Narrator: Harold Lehto (HL)

Company Affiliations: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool

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Interviewer: Ernie Epp (EE)

Recorder: Owen Marks (OM)

Transcriber: Sarah Lorenowich

Summary: Retired millwright for Saskatchewan Wheat Pool terminal elevators Harold Lehto discusses his long career on the Thunder Bay waterfront. He recounts joining the Wheat Pool as a shoveller for Pool 10, and he describes different methods of shovelling boxcars, handling different grains, and removing grain doors. He then discusses his move to Pool 6 on the boxcar dumper operation before joining the millwright staff there and later at Pool 7. He explains the day-to-day and seasonal repair work of the millwrights, their responsibility for monitoring for safety, and the different millwright departments in the elevators. He recounts his involvement in bin cleaning, also called banjoing or bin diving. Lehto describes the work culture in the Wheat Pool, the safety hazards of grain dust and bug fumigation, being part of a union, and being involved in several strikes. He recalls the major changes during his career, like the Wheat Pool's increased cost cutting measures, automation, and downsizing. Other topics discussed include the 24-hour operation during busy era, the slow down of grain throughputs in Thunder Bay due to shifting markets, his workplace accident, his seasonal work before joining the elevators, and the lack of knowledge in the Thunder Bay community about the importance of the grain industry.

Keywords: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Millwrights; Grain elevators—equipment and supplies; Grain handling; Boxcar shovelling; Grain varieties; Grain car doors; Boxcar dumpers; Labour unions; Grievances; Labour strikes; Health & safety; Grain export destinations; Bin diving; Workplace accidents; Automation; Computerization; Downsizing; SWP Pool 10 (Western Grain By-Products); SWP Pool 6; SWP Pool 7A & B

Time, Speaker, Narrative
EE: Well, it's a pleasure to be here this afternoon, Harold. I guess we'll go by first names. I'm Ernie and you're Harold. HL: Sounds good.

EE: But I'm going to ask you to start by giving your full name for the record, so it's on the disc.

HL: Well, my name is Harold Walter Lehto.

EE: And you could tell the card that's being recording where you were born and when.

HL: I was born November the 9th, 1940, in St. Joseph's Hospital, Port Arthur.

EE: Good. Thank you for that. Then I ask the question how you came to work in the grain trade, and if you want to say anything about your earlier years in education that can fit in there. But how did you, in fact, begin working in the elevators?

HL: Well, at age 23 I was still living in Nolalu at the family farm, working some bush work and that kind. I had heard that they were looking for employees, Sask Wheat Pool, grain industry. So, I went and applied, and they sent me to Pool 10, which is on the Kam River. Saskatchewan Wheat Pool had bought 10, 11, and 12 from Fort William Elevator Company. That's when the big rush was on from the Russian deals.

EE: So, this would be, what, the summer of 1964?

HL: 1963. I started on November the 6th, 1963.

EE: Oh, as you turned 23.

HL: Well, a few days later, yes. [Laughs]

EE: Right. So, you started with Sask Pool on the Kam in Pool 10.

HL: Pool 10.

EE: And worked there for some time? Well, let me see. When you started working there how long did you work for Sask Pool?

HL: Just about 35 years. But I worked at Pool 10 shovelling—there's a shovel house, a small shovel house—that winter from November the 6th until just before Christmas, lay-off time. Then the following spring in '64, I got called back in April, and I stayed

there and shovelled at Pool 10 until I think about June or July. Then I got transferred to Pool 6, a dumper house as they call—no shovelling and that.

EE: How different were the two elevators? Pool 10 was quite an old elevator. They both were, I guess, in their way, but Pool 10 was older than Pool 6. Would you know?

HL: That I don't know. I would have to say it was because it even had rope-drives yet instead of--. You know one main rope-drive? I don't know if you're familiar with the rope-drive. Instead of electric motors at different stations, like Pool 6 and they have.

EE: This wasn't the elevator that is now Western Grain that Mailhot has?

HL: It's the one that produces bird seed.

EE: Okay that moves that through.

HL: Is that Methot [sic] or something similar?

EE: Oh, okay. So, that was Pool 10? I was just hazy. I had been in Pool 10 and seen the--. Were you with us as well Owen? We did a tour, and we'd been talking to Mr. Mailhot about the possibilities of his elevator becoming a historic site, actually—although I shouldn't say anything more than that. So, that was Pool 10. So, I have a sense of that.

HL Yes, that's Pool 10.

EE: And Pool 6 was a more modern kind of elevator?

HL: Yes, a much larger capacity, grain capacity.

EE: It was built by, I think, Mackenzie and Mann when they were bringing the Canadian Northern Railway into Port Arthur, that Pool 6 was built for them initially, then Sask Pool took it over in the '20s, I guess, or '30s.

HL: Manitoba had it for years.

EE: Did they?

HL: Oh, yes. They owned it before and then Sask Wheat Pool must have bought it from them at that.

EE: Things get sorted out in the records. When you worked in the first elevator, what kind of a day would you have?

HL: Well, from 8:00 in the morning until, in those days you had lunch hour, so you worked until 5:00. You had the noon hour off.

EE: Eight plus one.

HL: And then sometimes you had to go back—or you could go back—for overtime in the evening. In those days you had to shovel 10 cars in your eight hours, and you'd go back and shovel, I think, was it five in the evening again. Three hours overtime.

EE: That would be the most overtime that it would ever have, an evening shift as well would you try to clear?

HL: Yes.

EE: And so, the shovelling was in the cars, actually, was it?

[0:05:01]

HL: Well, it is with the plywood boards. It's not like a shovel shovel. It's a plywood 3 by whatever--.

EE: And the cable pulling it.

HL: Cable pulled it, and as long as you kept it slack, it would come with you, but as soon as you let go, it would kick in and draw you to the car door, and the grain would spill out into the hopper.

EE: Was it difficult to learn that skill?

HL: It did take some getting used to, yes, yes. At the end, pretty good at it already. As a matter of fact, you rode the cable with your foot and that, like surfing backwards. It was sort of a no-no because if you got your leg wrapped around the cable and it tightened up with the load, it would take your leg off.

EE: You never saw that happen I don't suppose?

HL: I haven't, but I think there's a fellow that did have his leg taken off.

EE: At Pool 10?

HL: I don't know which house it was.

EE: Because there were a number of elevators, in fact I guess quite a few, that had that kind of system.

HL: The shovel system.

EE: How long did you say you worked at that elevator then?

HL: I was there from November until lay-off time around Christmastime, and then the following spring again until June or July. Then I got transferred to Pool 6.

EE: So, it was actually just within '63 and '64 that you were there?

HL: Yes, yes.

EE: Was there any kind of a sense of this being kind of a young-man's job holding the shovel and so on?

HL: Well, certainly if you were younger, it was less strenuous than at that later age, yes.

EE: If you'd been 45 rather than 23 or 24.

HL: It varied on cars, too. If you got wheat or durum, the cars were only about that high off the floor with grain. But if you got barley or oats, they were sometimes up to the ceiling because it's a lighter. That's how they went, by, what are they, 90-tonne cars or 120-tonne cars.

EE: I don't think we actually in a previous interview thought about that very much. I grew up on a farm in Manitoba, so I have some sense of what the 60-pound bushel of wheat and a bushel--.

HL: Yes, and then oats and barley would have been lighter and that, so you could load more.

EE: Yes. Oats doesn't flow particularly easily, but clamouring up there I dare say--.

