

**Narrator:** Margaret Irwin (MI)

**Narrator:** Keith Randle (KR)

**Company Affiliations:** Irwin Concrete, Mission to Seafarers

**Interview Date:** 13 December 2010

**Interviewer:** Nancy Perozzo (NP)

**Recorder:** Ian Dew (ID)

**Other Speakers:** Charlotte Randle (CR)

**Transcriber:** Sarah Lorenowich (SL)

**Summary:** Concrete truck driver Keith Randle and wife of Bob Irwin (owner of Irwin Concrete) Margaret Irwin discuss the history and operations of Irwin Concrete in Thunder Bay and Northern Ontario. Irwin describes the family's history, the growth of the business in Thunder Bay due partly to the elevator construction and expansion business, and the eventual sale of the company upon Bob's retirement. She recalls some of the company's main projects, other family members involved in the business, other concrete mixer competition in town, and Bob's sadness at the downturn in Thunder Bay's grain business. Randle goes on to describe his long career as a truck driver with Irwin Concrete and his own family's history in cutting wood pilings for the elevators. He details the daily work of a truck driver, the mechanics of the mixer trucks, the stages of pouring concrete for an elevator foundation, and the process of slip forming concrete for elevator silos. Other topics discussed include recipes for concrete, working on United Grain Growers Elevator A after it's annex collapse, using wheelbarrows to move concrete around a worksite, and Mrs. Irwin's stories from her volunteer work at Mission to Seafarers.

**Keywords:** Irwin Concrete; Concrete pouring; Concrete construction; Concrete mixing; Concrete transportation; Grain elevator construction; Concrete slip forming; Grain elevator expansion; Grain storage; Thunder Bay terminal grain elevators; Searle Elevator; Richardson Elevator; United Grain Growers Elevator A (UGG A); UGG A collapse; Grain elevator disasters; Parrish & Heimbecker Elevator (P&H); Mission to Seafarers; Grain transportation—ships; Ocean-going vessels; Lakers; Seafarers; Truck drivers; Wood pilings; Fort William; Northern Ontario; Prince Rupert; Churchill;

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: Good morning. We're having an interview this morning. It'll be a joint interview, and I'll have the two people who have kindly consented to be interviewed introduce themselves in just a moment. But it is December 13, 2010, and we are conducting this interview in a nice, lovely Christmas decorated apartment in the South Ward of Thunder Bay. So maybe, Mrs. Irwin, we'll start with you and have you introduce yourself.

MI: Well, I'm Mrs. Margaret Irwin. Bob Irwin, whom we are going to be talking about, is my husband, and due to illness, he is not able to be here.

NP: And just introduce who you are.

KR: I'm Keith Randle. I drove truck for Bob Irwin for many years.

NP: Starting in--?

KR: Starting 1956 until—when did I retire?—'73.

CR: Oh, '73.

KR: The fall of '73.

NP: The fall of '73. I'm just going to move this microphone a little bit closer to you, okay?

KR: Oh, yeah.

NP: Because we can actually share this one. We've got good women's voices. [Laughing] We're used to being understood. Just before the interview, Mrs. Irwin, we were talking a little bit about the history of the Irwin company, and we haven't even said what the Irwin company does. So tell us what was the official name of your husband's company, and what kind of work did they do related to the grain trade that we're talking about today?

MI: Well, actually it originated back in Emerson, Manitoba where his grandfather was. He was involved in a company out there, and he always felt as though Thunder Bay was going to be the key place for all the grain to be shipped. At this point, he felt that the best thing to do would be to move to Thunder Bay and try and establish elevators and capacity to carry and hold the grain for the shipping. Being at the head of the Great Lakes, he figured it was an ideal spot. So anyway, which he did, and he came down

here. He was married, and he had his family, but he really was quite interested in the Kam River more than anything else. So the two elevators on the Kam River—I'm not too sure whether it was the Great Western or one of the elevators up there on the Kam River--.

KR: One close to the Great Lakes.

MI: Next to the swing bridge. Not too far. Before you get to Paterson's as you're coming up the river.

KR: Ogilvie?

MI: Hm?

KR: Ogilvie Elevator?

MI: No, not that way. So anyway, he decided this would be an ideal spot being in the river and being protected because they didn't, at that time, have a break wall across the front of the lakeside. So he did arrange to have the one built, and then he said, "Well, one isn't going to be enough. I think we should build two." I think he had some involvement with the second one. I'm not too sure. My husband's uncle was superintendent of one of the elevators there, John. And then as they started commercially building elevators, they built the Searle Elevator, and my husband's father was the superintendent of that elevator. So then came one day, of all the concrete that was going into these elevators, the father decided that, "You know," he said, "son, I think we should try and see if we can't start up a ready-mix concrete business in order to supply the elevators with concrete." So he did. He was only 16, I think, when he went down to New York to pick up a cement truck. [Laughs] But then when he came back, he ran the plant for a while, and then Permanent Concrete became interested, so they kind of backed him up. Then, this is, I think, the beginning or starting of all these elevators, really, started the Empire I think was one of the originals too.

**[0:05:17]**

But then they started building up the elevators, and the more elevators they had available, the more grain was brought in from the west, and they had the storage areas. Even during the war, they were building storage bins, and I know because my husband had to pour the base for the storage bins to go on because they didn't have enough space to store the grain. Because there was so much grain being shipped overseas at that time that they needed to get all the grain they could possibly bring in. So from there, I think that eventually it became quite a hustle bustle here. So he did well, I mean, knowing, and with his father and his uncle, in the

grain business, they were able to guide him and direct him as to whether they should be setting up more elevators or not, you know? But he was too busy pouring, so he didn't have that chance. [Laughs]

NP: Let me just go back to some of the things you've said. A lot of information in a very short time. So if I've got this right, your husband's grandfather was the first one to come here, and he came here already with a family.

MI: Yes.

NP: And there were how many?

MI: Oh, dear. I know there was one girl. [Laughs]

NP: One girl?

MI: One girl, and I think it was, what, four or five boys? Four or five boys. There was John, Stewart, Leslie--.

KR: John's the only one I know.

MI: I think there were five boys and one girl.

NP: And were all of the boys involved in the family business?

MI: No, they weren't. No, one sold cars. Dick was one of them. One of them I know had a dealership with the cars, and two of them were supervisors of elevators, and one was, but he didn't stay there very long. No, I think those were the only two that really did stay to the end of the grain business until they--. And they either passed away or--.

NP: So when you say they were superintendents of the grain business, I guess I'm just a little unclear here. So your husband's grandfather, he was involved in the actual construction of the elevators.

MI: Yes, of the one, and the second one is partly. He didn't completely operate that one, but he did oversee it.

NP: So he was involved in overseeing the construction of it, but they actually ran them once they were up and operating?

MI: Mmhmm.

NP: Okay. And one of his sons, then--.

MI: John.

NP: Was involved at Searle as the superintendent there.

MI: That was Bob's father, Leslie.

NP: Okay. So I'm thinking of the son of the original guy who came here.

MI: Mmhmm.

NP: So which one was your husband's father?

MI: Leslie.

NP: Okay. And when you said your husband was the one who got started in the concrete business itself?

MI: Mmhmm.

NP: And he was the one who was 16 and went down to--.

MI: Yes, down to New York. [Laughs]

NP: So just setting up some time frames here, we had a tour of one of those elevators—Western Grain Products, I think, is what you're speaking of, but we can confirm all of this—and I think that one was built in 1912. So that would be about right?

MI: Probably. Yeah, that would be the year.

