Machinery. Being a salesman, every once in a while, he came out to see—and knowing the cleaner machines and all that—everyone once in a while he came out to see what I’m doing in Pool 15, trying out the BM&M. In hindsight, he’s a smart man, so he knew what I was doing. Didn’t have to tell him. Because they had to do a lot of rearranging the machine and the flow in the machine, and he knew exactly. What I’m trying to say is that after we had done it, and we tried it, and we started the--. Actually, the first elevator was Pool 7B. That’s when we tried it on a big scale. That’s where we knew, and then after, every year we started one set in Pool 4, another set in 7A, things like that, upgrading all Saskatchewan Wheat Pool’s cleaning system. Yes, the cleaner system.

So he knew. What I'm heading towards is that he probably had his own idea working for Northland Machinery, and I don't know if it was Northland or Berglund Machinery. They were the same. Same company, same people. They started making these big screen-type machines themselves. They made it on a small like the Essex machines, the small screen-type machines. That was okay in the reclaim system. By-product and reclaim, it's the same thing. Sometimes I say by-product, sometimes reclaim. So they made those smaller ones, but not on the big scale that will take care of three other Superior machines. They started making their own. I don't know whether that was a result or not. I don't want to get sued or something, but he knew what was going on, and they started doing the same thing. Actually, there was a court case too because Burnaby took them to court that they copied the Burnaby machine. [Laughs] This is going to be on the tape? Darn it!

NP: Well, if it's a court case, it's public knowledge anyways. [Laughing]

JJ: It's public knowledge anyways, but it didn't go too far anyways. But yes, they started building those big machines, and every year we changed one or two in our elevators, like, Sask Wheat Pool. Pool 7B was the first one. One set was converted. And again, we gave it a few months until we tried and tested and measured everything, how it works, and we went ahead, and we started doing it in every elevator.

NP: So a really big capital project then.

JJ: It was a big one because I don't know how much a machine costs in this day and age. It cost quite a bit.

[Woman]: Sorry.

JJ: It's okay. It's okay. So it would take, you know, quite a bit of money to convert, so they couldn't do everything at once. But while we were doing this, I know that next-door, Canada Malt next-door to Pool 7B, and then Manitoba Pool, they were interested, and they came over. We used to go to each others' elevators and look and things like that. Yes.

NP: Those were the good old days when there was cooperation between elevators even though they were your competition.

JJ: Yes, competition, but still, yeah, we cooperated. Yes. While I was in the engineering department, it was required for me to upgrade our cleaner men, you know, our cleaner operators, and we had quite a few. Like 10, 12 in each elevator, and we had to put them through cleaner seminars, that, "Okay, this is not the old machine anymore. This is not the old system. You have to learn the flow. You have to know what product goes to what machine," and things like that. So I started putting on cleaner seminars. When I

retired in '92 because--. '92, they started cutting back on manpower already. When I retired in '92, well, I'm not sure if it was Northland or--. I think it was Northland that picked me up right away, and I started going out with them. Or was it--? One of the smaller companies, they still have a machine shop close to the Fort William elevators up on the river. Thunder Bay Millwrights or something like that. I was travelling with them and going into the elevators on the Prairies.

[1:50:50]

NP: They were starting to build the bigger elevators?

JJ: They were starting to build the concrete elevators, but they started actually in '80--. When did they start building it? Like this one is from Weyburn, Saskatchewan. I think they were the very first ones to build and extend, and that was in '85 or '86. I think it was '85. Yeah. It's just the writing important in there.

NP: Well, it says, "Prairie farmers had a glimpse of the future in 1988 when the first generation of--."

JJ: '88?

NP: "Concrete elevators was built in Weyburn."

JJ: Okay, it was built by then, but in '85, that's when they started to talk about--. Yes. In '85. This was built in '88 already, so by then, they had quite a discussion back and forth between the provincial government, the federal government, on a big scale. Like the Saskatchewan government—don't quote me on the years—but this was in the early '80s when the Saskatchewan government said that they will help the farmers. They will help to build the concrete elevators, and if the federal government matches that amount what they put up. So obviously this was built in '88 already, so that had to take two or three years to be built. At that time, they started building.

NP: And that was the same time or about the same time that they started with the rail line--.

JJ: Everything.

NP: Everything. Cutting back on rail lines.

JJ: Everything started to change.

NP: Everything started to change.

JJ: Well, it's cutting back on the rail lines because they didn't need it anymore. If they clean the grain in Weyburn, they have a chance to go to the West Coast or down south. Once the grain is cleaned, then they don't have to come to Thunder Bay. See, until they started building the concrete elevators and installing cleaner machines, Thunder Bay was needed. Even if they had to send their cleaned grain by car to the West Coast, they still needed Thunder Bay to clean.

NP: You talked about dockage in the grain cars, and I think you mentioned sort of a seven percent figure.