HL: Well, there's two different methods. Some would stay at the door and just put their shovels in and go like that and work your way to the end of the car. Some would crawl right up to the back and then dive the shovel in and then come to the door.

EE: Would the ones that are doing the second—heading right up there—would they get their cars unloaded faster than the first guys did?

HL: Well, you could bring a bigger load in front of you by going to the back and that, yes. Shovelling flax was very slippery and that, so they would flow almost like water.

EE: Yes, flax seed is certainly a difficult one to stand in.

HL: And then sometimes you'd run into trouble when you're getting down to the floor and that if there's partitions. They'd lift 2-by-4s out of the floor, and then your board or your shovel hits that it'd--.

EE: Flip you right over.

HL: Flip over, yes.

EE: How long would it take to empty 10 cars as a rule? Was there any kind of measure of that?

HL: No, when you get good at it, especially in this kind of weather, it would be no problem because the weather is cool and that. You'd do it in fairly good time. You'd have time to spare. In those days. They smoked and that, so they'd jump out of their cars. Once the car is cleaned out then you had to--. **[…*audio skips*]** To get the grain to flow out.

EE: The grain that had slid into between the wood and the steel.

HL: Exactly.

EE: These were all steel boxcars that you were handling at the time?

HL: In those days, yes. Yes, they were.

EE: The doors of the car were covered with what? Because you'd have to get that out to get the grain flowing.

HL: Well, in the early days when I started, they were wood. So, someone had to chop an opening there and then break off the edge of the door, then we graduated to a skill saw and ran a skill saw through the sides and relieved the pressure behind. Once the pressure is off, then you took a crowbar and took the grain door boards off.

EE: So, the wood was waste?

HL: Pretty much. But the railroad had just people that worked in that field restoring them, recouping them, the grain door boards.

EE: Yes, we've heard some interesting stories about happened in that area as well. [Laughs]

HL: Well, as the rumour goes, I think there were several houses built in the East End out of those. [Laughing]

EE: Yeah, and I've seen--. **[…*audio skips*]**

HL: Went to the cardboard with the metal stripes, I guess to save on the wood and that. I don't know if it was cheaper than the wood, the cardboard.

EE: The steel strips would keep them rigid.

[0:10:02]

HL: Exactly.

EE: So, they had the sliding steel doors on the boxcar, covered all of that, and that had to be pulled aside then first, and then you opened the grain holding.

HL: Yes, yes. Some of the cardboard doors, they would bulge and that if you had a heavy load behind there. Sometimes you had a heck of a time getting that steel door open because the pressure from the inside from the--.

EE: Sure. And you didn't have mechanical assists on that. You just had to muscle that door out of the way, I suppose.

HL: With bars and that, yes. But whereas then later on when the same thing happened at the dumper houses like Pool 7 and Pool 6, they had just a cable that you put on there and the winch would pull it open.

EE: Helps to have that sort of assist. So, you'd arrive at 8:00 and go to work to get your 10 cars.

HL: 10 cars.

EE: 10 cars unloaded through the day.

HL: Pool 10, I think, had two tracks, so they were setting one track up while you were shovelling the other. I think they were spotted too, so two hoppers. Two guys working in this hopper area and another two over there.

EE: Having visited the elevator not too long ago, actually, my eyes are seeing what you're describing—the place where this was taking place. So, the unloaders weren't that large a number of people. Who else would have been working at the elevator, or do you remember what the rest of the operation, the grain moving--?

HL: Well, there was always, as the grain was coming out, there was both government and company employees taking samples in a bucket and that. They would run them up into the inspection office and sort of rough grade them, I guess, to see what quality they are and what kind of dockage—a lot of chaff or seeds and stuff like that. Then they would charge the farmer for dockage.

EE: Right. And there would be others involved, or did you also--? **[*…audio skips*]**

HL: Into the hopper and then the belt took it away and up the leg in the scale floor and weighed-off.

EE: And there were others doing that work?

HL: Yes, yes. Oh, yeah, and then there was cleaner men running cleaners and that, then another department loading boats.

EE: Well, that was the beginnings then, and over to Pool 6. How was the unloading carried out there? You've described it as a dumper elevator, then.

HL: Dumpers, yes.

EE: What did that involve?

HL: Well, Pool 6 was sort of unique. It has a trestle in the back and the cars were pulled on from the siding on the front through and into the back area. Some of the other—I think, was there four tracks there—four tracks, they just pulled them in, and then so many, I can't remember, three or four cars and then they were kicked out on a side spur then, once they were emptied.

EE: So, you'd have--. **[…*audio skips*]** Time then, could you?

HL: No, dumpers were just the one. Each track had a dumper on, and then they would handle the car one at a time on each track, yeah.

EE: One at a time. How did the dumper work?

HL: Well, this was like a cradle affair and that. The whatchamacallit there, they were called rams on each side, and they were run by electric motors with gears. They would activate it one way, and then as the grain quit flowing, then they would go the other way. I think they rocked about four times, and the car was empty. It had baffles that went in and diverted the grain out the door on each.

EE: So, this was a physical arrangement in which the car would be sitting on a section of track that rocked back and forth in order to let the grain fall out on both sides? Both sides were open then?

HL: Well, it had door openers that would lift up the paper doors, or control room from above it, he was watching, and he could control and push, lift the door open once the steel door was opened.

EE: Right. And then the cars were mechanically rocked back and forth--.

HL: Rocked, exactly.

EE: It would allow the grain to flow out of both sides.

HL: Like I mentioned, the baffle went in to divert the grain out and into the hopper.

EE: It was all mechanical? That must have been--.

HL: Yes.

EE: Were you aware that that was how it happened there when you were at Pool 10?

HL: No, no, I was not aware.

EE: The first day must have been quite a--. [Laughs]

HL: It was an eye opener! [Laughing] Yes.

EE: So, what was your job when you came to Pool 6 then, where this system was in effect?

HL: Well, starting off I was a doorman. You stand in between these arms that push the doors in, and any paper and that that was coming out, flowing out, you'd pick that out and step aside. Once all the flow stopped, then you started to rock. Then you would step off and onto the main floor area because the whole assembly would go back and forth.

[0:15::16]

EE: You wouldn't have any--. **[…*audio skips*]** Whether it had been added later, would you know about that?

HL: I don't know about that. I'm assuming it probably was original, but that's just my assumption.

EE: Yeah, because the elevator was built, I believe, around 1910. So, it would be interesting--. Well, we'll have to do some research on that sometime to clarify how long. The Pool 6 was also much larger than--. Was it, in fact, the largest elevator on the--?

HL: Yes. No, Pool 7 was.

EE: Pool 7.

HL: Actually, it was Pool 7 was the largest I think in the world. After, there's a bigger one in Texas, what I understand. I think Pool 7 had about 7-million-bushel capacity, storage capacity.

EE: Right, and Pool 6--.

HL: I'm not sure what it would have had. I'm guessing maybe 4 and half, 5 million. I would be guessing.

EE: Obviously less than that. Sure, yes. You worked there, then, for the rest of your life in Pool 6?

HL: Well, as things wound up at Pool 7, on the millwright staff. And then I went to the millwright staff, yes.

EE: Oh, I see. Well, that would be part of the everyday as well now. So, you worked in the unloading area of Pool 6 for how many years? For some years?

HL: Several years, yes. I think I was at Pool 6 for about, oh I don't know, 25 years or something like that.

EE: So, around '79 or '80 then?

HL: Yes. There was a posting, so I put in for that and went into an apprenticeship millwright program.

EE: At Pool 7?

HL: Yeah. No, at Pool 6.