NP: And when was your husband born?

MI: He was born in 1930. They were born here.

NP: So 1946, then, he went to New York to pick up the--. Just after the war.

MI: Yes, yes. No, no. It was before the war.

NP: Okay. So we need to get our times a little straightened up.

MI: Yes. No, he was too young to go into the war and to join up. He tried, but they wouldn't take him. But no, it was before the war he went down. It was during the summer. There was--. Is this recording? Oh, then I won't say. But anyway, it was quite an adventure for him. First time he'd ever been to New York, and he was quite taken with it. But he said, "I never want to go back."  
[Laughing]

**[0:10:25]**

NP: So just 16 and he was driving this big truck back.

MI: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

NP: Why would he go to New York for the truck, do you know?

MI: His father, evidently, had found this truck that he was interested in, so he wanted Bob to go down and get it. Mother said, "No," but dad said, "Yes." So Bob went. [Laughs]

NP: And he came back without mishap, bringing the truck back?

MI: Oh, yes. There's a few states that he went through. He was, he said, given a real good run over because they were wondering why he was bringing this big truck back. But anyway, he said it wasn't too bad. It was just a couple of states where they kind of did a lot of questioning, but other than that, he was fine.

NP: Now, I'm not sure if I clarified this because lots of names floating around here. So your husband's father was Leslie, and Leslie was the superintendent of one of the grain elevators.

MI: Of Searle.

NP: Of Searle. Okay, got that straightened out. So when we do our historical research, you know, look at all the documents, then we can put all these names together with your husband. Do you have anything more to add about the history of the company once the truck arrived?

MI: Not really because, you know, Bob never really--. He never really went into it in any detail to me after we were married. So it made it--. His main purpose was making sure all the trucks were in, and they did their job.

KR: Mixing concrete, eh? [Laughing]

NP: So that one truck grew to how many over time, do you know?

MI: Oh, he had about 16 there.

KR: Yeah, it would be that many anyway.

MI: Mmhhh, yeah. I think there were about 16 trucks, and he had a lot of porta-plants. In fact, he had the first porta-plant here, and he had those sent out to--. Oh, he'd send a porta-plant to Nipigon, Marathon, Kenora, up north, and I know there was--.

KR: Even sold one to Newfoundland.

MI: Hm?

KR: Remember the one they took to Newfoundland?

MI: Newfoundland? Did he?

KR: Yeah. I took it down to Quebec, Montreal, and took it down to the docks, and they loaded it on the ship.

MI: Hm!

NP: So what is a porta-plant?

MI: Porta-plant is--. You can probably explain it.

KR: It's a portable plant on wheels that they move around.

MI: Makes concrete.

KR: Has a hopper on it, conveyor belt. You fill the hopper, and it mixes.

MI: It makes concrete, yeah.

NP: How big would something like that be? Just if we looked at the size of a porta-potty, how many--? [Laughing]

KR: It could probably mix about three yards at a time, yeah.

NP: So did he construct these here?

KR: No. I don't know where he got them from. [Laughs]

MI: No, he would buy them, and he bought the first one. Of the concrete plants that were here, he bought the first one, and then because he had so many calls for concrete out of town, it would be far too costly to haul, say, even to Kenora loads of concrete. So that's when--. I think Kenora was--.

KR: Actually, what it was, it was just a hopper on wheels and a conveyor belt. They would put that gravel into the truck mixer and mix it in the truck.

MI: The cement and that.

KR: Yeah.

MI: Because his trucks would haul the material, but they would make the concrete in the hopper plant, like in the hopper. Then the concrete trucks would take and disperse them to wherever they had to go. Like when they were doing all the mines in



Marathon, they had the concrete for pouring all the mines up there. That's why they had it in Terrace Bay. He had a plant in Terrace Bay too, the porta-plant in Terrace--. Because Greg was there.

**[0:15:11]**

KR: Yeah.

MI: And then at Marathon when Greg was managing it. So as I said, whenever they were called on to do a big job, they would bid on it, and if they got it then what they would do is send a porta-plant. When the porta-plant would go up, then they would get drivers, and they used to stay there, whoever it was, eh? They would stay right there.

KR: Yeah.

MI: The drivers and the fellows that did the mixing and what have you.

NP: What was the history of the company once your husband started it up? Did it stay in the family for a while?

MI: Well, it was always in the family, but when Perma Concrete came in with him, they retained the name. They were getting all the concrete and that coming--.

KR: The Permanent, they didn't come in until they went to Fort William Road.

MI: Fort William, right. You see, they had it on Gore Street. Their plant was originally on Gore Street, and it wasn't until he went over--. And he had such a demand for business, and out of town so much demand, and the elevators, and Richardson Elevator, and then when the one fell into the lake, well, he had that one to do too. So anyway, then Permanent Concrete came in, and they went in with him on that, but it wasn't until they had this large plant built at Intercity. But he just couldn't keep up with it, so Permanent Concrete came in and they worked together right to the end, didn't they?

KR: Until Lafarge come. [Laughs]

MI: Yes, and then Lafarge came in at the very end there, and that's when Bob retired.

NP: Lafarge took over the company then?

MI: Mmhhh.

NP: Bought it from--?

MI: From Permanent then.

NP: From Permanent. And Bob was managing it all the way along until Lafarge took over?

MI: Mmhhh.

NP: Were there any competitors in Thunder Bay at the time?

MI: Northshore. There was Northshore and Pyhtila. That's the only two, isn't it? Northshore and Pyhtila.

KR: Yeah, yeah.

MI: At that time there was just the two.

NP: And was Irwin the largest, would you say?

MI: Oh, yes.

KR: Yeah.

MI: Oh, yes. By far.

NP: So they were able to take on the major projects?

MI: Oh, yeah. Like the Great Lakes, the mill out there.

KR: Yeah.

MI: They did all of it, and they did the addition when they put that new part on. I know people even phoned and wanted him very badly to do a job, and he said no. He said he just couldn't do it. He said, well, he had gotten a phone call from a Winnipeg firm that Bob had did a job for them, and he said, "If you have to have anything done, don't you dare get anybody else but Irwin's because," he said, "that concrete has stood up without a crack or a flaw in it for umpteen years." They couldn't get over it. But he said no. He said because he had to go to, I think, it was a Mr. Anderson to get the material, and so Bob said, "Well, I can't advise you which way to go," but he said, "I think I'd make some more inquiries." because he was very, very fussy about his gravel. Remember?

KR: Yeah.

MI: Oh, I know. I tramped more gravel pits with him trying to get the right sources. [Laughing] Then when I went back to university and took a course in forestry, he was quite upset.

KR: Some of them elevators, they got the gravel from the lakeshore.

MI: Yes. Oh, that was the best stuff.

KR: They dumped it at the old gravel plant on the Kam River there. Then they'd truck it over to Irwin's plant.

MI: Hm. Yes, well, they used to haul--.

KR: They were still doing that when I started there.

MI: Is that right, eh?

KR: Yeah, yeah.

MI: Oh.

NP: So where on the lakeshore were they getting this gravel from?

KR: Yeah, down east towards Nipigon.

MI: Yeah, Nipigon. That was the best gravel they ever got.

KR: They'd just take it right out of the bottom of the lake.

**[0:20:03]**

MI: It was all clean. It was clean gravel. What are you doing?

NP: How did your husband build his expertise in concrete? Like how did he get to be so good at it?

MI: You know, I often wondered about that because he was so interested in everything that was going on in concrete. I don't know. He never did say. I think his father was behind him on that. But where he really obtained all his knowledge from, I never did find out. Did you ever--?