JJ: Yeah, from two to six, seven percent.

NP: So would every grain car be pretty much the same?

JJ: No, no, no. That I would like to go back to that when we--.

NP: Talk about cleaning?

JJ: When we look at the cleaner machines how they clean because, just quickly, you cannot eliminate the cylinder-type machines.

NP: Okay. Now, I'm going to ask you some general questions then so that we can really concentrate on the cleaning in the next one, and those questions are: When you look back at your career, which is long and illustrious--. Oh, you've got more to add?

JJ: I haven't finished yet. [Laughs]

NP: Okay.

JJ: Because when I started to go out with this new company, and they were in the grain business cleaning machines and all that—repairing, installing—and I started visiting the Prairies, six months later, I got a call when I was in Regina. And the man from head office, Sask Pool's head office, came to see me, he said he wants to have a little--. First, he was inviting me for supper and a drink and things like that. He started talking that they want me to go back to--. Everybody knows everybody in the grain business, and they want me to go back to Sask Wheat Pool's payroll. Not on my own and not--. Because this company that I went with for six

months was advertising me as a grain processing foreman consultant. So my company said, “No, you can’t do that. You have to come back with us.”

[1:55:47]

Now this is a little bragging because they gave me a contract offer, and they said they’d give me the consulting wages. I don’t want to say what. There was just one clause in my contract. While I am under Sask Wheat Pool’s contract, I cannot go into any other company’s property or help them any way, shape, or form with their grain cleaning. So it was a nice offer, and I took it. Up to 1996, they didn’t renew my contract. So I was with them for four years.

NP: And what was the official title?

JJ: Grain cleaning and processing consultant. And after four years, they didn’t renew my contract. You know, right away, the other company picked me up, and I started going. [Laughing] That didn’t stop me to go help Sask Pool after, but by then, they felt confident because they built quite a few elevators, and they were ahead of the game out there. And that was their purpose. So I was consulting all the way to year 2000. From ’92 to 2000, half of it with Sask Pool, the later half with anybody else in the grain business.

NP: A good, long career. As you gaze back on that, what are you most proud of?

JJ: As a person? [Laughs] I don’t know. I suppose I feel satisfied that when I came out in 1957, I didn’t speak a word of English, and I sort of advanced myself and had the drive in me to keep going and keep learning and keep helping. Whether it was the company or people, even this day, I am that way. I like to help people in here, and they know me. Ask anybody, and they will tell you that. It’s just my nature. I don’t know. It’s not so much my upbringing because when I went to even high school, after Grade 10, I didn’t stay home with my folks. I was in a dorm, and after I finished high school, then in the military, I was sort of on my own, but I always had to maintain one thing is that to be my own man and look after myself and help other people. Always there. I would like to mention that this I said to my grandson, and I said to some other people who ask me, that what do you contribute your success to? I said, “if I look back, there were some big decisions I had to make.” And I’m thinking about business wise, business ventures, like investing the company’s money and telling them that yes, this is a good idea, and things like that. I always had one thing in my mind, and that sort of guided me most of my life and most of my ventures. If it was like in the company business—and this is it—what would I do if this was my own business? What would I do if this was my own money to invest it? Would I do it? I don’t say that I was right 100 percent, but I would say that 90 percent of the time, I was good. I didn’t make a mistake going that way.

[2:00:36]

NP: What would you say was the biggest challenge that you faced?

JJ: The biggest challenge? Getting married. [Laughing]

NP: Okay, work related! [Laughing]

JJ: Work related. I went with the wife for five years before I married her. Okay? So that was it. Five years to go with somebody.

NP: You didn't want to make a stake there. [Laughing]

JJ: Anyways, work related. What was the biggest challenge? I don't know. I never really had too much trouble. I don't know. I always maintained a good working attitude, and not because I had to, but because I wanted to. I didn't have such big challenges. I don't know.

NP: What did you like the least about all of the things? Like when you look back, it doesn't mean that you disliked it, but what did you like the least about--?

JJ: Oh, I don't know. Again, I cannot be negative. I have to tell you that I was happy to go to work everyday. [Laughs] You know? Even in Pool 5 when I was so sick that I didn't have supper and all that, next morning, I got up, and I had to go. I know a lot of people fell out and they didn't go, and they didn't get back to the elevators a lot of them. But no, I can't really recall anything like that.

NP: Good! Well, we're just over two hours, so I'd like to stop here, and when we get back together again, we'll have a few general questions such as how do you feel what you did contributed to Canada's success as a grain trading nation. A question about if we were ever to get a activity centre, historic site set up in Thunder Bay to recognize the grain industry, what part of the work you did do you think we should feature. Those kinds of questions, but we'll spend most of our time talking about the actual intricacies of cleaning. So thank you very much for this very good interview, and to be continued.

JJ: You're welcome. Thank you.

End of interview.