EE: You began it already at Pool 6?

HL: Yes, yes. That's where I went.

EE: And what did you do after you moved away from the unloading before you became a millwright? Or was that transition straight to--?

HL: I was up in the annex first. It was the annex and then there was a posting for a millwright, so I put in--. **[…*audio skips*]** Ah, well, I think there's a little bit of a pay increase and that.

EE: Always attractive.

HL: Yeah, so. Other than that, I think it would be something different to try.

EE: How many millwrights would there be in an elevator?

HL: Well, in the heyday there was quite a few of us, I think. I'm guessing maybe around 18, 20 at one time when things were--.

EE: Per shift? What were the shifts at Pool--?

HL: No, altogether.

EE: At Pool 6, would you have an evening shift as well? Or did the actual elevator run around the clock?

HL: Well, when things got really busy and there was cars waiting on the tracks, sometimes they went up to three shifts, yes. Three eight-hour shifts.

EE: Three eight-hour shifts.

HL: But generally, if things weren't that busy that you needed extra manpower, they'd run two shifts.

EE: Did you have the hour lunch break as well at Pool 6?

HL: For a while we did, but then they went to the 8:00 to 4:00.

EE: Right, the eight-hour shifts to allow for 4:00 to 12:00 and 12:00 to 8:00--. **[…*audio skips*]**

HL: Along Cumberland Street. Guys would go there at noon hour, and some wouldn't show up, so they figured, well, by running straight through they'd be staying there. [Laughs]

EE: I guess you could travel a fair distance in an hour, especially if you had a vehicle.

HL: Well, we were right beside Cumberland Street, so, yeah. There's walking distance no problem.

EE: Pubs that are still in--. Well, they probably don't operate anymore.

HL: No, they're gone ages ago.

EE: Yeah, well of course, lower Cumberland has been changed quite a bit.

HL: Re-vamped, yes. [Laughing]

EE: Dressed up.

HL: Well, there's all those houses there. There's CN house and Princess and all those, Laprade's.

EE: These were--.

OM: Vendome

HL: Vendome, yeah. Kimberley and all those Satan's dens. [Laughing]

EE: I need to look at that again. In 1885, when the railway was completed, Port Arthur had more than 40 hotels and public houses in it. I don't know that it included ones down Cumberland. It must have. Indeed, it certainly was.

HL: In the early days, yes.

EE: So, what was it like to, in general terms, to be working at Pool 6 through these years? How many would be on a shift? You might have, I take it, maybe half a dozen millwrights.

[0:20:01]

HL: Millwrights, oh, there was probably about 10 or 12, I would say.

EE: During a shift?

HL: During a day shift, yes. Less at night because things sort of simmered down at night. They didn't have probably as big a crew working.

EE: What did millwrights do in the elevators?

HL: Well, repair any breakdowns that occurred on the cleaning machines or dumpers or belts. Any problems with belts or concentrators on the belting system--.

EE: And breaks will occur, breakdowns?

HL: Especially when things get older, yes. Then wintertime, overhauling how they would wear out from the grain.

EE: Yes, I've seen old spouts that had been completely worn through.

HL: Oh, yes, right through.

EE: The steel, I guess it is, the steel that they're made of.

HL: Steel, but later in the years they came with a ceramic liner and put it in there. They would last quite a bit longer.

EE: Ceramics are stronger than steel when it comes to the abrasive effect, particularly I guess of wheat kernels.

HL: I would say wheat or durum would be, yes, more abrasive than--.

EE: Barley or oats.

HL: Barley or oats or even rapeseed—or canola as it's called. Round ball bearings probably roll more than slide.

EE: How does canola compare to flax seed in terms of slipperiness? Is it about the same as flaxseed?

HL: Probably would be because it is an oil producing product, so.

EE: I guess I ask partly because of the tragedy on the Prairies.

HL: These three girls recently.

EE: These three girls that lost their lives playing on a grain truck.

HL: Exactly. Now, I don't know. Were they loading at the time? Was the truck loaded and they were--?

EE: It must have been something like that. Growing up on a farm and having handled grain, an, having shovelled barley and oats in a granary in a hot August day or September, I have my own thoughts about grain. But flax is so terribly slippery, you can slide down into it. That's why I'm wondering whether canola is as bad as flax for sheer slipperiness.

HL: Maybe flax is a little bit more slippery, but like I say, they are both oil products, seed or so.

EE: They certainly are that. What was the rhythm of the year in terms of--? You mentioned the winter shut down when you weren't working, but there wasn't any grain moving through, I guess, or very little. What was the rhythm of the whole year?

HL: Well, even after shipping season closed there usually around Christmastime or into the new year and that, then there was still cars coming in because if you had a lot of boats at the end. So, once things were slowing down and that then they would give you repair work to do—relining spouts that aren't being used or overhauling trippers or cleaners or whatever the cause may be.

EE: The season would start again in--?

HL: Generally late March, early April depending on the winter.

EE: The movement from the Prairies would begin--. Or was there significant movement of grain from the Prairies in the spring and summer before the harvest--? The previous year's crop, I guess. Was there a lot of grain that moved?

HL: There was a certain amount, but of course, this time of year was the boom time. Usually after harvest time once things get rolling in the Prairies and the cars start coming in, this was the busiest time right until freeze-up.

EE: From end of August, I suppose, or would it be into September as well?

HL: Probably into September--. **[*…audio skips*]**

EE: Months of the fall until freeze up would be the real push.

HL: And then in the spring too would be a certain amount once the boats start coming in and that. Then they would try to load them up and make space in the storage.

EE: As far as the crews were concerned, you'd have additional people during the fall, I suppose, being brought in to do the work? I presume it over the winter it would be kind of a skeleton crew, or did they maintain quite a few men in the elevators?

HL: Well, it would be certainly less workers in the wintertime, yes, but they would take a lot of the people as helpers to help millwrights and that even in the wintertime. I'm talking when things were really good, eh, not at the end here.

EE: No, because you say you were working for 35--. You retired in 90--?

HL: 7.

EE: '97. That's 34 years then from '63.

HL: Yes.

EE: So, you experienced the last--. Well, we'll get to that a little later I suppose. Let's get the typical. What was it like to be working in human and social terms? You got to know part of the population of Thunder Bay very well, I suppose. The workforce was entirely men, I guess, throughout this period other than in the office?

[0:25:21]

HL: Yeah, in the early days it was all men, but later on towards the end and that they started to get some women, especially in the government staff—sampling—and we even had a foreman that was a girl one time.

EE: She lasted for quite a while?

HL: Yes, until they started to cut back on terminals closing and this kind of thing.

EE: Was there a social life in the elevators as well, beside the work life?

HL: After work?

EE: I suppose it would have to be after work, yeah, unless there was a social life during the work! [Laughing]

HL: No, I guess there's few of us that befriended each other and that and would maybe go out for a beer or two, go fishing together—ice fishing and summer fishing—this kind of stuff.

EE: Was there anything organized by the company in terms of a Christmas or in the summer, a picnic or anything of that sort? Was that not a concern of theirs?

HL: Not with the Sask Wheat Pool. Not in my day. They did buy us a few jackets and this kind of stuff and brought in some pizzas and--.

EE: One at Christmastime?

HL: No, even during the summer and that. I don't know if it's a goodwill gesture or what it was. [Laughs]

EE: What was it like to work for Saskatchewan Wheat Pool?

HL: How was it to work for? Ah--.

EE: Yeah, what kind of a company did you find it to be?