KR: I think it was Ed Shilling, he was pretty--.

MI: Who was that?

KR: Ed Shilling, the batch man.

MI: Oh.

KR: That's the first batch man Bob had.

MI: And he knew about it, eh?

KR: He knew quite a bit about it.

MI: It was his batch man, then, he probably got all his knowledge from.

KR: Yeah.

NP: Ed Shilling, did you say?

KR: Ed Shilling, yeah.

NP: And he was a Thunder Bay person?

KR: Yeah.

NP: So I guess before the time that your husband started up Irwin Concrete, somebody must have been doing that work ahead of time for the early elevators.

KR: I think, wasn't it one of the Zanettis mixed up in it?

MI: Oh, Zanetti's.

KR: Yeah.

MI: They were making--.

KR: Concrete.

MI: Concrete then.

KR: Yeah, but not on a big scale like Bob did.

MI: I don't know. As I said, I'm sorry. I really don't have that much knowledge of it because Bob never really spoke to me much about it. As I said, all he ever spoke about was whether the drivers had gotten in or not. [Laughs]

NP: Making sure that everything occurred as it was supposed to, when it was supposed to.

MI: Right. Especially those calls that would come in in the middle of the night when the ships were coming in with a load of--.

KR: Cement.

MI: Concrete or something like that. Would get this phone call, “Well, I’ll be in at 3:00 in the morning.” So Bob said, “Well, be sure and wake me up at 3:00.” And I thought, “Wake? That’s the middle of the night for me!” [Laughs] But anyway, because he had to be over to the ship, to the dock, to make sure that everything was unloaded.

NP: At Keefer Terminal?

MI: Mmhhh.

NP: Or, I guess, once Keefer Terminal was there.

MI: No, it wasn’t Keefer Terminal. Where did they--?

KR: They used to unload cement right down the Kam River.

MI: Yes.

KR: By where they have the rowing boats there.

NP: So near Ogilvie Elevator then?

KR: Yeah. That’s where Jack Irwin had the St. Lawrence.

MI: Oh, the St. Lawrence, yes. He had the St. Lawrence there. That was between the Rowing Club and Ogilvie’s.

NP: What was the St. Lawrence?

MI: Cement.

NP: Another Irwin?

MI: Yeah. That was John Irwin’s son that ran this elevator, and that was his son that went into that business. [Laughs]

NP: So he was the one that brought in the cement?

MI: Yeah. Inland brought in the cement, didn't they?

KR: Yeah.

MI: Oh, there's a lot of mix. [Laughs]

NP: Okay, so let's go back to John Irwin then. John Irwin would have been your husband's uncle?

MI: Yes.

NP: And then his son was--?

MI: Jack Irwin.

NP: And he was involved in--?

MI: Hauling the cement in, and that was along the Kam River between the rowing club and--. That was Inland Cement.

NP: And so the cement, that was the supplier for your husband's cement?

MI: At that time, mmhmm.

NP: Okay. A real family conglomerate!

MI: Oh, it was. It was all kind of interlocked.

NP: Any other little tentacles there that you recall?

MI: No. All I know is a couple of fellows that were working for Jack Irwin, when they came back from the war, the fellows that carried them through, they had to let them go because they gave all the fellows back their jobs when they came back. So this one fellow was a little upset because Allan came back, Allan Sutherland came back, and he lost--. I mean, he didn't want his job, but John Irwin says, "Yes, this was your job before you went overseas, so." He married Ruth Irwin.

KR: Oh, yeah.

MI: Mmhm. So it was all kind of interlocked pretty well through, except for the big ones in the waterfront. There's nothing very much--. They didn't have anything to do with any of those, did they? Irwin's had nothing to do with the ones at Intercity. I don't think they had anything to do with any of those elevators. No.

**[0:25:18]**

KR: I'm not sure.

MI: No, no. Because there was Sask Pool, Pool 7. No, none of those. It was just the ones in the Westfort area it seemed—Searle's and--.

NP: Cargill?

KR: He rebuilt Richardson's, the one that fell down. [*Note: Likely confusing Richardson's for UGG. NP*]

MI: Oh, yes. Yeah. He added to Richardson's. He's added to several of them. He added to the malt plant too, didn't he?

KR: Yeah.

MI: Yeah, he added to the malt plant because they needed more storage. Richardson's, they needed more storage. He did that one. And then there was the one opposite Keefer. Which one is that right opposite Keefer? You know the--.

NP: P&H [Parrish & Heimbecker].

MI: P&H, yes. Well, P&H because the boats used to come in there and unload a lot of stuff for him too. Just as you come along, there was all this sand piles along there, and I know he had work there to do too. The one that fell in the lake, that explosion, he had all that construction. In fact, what he used to do, like, so often when they were pouring, they would have to do this constant pouring, you know?

KR: Oh, yeah. That's when they poured the tanks.



MI: Yeah. He would take his boat over—he had a 38-foot cruiser—he'd bring it over and tie it along the dock, and he would sleep on it to make sure that the fellows kept going. Because you see, if you ever stopped, it would leave a crack. So it had to be a continuous pour. What did they call that continuous pour?

NP: Slip form?

MI: Slip form.

KR: Yeah, slip form.

MI: Slip forming. Yes. He said no--. He said even when they were doing the stack at the mouth of the Mission River, he said--.

KR: For the Hydro plant, yeah.

MI: You were on that too, weren't you?

KR: Yeah.

NP: For the Hydro plant?

KR: Yeah.

MI: Mmhmm. Yeah. But I know they were all quite pleased when they finally were able to accommodate all the grain that was coming down from the west, especially during wartime when the demand was so great because they had no place. That's why they built all these storage bins. But they did very well.

NP: So your husband's career ended with the sale, and that was 19--?

MI: No, he retired.

NP: Okay. In--?

MI: Lafarge had already taken over.

NP: Okay. So remind me again. I think you have already said what date he retired, what year or approximately?

KR: I think it was around--. I retired in '73, and he retired shortly after, I think. I can't remember right.

MI: '73, yeah. I think he retired in the '80s. Didn't he retire in the '80s?

CR: You retired later than '73.

KR: Later than '73?

CR: We lived in the lake, and that was about '83.

KR: Maybe it was '83. [Laughs]

MI: It seemed to me he retired in the '80s.

NP: It's not that important. The reason I was asking was I was just trying to get an idea of when that was.

MI: And I've been asked that so many times. When I moved here—it's okay—I had that in my mind, and then senior's kicking in again. [Laughing]

NP: You have nothing to apologize for! Did he ever talk to you about how he felt once the grain industry started to sort of let up in Thunder Bay?

MI: Yes, quite often he would speak to me. We would talk about, oh, you know, he said, "It's really sad," he used to say. He always used the word "sad." "It's so sad to see this going down. It's going downhill." Then he had a friend that his mother knew—it was a friend of his mother's really—that came from the west when they had the bad depression out there where they were moving here to get jobs. And he used to tell him about the sad things that happened in regards to the grain out there. He always said, you know, he said, "If that ever happened, it's going to kill Canada because," he said, "I just hate to see the grain sliding the way it's going." He just used to--. He was very upset to see the way things were going.

[0:30:28]

KR: You know when it first started to go downhill? When they opened that one at Prince Rupert, built an elevator there.

MI: In Prince Rupert?

KR: Yeah. They shipped the grain to the west, yeah.