HL: In the early years it was really good. Towards the end and that, it got to get a little bit--. I don't know what words to use. It wasn't as pleasant as it was in the early days, we'll put it that way.

EE: Do you have a sense that you were employees of a farmer's cooperative, which it really was until the '90s?

HL: Yes, we were aware of it.

EE: Did farmers come to visit at all?

HL: Every once in a while we would get--. We even had tours at Pool 7, the bigger ones, and Pool 6. Some of the farmers that were coming through at that they wanted to see what their product was handled out this way. So, they would drop by, and they would take them around and show them how things were.

EE: Do you remember any conversations with any of them?

HL: No, I wasn't really involved. Usually, it was the management that took them out and showed them around.

EE: None of them pulled you aside to say or ask anything? [Laughing]

HL: Not really, no.

EE: They're well-mannered people. [Laughs]

HL: The only thing, there was one occasion I had there was a Finnish boat, and being Finnish myself, it was from the old country, so I talked to some of the sailors onboard. So, I took them around, showed them around the town a little bit, and stopped for a couple of beers.

EE: Did you speak Finnish from growing up in the country on the farm and so on?

HL: Yes, exactly.

EE: Were there other Finnish speakers in the elevators?

HL: Yes, there was a few of us.

EE: Was there any sense of ethnic diversity? How varied were the workers in the--? Or could you say anything about the character of the workers?

HL: It was quite varied. There was a lot of Ukrainian and Polish and Italians. There was all different nationalities.

EE: And you were a member of the Grain Handlers Lodge 650?

HL: Yes.

EE: Through the whole period, I suppose. You became a member right off when you were hired by Sask Pool, or was there an initiation or whatever?

HL: No, I think once you put in you, I think it was a 60-day trial period to see if you were--.

EE: Probationary.

HL: Probationary, exactly. After that I think you were in the union and started taking union dues.

EE: Who were the union leaders that you remember?

HL: It was, well, Frank Mazur was--.

EE: Especially.

HL: Yes. [Laughs] And then some of the elevator workers were negotiating teams.

EE: Frank was leading already by, what, the late ‘60s soon after you started? Or was he already the president when you started in ’63?

HL: I can’t remember if he was or not.

EE: You don’t remember anyone before him, I suppose? Big Frank was quite a presence. [Laughs]

HL: No. Yes, yes, he made himself well-known.

EE: Were you much involved with any of the negotiations yourself?

[0:30:04]

HL: No.

EE: You didn’t serve as a union steward or anything of that sort?

HL: No, I wasn’t, no.

EE: Did you ever have a grievance of your own for a steward to press on your behalf?

HL: Only once I put in a grievance in all my years, yes.

EE: Could I ask about it?

HL: Well, when they were closing down, they used to send two or three millwrights to different houses like Pool 6 and that because every so often you have to have fire tests and that—even though it was not operating—to make sure the water system worked in case there was a fire and that. So, they used to send different guys. I was quite senior in those days, and I was not sent out this time, so I said, “How come?” I can’t remember what the words were from our millwright maintenance form, so I put in for grievance there, but nothing became of it.

EE: You didn’t get pressed? You didn’t go to arbitration or anything exciting like that?

HL: No, no.

EE: Did you get to union meetings regularly?

HL: Every so often. Maybe not as regular as I should have been, but, of course, negotiating time you’d go see what the offer was and what we’re wanting. Then, of course, when it’s time to have a vote, you show up for sure.

EE: Sure. The union struck in the late ‘6-s, am I right? It was about ’68 or 9.

HL: ’68, the year I got married. [Laughs]

EE: You were married already when it happened or--?

HL: I think it was during! [Laughing] Yes.

EE: How long a strike was it?

HL: It was at least two or three months, if I remember correctly, because I was down east visiting my future brother in laws and that being laid-off, or striking, I should say.

EE: Did you have much strike pay at the time?

HL: I don't remember. It was $100--.

EE: A week or something like that?

HL: A week or every two weeks or something like that yeah.

EE: What was the Lodge 650--? Were you aware of being part of a larger union? Yeah, of course it was.

HL: Affiliated with others?

EE: Yeah, you were--. I'm just going back in my own memory. The Brotherhood of Railways, Steamship, et cetera, et cetera.

HL: Yeah, yeah, I think the head office was it someplace, Chicago or someplace in there, I think the main headquarters.

EE: You wouldn't have much of a sense of whether strike funds came up from headquarters or where your dues went?

HL: I would imagine it would come from headquarters, the strike pay and that, because I don't think they had that kind of bank account here.

EE: No, no, I daresay the dues would flow down.

HL: Yes, to head office.

EE: Was there another strike during your years?

HL: I think there was at least. I was in about three of them over the years.

EE: Three?

HL: That I recall.

EE: Right. Yeah, and the strikes were against all the companies I presume?

HL: Yes.

EE: It wasn't just Sask Pool, it would be--. Because the companies, on their part, were bargaining together on the other side of the table, I guess, were they?

HL: I believe they were, yes. The whole shebang.

EE: So, a millwright's day is not typical, I don't suppose. You never know what sorts of things you'll have to be doing.

HL: No, you wouldn't, yes. Especially on night shift, then you covered the whole terminal and that not just one area. During the day and that, we sort of have our own departments. I worked for years in the car shed and that. So, there was two of us looking after the car shed unless something major broke up and then we'd call in some of the extra hands to give us a hand. But then there was another gang that looked after the cleaner deck, and scale floor, and so on and so forth.

EE: Was some of your time involved in watching for things to go wrong? Or were you always finding things had gone wrong already?

HL: Well, you would make the rounds and that and saw something that was sort of abnormal and that, you'd have to look into it. If it was going to cause a bigger problem later on, then you tried to nip it in the bud before became major.

EE: You weren't the only tradesmen in the elevators I don't suppose?

HL: No, no. There was electricians and I guess that's about it, yeah.

EE: There would be more millwrights, I suppose, than electricians though because the electrical system would be fairly reliable.

HL: Yes.

EE: Were there any safety issues that you had to deal with, aside from the danger that breakdowns could cause?

[0:35:03]

HL: Well, no, not really, except if there was something that was sort of hazardous and that that might cause a safety issue—something coming apart and causing injuries to employees. That kind of--. Then some people, they were always wanting updates on guards and that. Every once in a while, somebody might lose a finger or something like that, so, of course, word would get around and they'd put guards on them.

EE: So, you were aware of accidents of that sort happening in the elevators over the years?

HL: Yes, yes. Matter of fact, I don't know if you're familiar with a leg, how a leg buckets work?

EE: Sort of, yes. Well, describe it.

HL: This was on the cleaner deck apparently. I didn't see it. But somebody was looking in there to see if the leg was running and that. So, being not thinking he stuck his finger in there, and of course it nipped the end off when the buckets went by. So, these kind of things. And oilers, they're squirting oil and stuff on chains and that when the chains are going around. You're supposed to shut them down, I guess, but they would squirt some oil on the chains and that and might get your oil gun nipple stuck in there or the spout stuck in there. So, there's always these kinds of things. Somebody would come along, "This looks dangerous. Make a guard for that."

EE: Make it impossible to do that, I suppose.

HL: Yeah.

EE: Did you have a sense that management was concerned about safety, then?

HL: If it brought their attention and that, they would--.

EE: If it caught their attention, they'd do something about it.

HL: Yeah.

EE: You were mentioning it was a good place to work, a pleasant place to work, when things were really moving which would be into the mid '80s I suppose. Or what's your own sense of how things began to slow down for Sask Pool?