MI: Yeah, that's when they were going across the other side, yes, in Prince Rupert when they opened up the elevators there. And then Churchill. I know he was always quite concerned about the one in Churchill. And I said, "Well, it's so seasonal there." But now you never know what's going to happen because it would be much shorter just to take it up there and then the ship from there instead of going all the way through the lakes and canals and what they're charging to go through all the canals and what have you, the Welland and the Soo.

NP: So with global warming--.

MI: Yes.

NP: Making it--.

MI: Harder.

NP: More desirable to ship out of--. Well, actually--.

MI: Oh, out of Churchill.

NP: Being more able to ship out of Churchill.

MI: Oh, yes. Mhmm. Yes, it would be. So as I said, the whole world, it just seems to be changing everything. You know, the growth of the--. I know the boats out here, like, I'm very involved with the Mission to Seafarers, and out here we had two ships laying out there for so long, but they were waiting for canola. The grains and that, there was none coming through. Nothing through. So they sat out there for three or four days, and they had to--. Because if they anchor, they don't have to pay fees for docking fees, so they laid out there. So they used to get some of the people in small boats to go out and bring them in periodically

because they'd come into the Mission to Seafarers and phone, and we'd give them coffee. If it was a foreign ship, we used to give them clothes to keep them warm because they came in from the Islands. They'd come in with short sleeves and no gloves or anything. So we'd bring them in—the fellows would bring them in—and we would make sure we took them in. We made sure they had warm jackets, sweaters. One fellow came in, he didn't have a toque or anything. He had short hair. So he saw one, he put it on his said, and he said, "Oh, that's good, good." They couldn't speak English half of them, so he saw another one, he put it on top and, "Oh!" [Laughs] I said, "Take them, take them." Because I said--. There's always one interpreter that comes along, so I told him, I said, "Well, take two of them and give it to someone onboard the boat." So he took both of them.

One day it was a Russian ship was in, and it was so cute. They had quite a long wait too, so I said, "Well, bring them in, and we'll fit them up with food and what have you." So they came in, and he saw a little boy's jacket there. And he looked at the little jacket, and he looked at it. So I said for him to take it, and he said, "Yes." So he took it, and he hugged it, and he says, "My boy. My boy." He was going to take it back to Russia for his little boy.

NP: You know, we had talked about this, the Mission to Seafarers, and we have set up an interview with the fellow.

MI: Did you have one with him?

NP: I don't think it's been conducted yet, but Ernie Epp is going to do that because he knows the pastor that You had mentioned.

MI: Oh, Ed Swayze.

NP: But I think it would still be nice to interview you. But I'd like to continue on and--.

MI: I'm sorry.

NP: And have Mr. Randle talk about when he--.

KR: She knows more. [Laughs]

NP: Well, no. Because what we want, you see, we also want to know the everyday work that was done to get these jobs done. So just tell us a little bit about the work that you did for Irwin Concrete.

KR: Well, I poured on pretty near every job, eh? Every big job. Elevators and the Hydro plant was the biggest ones, as far as big pours. In the days when we first started pouring for the elevators, they'd have to drive pilings first. Thunder Bay Harbour would drive the pilings, then I think Barnett-McQueen would come and put the steel bars in, form it, put the steel bars in. And then Bob would come along and pour the concrete.

**[0:35:19]**

NP: So you had mentioned, I think, before we even started or at the beginning of the interview about the pilings. What do you know about the pilings that they used for the elevators?

KR: Well, when I was a kid, my dad was taking piling out for elevators, wood piling.

NP: He was taking it out or putting it in? Or cutting it?

KR: Cutting it in the bush. He had a 40-foot boat. He would cut them in the bush. We lived on the lakeshore at Sturgeon Bay, and he would cut the piling, bring them down, and put them in the water, tie them all together, and tow them into Thunder Bay. He actually towed a bunch in for Searle Elevator. Then the tug--. I think, that's where he maybe tied them all up there. Then a tug would come along and tow them to whatever elevator they needed them at.

NP: So let's go back to your family then. You said that your dad was living at Sturgeon Bay?

KR: Yeah.

NP: So that's out towards the border. What's the history of your family? How did they end up in that area?

KR: My dad come from Wiarton. His parents come from England, and my dad started in Wiarton. You know where that is?

NP: Is that the Wiarton Willy town? [Laughing]

KR: Yeah.

NP: So where exactly is that? It's in southern Ontario, is it?

KR: Yeah. It's around the Georgian Bay area.

NP: And what brought him to the Thunder Bay area, do you know?

KR: Ben Renshaw was a friend of his, and I think they met down there. They all come from--. Their parents come from the old country. They met down at--. Ben Renshaw had a lumber business on the Cloud River. That's how my dad got started in the bush, I guess.

NP: So Mr. Renshaw is the name that you mentioned?

KR: Yeah.

NP: Yes. So did he send logs down the Cloud River, then, into the bay?

KR: Well, they cut timber in that Cloud Bay area, eh. He cut the big white pine for lumber. He had a sawmill set up on the riverbank.

NP: And then they would have a log boom that they would create to--?

KR: No, they hauled them all in on the ground, eh?

NP: And once they got them in the water? You were talking about your dad--.

KR: Oh, that's my dad, yeah. He got most of the timber from Sturgeon Bay area and outside of Sturgeon Bay in the bush, wherever he could find them in them days. He took spruce and jack pine. He took mostly for piling, but he took booms out too. That was the big boom logs—20 feet long, and some of them four feet on the one end.

NP: So were you involved in helping your dad?

KR: I was a little too young. [Laughs]

NP: Do you know when he would have been doing this cutting? The Searle Elevator, I'm just trying to think of when it was being built if he was cutting the piles for that.

KR: He used to tie the--. He had a 40-foot boat that he towed them in with, and he'd tie the piling up there. Some of it was used at the Searle Elevator, but I think that was after that was built. It was used for docks and stuff.

NP: Yeah. I've just seen some pictures of the Searle Elevator where they did an addition, and I saw some pictures of the pilings going in.

KR: Bob would be doing that, yeah.

NP: Quite an amazing amount of timber went into the foundations for those elevators.

KR: Yeah, they took a lot. A lot of it used to haul it into Thunder Bay Harbour, because they used to drive them, Thunder Bay Harbour.

**[0:40:03]**

NP: And how did you get involved in driving truck, I guess? Was that your first job with the Irwins?

KR: I drove for my dad when I got out of school. I was 15 when I finished school, and I went driving for him. He rode with me a year until I could get my license, and then I took over driving. [Laughs]

NP: Because he knew you needed to be 16 then to get your license?

KR: Yeah.

NP: And why did you move on from your dad to Irwin's?

KR: Well, my dad died in '56.

NP: Ah.

KR: Yeah. So I had a chance to get on there, so I took it.

NP: What was a day on the job like when you first started, do you remember?

KR: Well, I used to work about 10, 12 hours hauling for Great Lakes Mill, and then we'd unload cement until 9:00 at night, bagged cement out of cars, and dump it on a conveyor, put it up to the top of the plant.

NP: So was that physical labour then?

KR: Yeah.

NP: Lifting the sacks, do you remember how much they weighed?

MI: 100 pounds, weren't they?

KR: About 100 pounds in them days, I think. [Laughs]

NP: Oh!

MI: Yeah. 100-pound bags, I remember that.

KR: I used to have a sore back every morning.

NP: Oh, I imagine. You must have been in great physical shape!

KR: Well, got it done anyway.

NP: Was the company still at the Gore Street plant when you were doing this?

KR: Yeah, yeah.

NP: So what did that plant set up look like?



KR: Well, it used to have a lunchroom and everything down on the bottom, and the garage on one side of it. Then the conveyor would come up the back, bring the cement up the back, and put it up in a big bin up above. That's where they'd get the cement from—concrete from—the next day, eh?

NP: And as a truck driver, what did you have to do? So when you showed up for a job--?

KR: Well, fill the water tank. [Laughs] When you showed up in the morning you mean?

NP: Mmhmm.

KR: Well, you'd check the oil and everything and make sure everything was working, get the mixer started up. The mixer had its own motor in them days.

NP: And how does that differ from now? The mixers don't have their own motors?

KR: It's all hydraulic, eh, so it's air or oil.

NP: The water, was that just from the city water supply or did they--?

KR: Yeah, yeah.

NP: And how would you know how to mix it? How did you know the recipe?

KR: Well, the mix is just--. The batch man got everything mixed or ready to mix, and if you had to have water on the job, you had a water tank on the mixers, so you'd just add whatever you figured it needed.

MI: Different jobs had different designs though, concrete designs, didn't they?

KR: Oh, yeah.

MI: They would state what design they wanted in their concrete.

KR: If they wanted 3,000 pound, you had to put so many bags in. 2,000, you put less bags. But the batch man done all of that. It was all weighed out.

NP: So then you were just given the ingredients and told to put them together?

KR: Yeah. Make sure you don't make it too wet. [Laughing]

NP: Not too wet, no. I understand that that really has an impact on the strength of the concrete.

KR: Yeah. They usually wanted around a three-inch slump. I would move good and a lot easier to work with.

NP: Now, talk about a three-inch slump. What does that mean to those of us who don't anything about slumps?

KR: Well, they put it in a cylinder about that high, that big around the bottom, that big around the top.

NP: So almost like a cone.

KR: Yeah, a cone. Yeah. Then they'd fill that with concrete. The inspector done that. Then he would pull the cone up, and if it fell down too much—he measured from the top—if they wanted three-inch and it was over three-inch, well, they didn't like that.

**[0:45:16]**

NP: Ah.

KR: Yeah. They'd measure. They'd lay a bar on top of the cone and measure from there up to the cone bottom.

NP: And what would happen if it did slump too much?

KR: Well, they usually took it. I mean, it wouldn't be that much out of line. If it was really too wet, they'd send it back to the plant.

NP: And then what would happen back at the plant?

KR: They'd have to get--.

NP: So they'd send you back to the plant with a full truck of--?

KR: Yeah, then you'd have to put more cement in it or aggregate.

NP: So what would go into a load that you took out to an elevator? You'd have the water--.

KR: Yeah. You'd have the water and air entrainment, they called it. That's what put air into the concrete.

NP: And then the aggregate was--?

KR: Cement and sand and the aggregate.

NP: Did you have to go, as a truck driver, were you also responsible for going to the, I don't know if it was the gravel pits to pick up the--?

KR: No.

MI: No, Bob used to have Mr. McConnell and the people that would haul for him.

KR: Lempiala. He used to get it hauled in from Lempiala Sand. He used to haul it in.

MI: Yeah, they had several puts around that they could draw from.

KR: Yeah.

MI: Then they'd always have drivers haul it in for them.

NP: And all of this would just be stored in the yard on Gore Street, and you'd--.

KR: Yeah.

NP: Pull together what you needed for a job.

KR: If it was slack, two of us drivers would take the dump trucks in the wintertime and haul in.

MI: Winter was a slow time, so he'd keep them. Bob used to love to keep his men on all year, you know, as much as he could. So that's when they used to do a lot of hauling in the wintertime.

KR: Yeah.

NP: Do you mind if we take a little pause now? **[Audio pauses]** With lunchtime, so.

MI: Oh, I see.

NP: Okay, we're ready?

KR: You're having a late lunch. [Laughing]

NP: Well, before we stopped, we were talking about the life of a cement truck driver, and you had commented on having learned to drive hauling logs. So that was a pretty challenging task as well.

KR: Yeah. Piling we called them.

NP: Good. What kind of truck did you drive when you first started driving cement? Like what make was it? Was it the one that Mrs. Irwin talked about?

KR: No, it was KB-8, if you knew what they--. The old International.

NP: Tell me about them because there will be people listening to this who will be interested in the equipment.

KR: Well, the one I had was in pretty good shape. [Laughs]

NP: That wasn't the one that was brought up from New York?

KR: Oh, no.

MI: No, no, no. I think that went long ago. [Laughs] That was on Gore Street. I don't think it lasted too long.

KR: They had one of them there when I started, but I don't know if they used it or not. I don't think so. [Laughing]

NP: So what kind of capacity and so on was that kind of truck?

KR: Well, you could get eight yards in it. I think it was a five-yard mixer, but we got eight in sometimes. It was a little overloaded, but--.

MI: Yes, I remember.

NP: And that was the kind that had its own motor for the--?

KR: Yeah. It used to have a motor sitting between the cab. It was right on the mixer, the little motor, eh? Little Chrysler motor. You have to get that running so you could turn the drum, eh?

NP: So tell us about the maintenance work that you had to do as a truck driver. It wasn't just you sat in behind and--.

KR: You just had to keep enough grease on it. I think the mechanics used to change the oil. Yeah, that was all that we had to do. Keep it clean. I waxed the drum one time when I didn't have much to do. [Laughs] Make it shine a little bit. It wasn't much you had to do.

**[0:50:11]**

NP: So you took pride in the look of the equipment as well?

KR: Oh, yeah.

NP: How long would one of those trucks last? Was it years or was it by mileage sort of that--?

KR: Well, mostly by mileage, I think. Well, if you looked after them, they'd last quite a while.

NP: What would be a good mileage to get out of a truck before you retired it?

KR: Oh, you could get maybe 300,000. Sometimes you went to pretty rough places, eh? We used to haul up by a pipeline. I was pulling a mixer trailer at that time and haul it close to Nipigon anyway. You go way back in the bush when they were just putting pipeline, the gas pipeline, through there. They'd hook a bulldozer on you, and you had to go wherever he went. [Laughs] There was mud up to the running boards on the mixer. Really, I wouldn't have put my truck in there, but that's the way you had to go.

NP: Did you ever have any close calls driving the cement trucks?

KR: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. [Laughs] Quite a few!

NP: Is there one that stands out in your mind?

KR: Well, there was one time I was going to Red Rock in the wintertime and the roads were slippery. I was coming down the hill to a bridge, and on the other side, a school bus turned in front of me. He turned at a place to turn around there, but I didn't know he was going to pull out in front of me, so I had to try to get it stopped. But I managed to get it slowed down enough. He got off the road, and I went by.

NP: Oh!

KR: I wouldn't have wanted to hit that with kids in it.

NP: No. Oh, frightening.

KR: That would have been an awful mess. Well, you get a few close calls when you're going all the time, eh, especially hauling around town.

NP: And you worked for how many years doing this? It was--?

KR: 37.

NP: 37. That's a good, long career.

KR: Yeah. I liked it. It was a good job.

NP: What did you like about it?

KR: Well, one thing, you was home all the time, but I used to like getting out on the highway too. When I got on the trailer mixer, if they wanted to send me to Montreal one time, you'd unhook off the mixer and hook onto a float.

NP: What would you be doing in Montreal?

KR: One time I took a portable plant down there, and I come back to Brockville, that's where the head office was. They sent me back to Montreal to get a load of steel to bring back to Brockville.

NP: Hm.

KR: That's what I was doing down there. But quite often we hauled out west and hauled concrete in portable plants.

MI: Yeah, Calgary.