HL: I guess it would be in the late '80s that things started to slow down, once--. Russia was our main buyer in those days and that, then either they started to get grain from the Ukraine or something—because that's a basket belt there too. Bread-growing basket belt? They were getting, I guess--.

EE: We might say, first of all, I might ask you, our operation here was mighty when there was a market on the Atlantic, and you're suggesting that that was Russia, the Soviet Union, was particularly the buyer.

HL: The buyer, yes. And then, I guess, it went to the--.

EE: The Pacific rival would have been China, I suppose?

HL: Yes, then sort of a lot of it moved to Vancouver and that. Of course, in the middle of summer Churchill got some of the business because of the short season there. I guess there'd be a shorter haul from there.

EE: So, Soviet Union began collapsing about 1990, so I guess one of the questions you probably can't answer is whether it was the disorganization that the collapsing Soviet Union experienced that, in fact, reduced the Atlantic trade? If we make it late '80s, we just have to move it a year or two. It's 1990/91 the--. **[*…audio skips*]** Difficulty in the factor. Did you have a sense of Vancouver as a rival? Was Sask Pool moving grain to Vancouver and Prince Rupert, for that matter, as well?

HL: Well, especially from Alberta, that would be shorter to go to those terminals. Being a year-round port, that was a benefit for them.

EE: Alberta Pool. Yes, it certainly was. I guess we need to check those elevators as to who owned them and what was moving.

HL: Sask Wheat Pool had one in Vancouver because I visited there. I was on holidays, so I said, "Well, let's go see what it's like here." Took a quick trip around there.

EE: Did you go into the elevator?

HL: I believe I did, yes. It was years ago, so.

EE: Do you have any memory of how it compared with the elevators here?

HL: It was smaller than especially Pool 6 and 7, what I recall back then. I don't know if they've added on since then or not.

EE: Well, these were such mighty elevators here that Sask Pool took over or built for the trade--. **[…*audio skips*]** Some of the interviews have in terms of doing days, and so on and so forth. What would you like people to know about the work you did and the places you worked? You've been rooting over this subject for almost a month since we met at the Labour Day picnic that afternoon, I suppose.

HL: I never gave it a second thought! [Laughing]

EE: Until you got my letter! [Laughs]

HL: Exactly. The worst part I hated about Pool 6 was it had flat bottoms in the bins, so you'd have to go down and they called it *banjo* it, to pull the grain and that to the opening where the belt was down below. Well, that wasn't bad if it was grain, but if there was hung-up screenings, you'd have to go down on the cable and the chair and with a pitch-fork loosen—because it stuck all around the sides of the wall—go down there. Most of the time, once you start stirring that dust up, that grain dust and that from the screenings, you couldn't see your hand in front of you! That was the most horrifying, especially the high--. **[…*audio skips*]**

[0:40:39]

EE: I take it you've done that?

HL: Yes, yes.

EE: A number of times?

HL: Several times.

EE: Did they provide you with a mask?

HL: Face mask, yes.

EE: For breathing. Goggles for the eyes?

HL: Goggles, yes, yes.

EE: I see. So, they did try to protect you, but, of course, it's like being underwater in a sense.

HL: Pretty much, yes. It seemed like the centre was hollow, but it was hung-up on the edges. So, some fellows would go down a little further than they should, and it would collapse. It would almost be like an avalanche. Then that puff, and some of them would get buried up to here in there and holler and get cranked up a little ways out of there. That's the worst part of the old elevator business that I--.

EE: Who got chosen to do that? On what basis did you get the job?

HL: Well, junior workers and that, but then you'd go down for a spell and then they'd crank you back up, and then the next guy would go over and give you a bit of a break.

EE: One of the great advantages of seniority was being able to--.

HL: Stay on the top side, yes, [laughing] and do the cranking or the safety line around the--. **[…*audio skips*]**

EE: What were the tapered ones at Pool 7, so that they--?

HL: Yes, and then later on they did convert and had contractors put in a tapered bottom there, hopper-type bottom, to direct the grain.

EE: Sure. Right. Did they do that with steel, or did they simply pour concrete in there?

HL: I believe it was concrete. Give it a slope.

EE: Yes. The thing was resting on bedrock or close enough to it, so they didn't have to worry about the weight of that. The hoppers, these were all concrete-walled hoppers?

HL: Concrete, yes. Pool 6 had tile, though, tile with flat bar in between it. It was two layers of tiles, an inner and outer, and flat bar in between. Actually, quite a bit of steel in there because I remember coming up the ladder from some of those. If you went down to do the grain and that, you just a lot of times went down the ladder, and the rungs would pull out partway and almost give you a heart attack. You'd figure it would come right out, but they went so far in--. **[…*audio skips*]**

EE: Significant injury while working in the elevators?

HL: Broke my ankle.

EE: In a fall?

HL: Yes, off a ladder. We were doing an overhaul job and were climbing up a ladder, and I lost my grip. I only fell down about six feet or so to the concrete floor, but--.

EE: That's sufficient. So, you were off for a month or two?

HL: I think about three months altogether, yes.

EE: Joints, ankles, knees, and so on--.

HL: I still got the plate and screws in there.

EE: Oh, that's what they did to repair it?

HL: Oh, yes.

EE: Pain as well? Discomfort?

HL: At the time. Well, sometimes if I do a lot of walking, that evening I'll feel pain and that. By morning, then, it's settled back down again.

EE: So, this is a quite vivid memory you have—I don't blame you for that—of cleaning out the bins. Are there other things you'd like people--. Because that obviously is something that you would think people should know what you had to endure to keep the grain moving.

HL: Yeah, well the ankle job was in the winter--. **[…*audio skips*]** Going up a bit of a ladder to get up to the level where the screws were. I lost my grip there and just dropped to the concrete floor.

EE: Ladders can be tricky things. What might interest or surprise people about the job that you did? Do you talk about it very much?

HL: No.

EE: May I ask if you have children or grandchildren you could talk to about it?

HL: Well, I've never mentioned it to them, and they never asked. Ever since I retired, we're going onto 20 years or 18 years and that. No, I never been back since I walked out there.

EE: And people haven't been curious until I appeared at the picnic?

HL: Well, once in a while we go for coffee at County Fair and there's about three or four of us old elevator guys that we--. "You remember so-and-so?" "Yeah, I see he's in the paper, died," or whatever.

EE: So, there's a bit of a community of grain handlers that--. **[…*audio skips*]**

HL: "So-and-so, haven't seen him since I retired. Wonder what he's doing," or whatever. Something like that. But other than that, no.

[0:45:13]

EE: What do you think might surprise people most about the work that you did those years?

HL: Surprise? I don't really know how to answer that word *surprise*. Like just another person off the street that never had anything to do with the elevator?

EE: Yeah, that would be a good person to think of.

HL: Oh, well, the only thing I could--. The size or the expansion of the elevator and how it works and that, if you'd never seen it would I think probably find it very interesting, or amazing actually, the way the system works.

EE: Did you get a sense that people were interested in what you were doing or thought about the grain trade in this community? Or did they just sort of, "You had that job," and they weren't particularly interested?

HL: I would think something like that. Say, "Oh, yeah. Those elevator guys are going on strike again." [Laughs] Or this, like in the paper now, "Good year of shipping grain." That would be the kind of controversy, yeah. "Oh, it was a boomer bumper-y crop again."

EE: Or compliments to you, I hope?

HL: Yeah.

EE: I've known a few people in the shipping business, and I remember one, a woman, who became a first mate on the boats for a time. She was convinced that the people of Thunder Bay really didn't appreciate what happened, the fact that it was a port city, that ships came in and went out and so on and so forth. Since many of the ships that came in and left were moving with grain, would you think that her assessment was true enough that people just didn't pay much attention? Other than the ones you've mentioned of course?

HL: Living here, I guess it's just an old part of the situation or part of the city and that. Like somebody working in a mine, Lac des Isles or something like that, it's probably just an everyday thing to them. **[…*audio skips*]** Something like that and seeing what evolves down there.

EE: You mentioned farmers touring, were there other tours of the elevators, 6 or 7, that you observed from people in town?

HL: Locals?

EE: I guess children wouldn't be allowed. Or were there schools--?

HL: I don't recall ever seeing school kids there, no.

EE: No, probably not.

HL: No, there probably could have been some other Europeans or something, but I didn't have much to do with them. I don't remember any big crowds coming either. You might get five or six something might come at a time and that was about it.

EE: Well, the elevators, although they're big places, wouldn't handle crowds very well, I wouldn't think. You'd want half a dozen maybe or a few more if you were taking a tour through, I would think. From a tour or two I've participated in, you wouldn't want them too large.

HL: No.

EE: You were on the brink of answering the next question, I think, which is what are you most proud of in the work that you did over the years?

HL: Well, I don't know if I'm proud of anything particularly except that keeping the place running and, I guess, keeping things going. No other special pride that I can think of.

EE: Keeping the grain moving.

HL: Exactly.

EE: Because the next question is do you think that the work you did contributed to Canada's success as an international grain trader? And then in what ways?

HL: Well, I guess by keeping things running and shipping grain out, cleaning and that, we must have contributed something to the welfare of the Seaway, and you know.

EE: Did you feel a pride in that?

HL: Not particularly. It was just a job.

EE: A job that earned a decent living.

HL: Yes, it did. I'm proud of that part. [Laughing]

EE: That you stood with the guys when they had to go on strike in order to wring a little bit more out of the farmers.

HL: Yeah, and like I say, I wasn't university--. **[…*audio skips*]** Good pension I enjoy today.

EE: Could I go back to--. You said you started at age 23 just after your birthday, did you complete high school, if I may ask?

HL: No. Grade 8, and I had to go to work.

EE: I see. What had you done before you got into the grain trade?

HL: Well, I did some fire fighting out in Nolalu, had some fires there. That and then planting trees and a little bit of bush work and that. Driving truck, bulk truck.

EE: Was some of this for Lands and Forests, the department?

[0:50:00]

HL: The fire fighting was, and the tree planting was, yes.

EE: Sure, okay. All of it, of course, sort of seasonal work unfortunately. The great thing about the elevators after a couple of years—or would it have been longer than that?—you were employed all year round then, I guess.

HL: Once you got in in those days, when things were going good, I guess, you got about four years or five years and you were pretty well a year-round employee. Then I worked that road going to Northern Light there. We were working on that in the wintertime--. **[…*audio skips*]** And then working on the summer part blasting rock cuts and that.

EE: Owen has a question.

OM: Your farm, in Slate River or in Nolalu?

HL: Nolalu.

OM: What was your farm? Was it a dairy farm or just a--?

HL: Bush lot.

OM: Bush lot, eh? So, you did a lot of--.

HL: Wood cutting was the industry around there for the main breadwinning. [Laughing]

OM: So, it was a good move for you to move into the city?

HL: Exactly, yes. I still have the homestead.

OM: Oh, is that right?

HL: Yes.

OM: That's great!

EE: Did you have livestock as well?

HL: We only had a few chickens for ourselves and then a cow or two for our own milk.

EE: Right. You weren't involved in sale of anything off from the farm operation except--.

HL: Not off the farm except the wood.

EE: Except the wood.

OM: Did your parents homestead that or--?

HL: No, it had been homesteaded before. We lived there before, and then during the war years—I don't know why—they sold and moved to town.

EE: Work, probably.

HL: I guess there was a shortage of men and that. I think my stepfather worked at some of the lumber yards in town here, and then in 1949 we moved back out again to a different lot though. Close by, just kitty-corner actually, the lots.

EE: A lot that had timber on it that you would clear off?

HL: Yes, yes. I think you needed 10 acres to get a patent in those days. Somebody had cleared it and got the patent for it.

EE: The last of the background questions in this basic questionnaire is describe any connections you see between your work and the work of farmers growing the grain handled in the grain trade. The good ladies in Winnipeg developed this questionnaire in the first--. [Laughs] That one is almost too obvious to ask.

HL: What was the question again?

EE: The question is "Describe the connections between your work and the--? **[…*audio skips*]**

HL: The product that we were going to be handling.

EE: They were indeed.

HL: But, yes. The farmers themselves--. Well, you being from that part of the country, I don't know how the farmers--. They sort of got cheated or something. They would take out and clean the grain and then they would dribble it. They would be docked and then they would be dribbled it back in again when they were shipping to the boat, you know what I'm saying?

EE: Yes, yes, I do.

HL: Well, that couldn't be helped if it was a damp year and it had to be dried. Then they'd have to run the dryers and that and then they'd charge the farmer for so much a bushel for drying it.

EE: All the farmers, I think, very often did have a sense that they were being gauged.

HL: Yeah, a little bit, yeah.

EE: The story from the 100 years ago and more about one of the farm leaders who was visiting Winnipeg, apparently. Someone takes him for a ride down Wellington Crescent in the city where all the big mansions were, and as he drives along, he's muttering under his breath, "One cent a bushel! One cent a bushel! They did this all with one cent a bushel!" As they claimed, the grain companies.

HL: Right.

EE: Of course, that's what was the origin first for the Grain Growers co-operative, and then other attempts and then the Pools in the 1920s. Were you given any sense of the history of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool as an organization. Did they ever--?

HL: No, never really explained anything. It was just my assumption that a bunch of farmers got together and started a co-op. I guess they had to probably buy shares or whatever to get this thing started and that and from there it must have grown. That's my assumption, now I don't know if it's factual or not.

EE: Well, it sort of fits in in a way. I was lying on a hospital bed in Trail Regional Hospital in September 1972, so it's sort of three or four years after the strike you mentioned—four years after—and so on and so forth. One of the fellows who visited someone else on the ward came over to chat with me a little bit, and he'd retired from Saskatchewan from being a farmer. Among the way I remember his saying, "You should have heard what they called us when they were pooling in the early and mid 1920s. They called us communists and all the rest of it." Because this fellow Shapiro who came up from California, I believe, to assist the farmers in

developing the Pool was regarded by the individual grain merchants, and of course, grain companies, which would include Paterson to whom my father always sold in Culross, Manitoba. All the grain went to Paterson's.

[0:55:21]

HL: Paterson's elevators.

EE: Yeah. They, with the media of course, were denouncing this kind of combined activity by farmers. If Saskatchewan Wheat Pool had kept a sense of that in their organization and their leadership into the 1990s, and beyond, they might not have got into the shenanigans--.

HL: Financial trouble that they did because they started to spread theirselves into Europe. They were going to build an elevator there. I don't know how many million they spent, and I don't think it ever did get functional is my understanding. Because we had a foreman from here went there to sort of overlook it or be associated with it, his family and everything went there.

EE: Do you remember where it was in Europe?

HL: I think it was in Poland somewhere. Ukraine or Poland.

EE: Okay. And what were the changes that took place in the organization of the Sask Pool that you remember or that you observed?