NP: So how far west? Just to the Ontario border or you went beyond that too?

KR: I have to stop and think. Well, I used to move stuff around for the pipeline too, right? The forms. So it was between Thunder Bay and Edmonton at that time. Wherever they needed the forms, we used to take them. It was good. I used to like getting out on the highway every once in a while.

NP: Yeah. But the elevator jobs would have kept you busy in town here. What was the biggest elevator job that you worked on, do you recall?

KR: Well, the one that fell in the lake there. That was about the biggest one, I guess.

NP: That was the one by Current River?

KR: Yeah.

NP: What was involved there?

KR: We had to clean all the grain out of the lake, what concrete was there, take it all out and haul it out to the gravel pit.

MI: A mess.

KR: Abandoned gravel pit.

NP: Where was the Bannon gravel pit?

KR: Abandoned.

NP: Abandoned one. Do you remember where it was? I have a special interest in knowing where this concrete ended up.

MI: Mmhmm.

KR: That was Onion Lake Road, I think. Up in there.

NP: How did you actually get the concrete and the grain out of the lake?

**[0:55:04]**

KR: They used draglines. If they couldn't reach it with the buckets, they had to use a dragline with a bucket on it, pulled it out, and loaded in the dump truck.

NP: When those bins fell in, did they actually smash up, or did they sort of fall in as big, intact silos?

KR: Well, it would be the whole thing that went in. I guess it broke up as it hit the water and stuff. Some of them waves went right over to the shipyards.

NP: And then did they re-pour the silos?



KR: Oh, yeah. They had to drive more piling and pour the foundation. They figured how come it fell down was the ships coming in, and when they turned their propellers to stop over the years, well, it washed the dirt out from between the pilings and stuff. That's what they figured happened.

NP: Do you remember where the pilings were coming from for that job then? Were they still coming from--?

KR: Well, probably some of them could have been wooden piling, but I think they used steel piling in the later years. Yeah.

NP: Ah, right.

KR: Thunder Bay Harbour had done all that.

NP: I think earlier on in the interview you were talking about what it was like to be involved in constructing an elevator, but I don't know that we finished. Because you were talking about there was the pilings and then a company came in and did the--.

KR: They're made of steel.

NP: And then--.

KR: Steel bars and everything.

NP: The rebar?

KR: Because they had to put forms around the outside. I think Barnett-McQueen done most of that work.

MI: Mmhmm.

NP: And then you would be involved in--?

KR: Pouring the concrete, yeah. Some pours would be maybe 400 yards. In them days, they put runways down, and you dumped into a buggy, and the men pushed it until he got filled up. We must have poured them in sections, maybe 400 a day, 400 yards. But they'd wheel it all.

NP: So this was in the early days when you started then? In the '60s, probably, that they were wheeling it.

KR: It would be in the '60s. I think they still wheeled some in the '70s even before they got pumps. It was pretty late before they got the pumps. But then you couldn't get anybody to push a wheelbarrow after that. [Laughs] Yeah.

NP: They found the easy life.

KR: I took a load to Red Rock Mill one time, and there were about ten guys standing around there and the foreman waiting for me. The pump was supposed to come, and the pump broke down. So I said to them--. All young guys, eh? Big and strong. I said, "You better grab a wheelbarrow and start wheeling." "What?" He says, "We don't push a wheelbarrow this day and age!" [Laughing] That had to be, gosh, 40 years ago, I guess.

NP: So how did the job get done?

KR: Well, the foreman, he was an older man, and he grabbed a wheelbarrow and started wheeling. So I guess the shame or something. [Laughs] He was a nice old guy.

NP: Did everything always go as planned on these pours for the elevators, or were there ever any problems that you remember?

KR: They went pretty steady as far as I can remember. I think it was two 12-hour shifts. We couldn't go real fast because to put it in the hoist bucket I told you about, they would hoist it up. It wouldn't be too high in the start, but as you went up, it got higher. So they didn't want to pour it too fast because when they jacked the forms up, the concrete might move, eh? But they used to take it up there and dump it in a hopper on wherever the level was, dump it in the hopper, and then they wheeled it all the way around the tank with wheelbarrows, the buggies. Then they'd have to, I guess, they could be high enough to dump it into the form.

**[1:00:15]**

NP: So these forms would go right up to the top, so eventually they'd be hauling those buckets--.

KR: Yeah, they'd keep jacking the forms up, eh? They'd pour until they got full, and then they'd have to jack them.

NP: How was that jacking done?

KR: I don't know. They had some kind of hydraulic jacks there. I don't know. I never seen how they worked.

NP: Was there just one person operating that?

KR: I'm not sure. More than likely, they had it brought by air or oil. I'm not sure. But they'd fill the form, and then they'd have to jack it up. But they couldn't go too fast. I don't know if they did two tanks at the same time. It could have been because by the time they got the next one full, the first one would be dry enough to lift up. Because they used to go steady with them. The form, actually, would only be about four feet high. Something like that.

NP: And they went up over 100 feet when they were finished, so that was a long--.

KR: 100 or 120 feet, I think, anyways it was.

MI: That rings a bell.

KR: And then the one tank--. I think one tank--. On the slab, they'd be about six tanks, maybe six or eight. I think they'd have two side by side. They were pretty big tanks, maybe each one would be 50 feet across, each tank.

NP: The silos?

KR: Each tank, yeah.

NP: Hm.

KR: Pretty big anyway.

NP: How thick were the foundations, the slab, do you recall?

KR: Oh, about four feet anyway.

NP: So you said you had a 12-hour shift.

KR: Yeah.

NP: How many loads could you haul over that time period? Obviously, it would depend on how far away the elevator was, but let's say something within a 15-, 20-minute drive.

KR: Well, I'm not too sure. Probably--. Well, you'd have more than one truck. Maybe three trucks hauling, something like that. You probably hauled maybe ten loads. I'm not sure. I can't remember.

NP: Did the size of the trucks change over the time that you were--?

KR: The size?

NP: Yeah.

KR: Oh, yeah. The last when I retired, I could haul 12 yards in that truck.

NP: I think you said the first one was four, but you could get six in it, was that what you said?

KR: Something like that. [Laughing]

NP: Anything else change in the trucks or were they pretty much--?

KR: Oh, yeah. They get better riding all the time, seats get better. The first seat was like sitting on that table. [Laughing]

MI: Yeah!

KR: But they got better. They'd have hydraulic seats and stuff, just like a car seat.

MI: They had a lot of Mack trucks at one time, did they not?

KR: Pardon?

MI: A lot of Macks trucks?

KR: Macks, towards the end, yeah. The last one I drove was a Mack.

MI: Yeah. Maxidyne International.

KR: It was nice. Easy shifting. They called it Maxidyne shifting.

NP: Did you have a favourite truck?

KR: That little International and trailer was my favourite. [Laughs]

NP: Did you get to drive the same truck all the time, or was it whatever truck was available? Or were you assigned a truck?

KR: I drove the same one all the time.

NP: So did you name them?

KR: Well, I didn't have special names. [Laughing]

NP: I thought guys always named their trucks!

MI: Remember Buster? He was driving a Macks truck, and he said, "In order to get that to go faster," he said, "I used to tie a wiener out in front of it." [Laughing]

**[1:05:00]**

KR: That was a Mogul International.

NP: Do you have anything to ask, Ian? I'm not really a technical person when it comes to trucks.

MI: No, well, they used to have a lot of--.

KR: Oh--.

MI: Yeah?

KR: I was going to tell you about hauling concrete to the Nipigon Bridge. It was on the straight truck, and it hauled six yards. Well, about six days in a row, I took a load down. And the guy testing it, his machine was haywire, but he figured it wasn't. So he tested it, and the air wasn't right. I think I dumped about three or four loads in the gravel pit. I said, "If you test that meter, maybe it's haywire." So he finally did test it, and it was haywire. So they had to pay for all that concrete, eh? Six yards, take it there, and dump it. Kind of wasteful.

NP: Which reminds me, I was thinking of different things about concrete, and when you were talking about the concrete being carried up the forms to build the bins, all the way up, did they also have to do the vibration then? Every time they poured in the concrete, did they have to vibrate it?

KR: Oh, I think so, yeah.

NP: So that would delay things a bit, like as far as making it slower to unload your load.

KR: Well, it wouldn't slow them down because they could only go so fast anyways. I forget how far they'd go on a shift. I think about eight feet high. Something like that.

NP: Who would be doing the concrete work itself? Like the actual--.

KR: The Carazza. You mean the work, hard work? [Laughs] Carazza, his men.

NP: Are they still in business?

MI: No.

NP: No?

MI: No. Well, Vi still—as a matter of fact, I was talking to her last night—but Reno, her husband, was in charge, and then when Reno passed away, Mario took over, his relative. But he didn't keep it going very well.

KR: When he took over, that was the end of it. [Laughs]

MI: Yeah, that's for sure. Just run it into the ground. But anyway, no, they don't operate at all anymore. But Reno was very, very good.

KR: Beg your pardon?

MI: Reno was very, very good.

KR: Reno, oh, yeah.

MI: He was such a conscientious man.

NP: So was that the only company involved as far as you know in the actual sort of placement of it and--?

MI: No.

KR: No, there were other men, but--.

MI: There were a couple of others, but that was the only one that Bob really like--. He was a perfectionist, to put it that way. He was a real perfectionist, and it didn't matter if you were a friend or not a friend, "If you did the job the way I want, perfect, then you've got it." That's the way he was with Reno, and that's how he got to know Reno too.

NP: So they worked well together?

MI: Oh, very well. Mmhmm. Yes. Very well. If there's anything that Bob wasn't pleased about, he would speak to Reno, and Reno would have it just like that. And the other way around. If the concrete wasn't exactly what Reno wanted for that job, he'd speak to Bob and straighten it out immediately. They worked so well, and that's why, I think, they got so many jobs. They were just number one all over because they were just highly recommended because the two of them worked so well together.

KR: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Was there ever any repair work done on the elevators that required concrete that you recall? Besides the big one with the bins falling into the lake.

KR: There's always something to do. I mean, we used to take a load or a couple of loads in once in a while. Just patchwork, eh?

MI: Mmhhh. With the ships, you know what I mean, coming and going all the time, they really would loosen the sand and that, and it would suction out. The first thing you know, you'd get cracks, or you'd have splits and stuff like that, and they'd have to go over and redo the thing and do it all, fix it up so there would be no further damage. But I don't think that place that fell in was never ever checked that much.

KR: No, no.

MI: No, they just kind of ran on their good luck, and it gave out. [Laughing]

NP: So are there any other changes that occurred in your job over the 37 years you were there that--?

**[1:10:07]**

KR: Not too much, I don't think. I haven't been there now for about 30 years.

NP: Mmhhh. That's hard to believe, eh?

MI: Yes.

NP: That the '80s would be 30 years.

KR: It's got to be about 30 years since I retired.

CR: No.

KR: No?

CR: No, not that long. Because when you retired, we moved to the lake. We were there ten years, and we've been in town now five years. So that's only 15 years.



KR: Is that right?

MI: 15 years?

KR: It seems longer. [Laughing]

NP: Seems longer!

MI: It's nice to have a wife to keep you in line! [Laughing]

KR: When I retired, we was building a house in that time. If I wasn't working at the house, I would've went back to work. Actually, I did go in a couple times. They called me in. That was all.

NP: They needed your experience.

KR: It took about a year to get away from it, eh?

MI: Well, Bob always considered Keith—we always called him Buck—his number one driver, number one driver. If someone ever complained about something, I've heard him say, "Never mind. I'll have Buck deliver to you," because he knew that Buck would look after things.

NP: What makes a number one driver?

MI: Courteous to customers, very good, on time, and they always appreciated your friendliness. They always said, "He's so friendly. He's so polite." They really, really liked him. And Bob was only so pleased. Whenever there was a complaint come in, you know, because some of the newer ones, they weren't really that experienced, and it's hard to get a concrete driver anyways that know concrete. And just to put them out on a job, even with a driver, I mean, when they're on their own, they kind of get a little bit carried away sometimes. He had that with a couple of young ones. [Laughing] So, "Never mind," he says, "I'll send out my number one man."

CR: He would also help the people if they were short of helped. He helped to take the concrete off the truck for them.

MI: Yes. He'd get out, level it--.

KR: I wheeled it out once in a while.

MI: Yeah, he'd get out and help them.

KR: If it was on a slower job.

MI: Hm?

KR: If it was on a slow job, I'd push a wheelbarrow for them.

MI: Yeah, I know. That's what Bob was saying. I know there was an older man phoned one time, and he was very upset because he couldn't get anyone. I guess he had someone that knew nothing about it, and you went out on that job. He phoned, and he wanted to know all about you, so Bob gave you a very, very good recommendation. He said that, "He even came out of his truck and helped me." And I thought, "Oh, that's nice to hear." Bob was so thrilled about that. But to get drivers who will do that now-- . "Well, here's your load. Make the best of it." [Laughing]

NP: Well, I think that is my list of questions, unless you have something, Ian, to add or ask?

ID: I'm really interested in your Mission to Seafarers. Can you tell us how you got involved in that?

MI: Well, actually, I'm a lieutenant commander retired from the Navy, you see. So what happened, our minister at the church, he was Army, and I had arranged for the 11<sup>th</sup> of November parade at the church. Got everything all ready. So he said, "I want you over for the Mission." And I said, "For what?" [Laughs] "Where am I going, to Africa?" And he said, "No." He said, "We have our Mission over here." And he said, "We need helpers." And I said, "Well, sure." I said, "I'll go and give you a hand." So anyway, I went over, and I was introduced to some of the fellows coming in on their ships. They as a rule--. None of them spoke English, so I said, "I don't know how to--. What do you do?" They said, "Do the best you can." Of course, I taught school. I was a retired schoolteacher, so anyway, I said, "Okay, fine. We'll do the best we can."

So anyway, they come in, and they would be cold. Because we have a van that goes and picks them up, and we hear from Sandy Henderson which ships are coming in. He's one of the port authorities. And he says, "Such-and-such boat will be in, and this one's from the Philippines, or this one's from Sweden," or whatever. So they would come in, and they would get in touch with us

and tell us how many wanted to come ashore or if there was anyone coming ashore. So, “Fine.” We send our van over, pick them up, bring them to the centre, and, “Would you like a cup of coffee? There’s some cookies, or we’ll make you something to eat.”

**[1:15:35]**

So anyway, they would sit down, they’d have a cup of coffee, and first of all, “Can we phone?” So we said, “Yes.” So we had time watched, and we had to--. When they went into phone, we’d get the number for them. They’d give us the number. We’d get the number for them to make sure they’d get a hold of the party because some of those people over there, they don’t have phones. So you phone this number, they have to run a couple miles or a mile or so down the road to get the person to get up. And of course, the time difference would be about 3:00 in the morning their time, into middle of the night, I should say. They would have to bring them back to the phone. And they said, well, it will take them so long to get so-and-so. Anyway, they would phone back. So they’d sit there, and then we’d time them. When they got off the phone, they would pay us, or they could buy cards and whatever, like \$10 for a card. Then they were allowed to make so many phone calls. But they did get a good discount.