HL: Well, they did, as far as I understand, when they were in Manitoba, they bought an elevator and a fish farm went with it, I think. A fish growing farm.

EE: Fish feeding or fish farming.

HL: Fish raising. Yes, so I don't think they have it anymore. I don't know what happened. I think they started to spread their wings too far and get into too many things and dole out the money. Ever since that, it started just going downhill in my opinion.

EE: Did you have a sense of the organization itself changing while they were doing this?

HL: Well, some of the management I found changes in that too, yes.

EE: Of what sort?

HL: Not for the better. [Laughing]

EE: What did they try to do?

HL: They cut staff and tried to cut here and there, I guess, once money got tighter and that. They were ordered from whoever—board of directors or something—to try and keep within a budget because our overhauling and that was really cut back. Before we used to always do all the shipping spouts and grain spouts in there, then they started to let them go and save money that way.

EE: Running the plant into the ground?

HL: Sort of, yes. It wasn't maintained as it was in the early years, yes.

EE: We interviewed Peter Barr, who was purchasing manager--.

HL: Agent.

EE: Agent for time. Did you have any dealings with Peter?

HL: Just often and sometimes we'd go to the separate office when we wanted something that we had to buy and that. We'd go get a purchase order from him and then we'd go and do our stuff and that. So, yeah.

EE: Did you have dealings with the purchasing agent before Peter was given the job? Any memories at all?

HL: No, not to the extent that we had with Peter. Peter was more open, I think. Even now when I see him, we always chat for a bit and that.

EE: Peter's at our church, so I've known him and his wife for decades. [Laughs]

HL: She's quite involved with the Swede Home there.

EE: Yes, just published her *History of Swedes,* which the Lakehead Social History Institute, which I was co-director, and this project is in relation to that as well. We took in the money at the university, receipted it charitably, and so on and so forth for the book. Raised about $75 000 over the years to support Eleanor's work. Quite proud of that part of it all. Did your own work change during these years, the work you did as a millwright? Did you see technological changes by any chance? Changes with the--.

HL: Automation. Automation. Especially on the scale floor and that there was less manual weighing of the grain. Just physical shutting off levers, opening levers, letting grain come up or go down or whatever, this was all done by control-room push-button type of thing.

EE: The computerization of the operation.

HL: Yes, and hydraulics or pneumatics.

EE: Sure. And as a millwright, were you involved in installation direction of that? Or did the electricians take over? Or were people coming in to do that kind of work?

HL: No, a lot of it was done by our own millwrights and that, the plumbing of the hydraulics and pneumatic lines and that. Then, of course, the electricians would do the sensors or whatever those controls that were operated electronically.

[1:00:06]

EE: Well, challenges. What other challenges beside dealing with changes did you find on the job?

HL: Challenges? Well, I don't know about challenges so much, but towards the end and then, of course, cutting stuff and that. That was more of a challenge. You had to maybe work a little harder or do a different area. Like I mentioned earlier, we had departments that we used to work out of, but sometimes when they were cutting back on staff, we had to go in different departments already and move around.

EE: Do you have a sense of major challenges that the industry as a whole faced? We have talked about the inability of Russians, the Soviet Union, to buy wheat the way it used to and the impact that had. Would you want to expand on that, or would there be other challenges? What about government regulation? Did you observe any or that or changes in it perhaps? Challenges?

HL: Well, I wasn't involved if there was any, that I was aware of. So, I don't know in that respect if there was government involvement. I'm sure there was to some extent, but we weren't aware of it. Maybe management did.

EE: Yes. The Western Grain Transportation Act was passed in the early '80s. Did you hear much about that or have any sense of what its impact was?

HL: This is not like the Wheat Board and that, this is later, eh? When they did away with the Wheat Board and that?

EE: Yeah, just in the last little while. This is earlier, back in the '80s. Or if I was to say Crow Rate, does that mean anything to you?

HL: The Crow Pass Rate or whatever? I've heard the term and that, but I didn't really know what it involved.

EE: I guess the old controversy didn't--. Well, of course, it was amongst the farmers and on the Prairies particularly. It didn't reach the elevator floor out here.

HL: Not that I was aware of. They probably discussed it amongst themselves and that. I don't know, was it subsidized, the rate?

EE: There had been a long period of subsidization, which the government became concerned—the Trudeau government—was convinced that they couldn't afford it. That's when lots of things began to happen, discussions. There's a book that scans the subject, which is a very interesting book. Changes by the railways and the rolling stock and so on, did that represent challenges or were they improvements?

HL: From the railroad?

EE: Yeah, when they went from boxcars to hopper cars. We hadn't really talked about that.

HL: Well, it probably maybe, I don't know if it made it a little easier because I didn't work in the car shed—just what I observed of people. We got hydraulic set ups that would run on tracks and a point would go into the thing and open them up. But some of them were hard and that, and they still had to maybe break them open with a bar and that, a big bar and that. But that part automated. Like the dumpers at Pool 7 and that, they got rid of at least two of them or so and put automatic like hoppers in there. The dumpers didn't work anymore, and the tank cars would open up and go into the hoppers.

EE: They were sloped the way the best grain bins were and the grain just flowed out. Well, we've come to significant events. What are your most vivid memories about the job? Other than falling and breaking your ankle, [laughing] which would be pretty vivid, I'm sure.

HL: Well, that part was, yeah. Will always stick with me until the day I die.

EE: I expect so.

HL: But other than that, I have no real vivid memories of anything spectacular that jumps out at me.

EE: The routine day-by-day.

HL: Well, much so, yes.

EE: Go down for 8:00 and punch in.

HL: Punch your card in, yes.

EE: Ask the foreman what's the job for--. "Where do I start?" Of course, you'd go to your area, I guess, as a rule.

HL: Yes, our own shop and that, and then work would be directed from there by our maintenance foreman.

EE: For each of the areas was there one maintenance foreman?

HL: Just the one maintenance foreman and he would--.

EE: Yeah, one central shop. And what were the most important events that happened in the workplace during your career? We're really plumbing for those vivid memories that, [laughing] if there are any.

HL: My memory is not as good as it used to be when I was 23! A few days short of 75. So, yes.

[1:05:09]

EE: Did the work over all the years impact your health at all? Lungs or anything of that sort?

HL: I think maybe breathing might have been better if I had been not involved with the dust so much as working in the elevator.

EE: That would be one of the changes, I suppose, over the years, the dust control.

HL: They put dust control, but I think it was a finer type of dust that was being put out.

EE: That still continued?

HL: Yes, because you could see—if the sun was shining—you could see all kinds of small particles in the air. It wasn't certainly dust-free.

EE: And it's the fine stuff that is the real threat to the lungs, isn't it, the particulates?

HL: Yes, and I--.

EE: From diesel motors and so on and so forth.

HL: I don't know about--. Some years you'd have a bug infestation, so then they'd put pills into as the grain was going along the conveyor belt. They let of some kind of gas. I don't know if that--. And then they would spray down in the boots and that, the bottom of the legs and that. Spray to kill the bugs down there and that. So, I don't think whatchamacallit is the healthiest product to be inhaling.

EE: Probably not, and you have a bit of a sense anyway that that probably has impacted your health.

HL: Because in the winter when you took them apart, those legs, there's be a--. **[…*audio skips*]** So, it must have stuck to that inside of the boots there to give off. Matter of fact, there was one fellow there, he had nerve damage in his hands. They curled up like that. He associated it with breathing because he did a lot of the fumigating in there that maybe that was part of the--. Breathing that in affected his nervous system. I don't know if they ever could prove it.