So anyway, they would sit and cry. They’d just find out they had a new baby because they hadn’t seen their wife for about six months. So anyway, after that, when they were getting ready to go, we would clothe them. And I felt so proud of my grandson—he’s a captain on one of the tugs out here—this one fellow was throwing one of the lines off the big ship, and his glove went with it. Oh, the poor guy. So my grandson grabbed the glove off the line and held it, and he pointed it out to the fellow. The fellow was curtsying to him, you know? So anyway, when he got the ship tied up, he went aboard, and he said, “Here’s your glove.” And he says, “Where’s the other one?” He said, “I only have one.” You know, just one. And this was real early in the spring--. I mean, late last fall, and it was so cold. He only had one glove. So anyway, my grandson brought him over to the centre. He told him, you know, “I’ll get the van and pick some of you boys up. Come over and get some warm clothes.” Well, we got them donated from us from this co-op out here near the cheese farm. He donated, I think, it was about 12 pairs of leather gloves. You know, those work gloves? So we gave him a pair of those work gloves. Oh, you’d think we’d given him--. And tears were streaming down his face. He had two gloves. He was just elated.

So anyway, we’d take them—if they were going to be in for any length of time—we’d take them for a ride. Like when Bob was well, we’d take them out to the Fort, and we’d bring them to the house. This one day, I brought them to the house, and it was a ship that had come in from India. It was in the middle of the summer, so I said to them, I said, “Well, would you like to come to our house, and we’ll have a glass of wine?” He said, “Sure.” He spoke very good English. So anyway, we gave him a glass of wine. He said, “That’s awful.” And I said, “Is it?” He said, “Yeah. Where do you get it?” And I said, “I made it.” “Oh, that’s worse.” [Laughing]

ID: Were most of those ships grain ships, the crews that you deal with?

MI: Yes, yes.

ID: Can you predict which ones are going to be in trouble before you see them?

MI: No. There was one--. Oh, this was several years ago. They went out, and they were inspecting this ship, and they were eaten alive with lice and bugs. This fellow had rubber gloves on up to here when he was rummaging through. They got in, and he was a mess. His neck and everything was just--. So anyway, they wouldn't let him come in the port, so he went to Duluth. He went on to Duluth. So I think they were told. I think they must have told Duluth about this ship because it had to stay out there until we could get someone out there to fumigate them to clean it up. They didn't want to wait. So anyway, when they got to Duluth, they wouldn't let them in either until they had fumigated the whole ship. But they had to wait. But they had it done in Duluth.

**[1:20:31]**

And as far as drugs go, I know Greg had quite a time in Marathon. There was a ship come into Marathon, and they brought two dogs down because they knew. They were pre-warned that there would be drugs on this ship that would come in. So anyway, he notified the OPPs, and the OPPs went down. My son was district manager for his dad at that time, so they went down with the dogs, and they sniffed the whole boat through. They couldn't find anything. But evidently, I don't know where the ship went onto, but they did have drugs, and the dog didn't find them. [Laughs] But you know, the fellows on the ships cannot get off in the States. There's guards on the docks to make sure no one gets off. So this is the only place they can get off for a little break is here in Canada.

ID: Do any of these people jump ship? Do they become involuntary--.

MI: We haven't had any. We haven't heard of that with our--. I mean, one of the--. A big problem was when one of the men died on the ship. They were from--. Where were they from? Was it Yemen? Anyway, when he died, we had a priest come aboard with a padre. And they went aboard, and they pronounced him dead, but they couldn't send the body back because it was too costly. They couldn't afford it, and there was no way they could keep a body onboard ship for several months, for a few months. So they did have him cremated and buried here. So his body is still buried here. We've had several in the hospital. Fortunately, to find interpreters, you can pretty well find interpreters for them because they have to be left here, and they will catch up with their ships later. But I know it was so sad when that one man passed away because, of course, the company wouldn't have anything to do with him when he died. "Forget about him. We just don't have to pay him now."

KR: There were some of the men that worked on some of them ships from different countries, they never got paid hardly anything.

MI: Oh, I know.

KR: I heard they got paid 10 cents an hour, some of them people.

MI: It's pitiful. You should see those magazines from the Seafarers. It's just the most pathetic thing you ever saw. Those fellows-- . We went aboard one time. Well, we've been invited aboard several times for dinner. We went aboard this ship from India. Anyway, of course, everything is that real spicy, oh, what do you call it?

NP: Curry?

MI: Curry.

CR: Curry.

MI: Oh. They had jugs of water all along, and I remember Bob, he said, "Which one's the water?" And he grabbed the water, and he was constantly drinking this water. And I said, "Why?" He said, "You haven't ate that yet, have you?" [Laughs] I said, "No." But they were so courteous. There was another ship from the Philippines that came in. No, it was Pakistan. He had his wife with them, and her name was Rose. So anyway, the next day, we were on duty—Bob and I were both on duty that day—so I said, "Well, let's go on the--. When I go down," I said, "I want to bring Rose a rose in a vase." So I brought her a lovely yellow rose. Oh, she was so excited about this yellow rose. So she took it back to her room. So anyway, they were in for several days. They were waiting for different types of grains that they hadn't gotten.

**[1:25:11]**

So anyway, the day before they left, we took—where did take them?—we took them some place up around Port Arthur, around the bluffs and what have you. Here she pulled out a great big luncheon cloth. And her husband said, "She stayed up all night for two nights to finish that for you." [Laughs] Yes, she was such a kind woman. She couldn't speak English, but he interpreted for her. It's so sad because you get the fellows that come in, and they have no money, so they just--. They get no pay, and sometimes they are left on their ships abandoned with no water and no food. It just so happens that the Seafarers come and provide. They

bring on water for them. And the company won't have anything to do with them, and they won't pay them. They abandon them, and there they are, left with nothing. It's so pitiful, you know, to see them. So often, they see their children maybe once in three years because they go to different ports, you know, and they have no money to fly home or to get home to see their family. No way. So it's really such a sad situation.

In fact, I noticed this is our 100<sup>th</sup> year for the Seafarers. What they're going to do is they're going to--. They've been trying and trying and trying. Of course, we can't get any backing. Everything is volunteer. So anyway, we're really working hard to see if we cannot get more help for these Seafarers. Not the Seafarers, the people off the ships who are left from home. In fact, we just got through bagging--. We did 92 bags. You know them Christmas bags about this big? We give them out to the ships. At the last few ships, we give them out to the crews of the last ship or the last two ships so they have a gift to open on their way back for Christmas. In it we put handmade scarves and socks and toques and gloves and candy and wrapped candies and shaving gear. And then with the women, you know you get these little packages in with makeup in the stores? What we do, we fill those up with soap and toothbrushes and toothpaste and stuff like that, and we give them a little face cloth and a little towel. They just love that. They don't use makeup or perfume or anything like that, but we always make up the women a nice little package too.

ID: Are there lots of women in the crews?

MI: Not on the crew. Not on the crew. It's their wives sometimes. The officers.

ID: Oh, I see.

MI: The officers sometimes bring their wives, but you don't find any of the ratings bringing any women. No way.

ID: So this is a whole interview on its own, but I think we should shut it off now and perhaps come back and get more.

MI: Yes, sure. I have a very interesting book I have here too on--.

**End of interview.**