EE: That would be a job I wouldn't want, for sure, to be involved in fumigation. Unless one had the--.

HL: Mind you, there was mention at the health or safety meetings and that that breathing in--. The foreman said, “Oh, that malathion. You can drink that stuff. It wouldn’t do anything to you!” [Laughing]

EE: He demonstrated, I suppose, did he? [Laughing]

HL: No, he didn’t give a demonstration of it, no. [Laughs] But that was his--.

EE: There’s the occasional brave man. Guy who lived in BC for some time, and Gordon Shrub was one of these tough guys, co-chair of BC Hydro. I think he once did drink something or other to demonstrate at a meeting or conference. Tell--. **[…*audio skips*]** Say, it’s important for us to be doing this? You think this has been an investment in Thunder Bay’s future to sit down this afternoon?

HL: Well, it certainly doesn’t hurt! No. I don’t know who will all see this, once you’ve finished with your questions and answers.

EE: Well, it goes into the computer at Lakehead University and is accessible. We have some volunteers now who are transcribing as well. So, they listen and type it out and so on. That’s never quite as good as listening. On the other hand, it’s a lot faster. So, it’s kind of the--.

HL: But where would this ever be used? Just for the archives?

EE: Well, stuff in archives is used by people! [Laughing] When I say that I’m working on a number of histories, one of them will be a history of the grain trade, it’s because of what has been recorded over the years. In this case, first of all, in the Canada Year Books. So, the statistics and so on are there. So, then in the future when you and I are dead and gone, others can read this and--. **[…*audio skips*]**

OM: Someone 500 years in from now will be listening to you! [Laughing]

HL: Yeah, yeah!

EE: Owen is a willing engineer helping here, sometimes has questions. Any questions this afternoon?

OM: No, just an observation. I came up in a grain family. My dad was a grain inspector for the government, and he was in there 30 years.

HL: Was that here or west?

OM: Here. George Marks, he worked in Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, the houses there, so you would call them. You were right. It was just thought as something a lot of people in Thunder Bay did. You either worked at Can Car or in the bush or the elevators.

HL: Or paper mill.

OM: Yeah! There was no great thought other than it gave you a paycheque every couple of weeks, eh?

HL: Yes, yes.

OM: And that was a good paycheque for a lot of people!

EE: This means, in a sense, the city it didn't nurture any kind of pride in what it did for the country. You know, what was happening here that was important to the economy of the country. This goes--. **[…*audio skips*]**

OM: City, yeah.

HL: City.

EE: This was a lunch-bucket town where people were happy to have the jobs.

HL: Yes, yes.

EE: They didn't have enough history professors around yet to celebrate!

OM: None whatsoever!

EE: Dammit! [Laughing] We came along late!

OM: My Grade 8 teacher may have mentioned the elevators, but I can't remember much more than that. But seriously, you know, it was just a fact of life. There was nothing special about it other than providing a living for a lot of families in this town.

[1:10:11]

HL: Exactly, that's right!

EE: And, I think, the town is poorer, the city is poorer now, for lack of those jobs.

HL: Especially taxation. They used to pay good dollars for their terminals and that tax-wise.

EE: Yes. That's fallen off markedly.

HL: Well, especially when they--. **[…*audio skips*]**

OM: I do have one question. I always meant to ask this question, but what do you think you would have done if you hadn't have gone in the elevators? Would your life have changed? What do you see happening?

HL: I probably would have wound up, if I didn't get involved with the elevator, in the forest industry of some sorts.

EE: Cutting in the woods?

HL: Either driving a machinery or a truck or something like that probably. Like I say, I didn't have the--. **[…*audio skips*]**

OM: That sort of work.

HL: Yeah.

EE: This was another side of what we were discussing a moment ago, that this was a city in which guys, first of all, coming out of Grade 8 could get a good paying job for a lifetime, as it was for quite a while.

HL: Yes, and in those days, you can work your whole life at one job. Not like nowadays. Most you have to maybe change three, four, five times different jobs, the way things are nowadays.

EE: Well, it says *other*. Are there any questions that you would have liked to have answered? Any questions that we might have asked that aren't on the questionnaire?

HL: Well, maybe I'd ask you a question about growing up in Manitoba. You grew up on a farm?

EE: Yes, oh yes, 240 acres.

HL: 240?

EE: And then my dad bought another 240 acres and things got a little easier.

HL: Yes.

EE: It was a mixed farm.

HL: Originally 240 acres is not very big for out in the Prairies.

EE: No, especially when the back 80 was a swamp.

HL: I see. Nowadays they wouldn't let you probably do that. You. can't--.

OM: It's a wetland!

HL: Yeah, it's a wetland. You can't disturb the frogs or the--. [Laughing]

EE: Yeah, my Mennonite roots are in the low countries, the Netherlands, so I have the Netherland's sense. It's only in the last few years that I've realized that when I drive across the Prairies—we lived in BC for nine years, moving back and forth to Manitoba—I'd see the rolling hillocks and rolling farmland. There's wetland down there and so I'd say to myself, "You know, if we had one of those big earthmovers that LeTourneau built down in Texas, just redistribute the land and level it off so you can grow grain on all of it."

HL: Whereabouts in Manitoba did you grow up?

EE: It's between Carman and Portage la Prairie, if that places it at all.

HL: Oh, I see.

EE: On Number 2 highway. North of Number 2, just east of Elm Creek. I went to high school at Elm Creek.

HL: There's a fellow that worked in the elevator, I think he was from Swan Lake--. **[…*audio skips*]** Swan River? Swan River.

EE: There may be a Swan Lake.

HL: I think it was north.

EE: The western part of the province--.

HL: I think it was north of--.

EE: Yeah, it would be that way. That part is not as familiar. Dauphin and Neepawa, I've been through them, but there are towns up there and villages I don't know. Culross, I don't know what's left there now. A Paterson elevator, for one, relocated a little bit.

HL: When I was still working, my wife and I said, "Well, this summer when I take my holidays, two weeks or three weeks, we're going to take one province at a time and go from Highway 17 or 1 or whatever you want, go north right far as we can go and see what each province has to provide." So, of course, we started in Manitoba. [Laughing]

OM: Churchill is lovely in the summer!

EE: You got to Thompson?

HL: Just short I think of Thompson and that. We stopped in a gravel pit. The horseflies! I had a black truck. They must have thought it was a moose or whatever. They just swarmed on that truck! So, we had lunch there and we were swatting horseflies, and we didn't see a wild critter—no deer, no moose. I said, "Well, I guess we'll stroke that vision off our holiday list!" [Laughing] **[…*audio skips*]**

EE: Just once, I guess. I don't know why we didn't go north to visit her. She and her husband would come down to Winnipeg quite frequently. In fact, they'd drive that road time after time. When we did go up there--. Were we up there? Maybe it was twice. On the first trip up, a niece offered a ticket—because she was working for Perimeter Air—we could fly up. My wife has not completely forgiven me for the fact that I said we had to drive that road. I've got to see the countryside! [Laughing] I like northern Ontario—some lakes, a lot of trees, rocks. I think you could shut it down actually.

OM: Well, you may as well thank--.

EE: Yes, it's a great pleasure. Thank you, Harold, for the insights you've given us this afternoon.

HL: Oh, well thank you.

EE: I suspect your good friend Russell sitting by is eager to repeat this because he has his own memories, keen memories, I suspect. Anyway, thanks so much for giving us all of this.

HL: Well, thank you!

EE: And for letting us record this for posterity.

HL: All right. Thank you.

End of interview.