

**Narrator:** Maurice Mailhot (MM)

**Company Affiliations:** Western Grain By-Products

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**Summary:** In this three-part interview, owner of Western Grain By-Products Maurice Mailhot discusses his career opening and operating a terminal elevator in Thunder Bay. In part one, he describes his father's pioneering work in grain pelletization and his purchase of two derelict elevators. Mailhot shares the history of the elevators, Pool 10 and Pool 11, and explains the process of updating the elevator's equipment to get it operating again. He discusses his vision for the elevator as a handler of specialty grains, and he lists the niche grains and programs he has been involved in, like CIDA food aid and organic certification. He describes the major challenges of the operation, like finding customers, enduring through good and bad crop years, and adapting to changing methods of grain marketing. He also discusses reasons for Thunder Bay's decreased grain handling, like containerization and lack of efficiency. In part two, Mailhot discusses hiring staff of mostly retired elevator employees and dealing with issues of alcohol. He also expands on his father's history. In part three, Mailhot tells several stories about his elevator operation, like loading a vessel delayed by weather, problem solving for other grain companies, and dealing with GMO flaxseed. He describes his interactions with other organizations, like the railways, grain trimmers, grain companies, Canadian Grain Commission, and private inspectors. Other topics discussed include the ethnic diversity of elevator workers, his pride in the quality of his operation, and the lack of repair work being done in the port of Thunder Bay.

**Keywords:** Western Grain By-Products; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Grain elevators—Equipment and supplies; Specialty crops; Non-board grains; Grain export destinations; Grain marketing; Mustard seed; Grain screenings; Grain pellets; Containerization; Organic certification; Grain pests; Rope-drive system; Grain varieties; Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); Food aid; Alcohol use; Immigrant workers; Grain transportation—rail; Grain transportation—ships; Grain trimmers; Canadian Grain Commission; SGS (General Society of Surveillance); Outward grain inspection; GMOs; Flaxseed; SWP Pool 11; SWP Pool 5; Davidson & Smith inland elevator

## Audio Part One

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: It's November 1, 2010, and we are sitting on the Kam River in Thunder Bay talking to Maurice Mailhot. Maurice, what I'd like you to do is start by introducing yourself and how you became involved in the grain industry.

MM: Well, okay. I've been introduced, I'm Maurice Mailhot, and we are on the banks of the Kam River in Thunder Bay. How I became involved in the elevator industry was through my family. It sounds rather odd now, but my father was originally in the grain feed business, the cattle feed business, in the early '70s. He manufactured grain screening pellets. He picked up the waste from the elevators who had, for previous generations, simply buried the waste. They buried their waste grain products—screening is from cleaning grain—and of course that's something that was stopped. So, he contracted to all the elevators to remove their waste. He then turned the waste into grain screening pellets which were exported to Europe. And he did this all during the '70s out of a little landlocked elevator called D&S [Davidson & Smith] Elevator near the McIntyre River on Hardisty Street.

In the late '70s, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool were closing their smaller elevators along the river and they demolished one or two. It cost them a lot more than they thought, so instead they decided to sell them off to anyone who was willing to take them. And he bought two of them. He bought elevator 4F and elevator 5. He really didn't do much with it.

I was living in Calgary at the time, and he called me and said, "Would you like a grain elevator?" And I said, "Well, you know, I really got a good job here. Not interested." And he said, "Well, I'd like to come down and see you." So, he visited me in Calgary and explained what he was doing. And he said, "You know, this oil boom that you're living in may not last. You may wish to do something else someday." I really didn't give it much thought, but I said, "Go ahead, you do what you want to do."

I have to back up a little. My father and I were best friends, somewhat similar to my son and I. And I said, "Do what you want to do. I know that whatever you're going to do is in our best interest." So, he bought this elevator in my name. He paid \$51 for it. It was derelict. It had no business, no equipment, really just a hulk of an elevator. And, of course, the oil boom didn't last in Calgary, and I thought, "Perhaps I can do something here." So, I visited in the late '70s, '79. It didn't look too promising. I did a bunch of work here in 1981 on my holidays, vacation and holidays, really just looked at the whole place and spoke to people in the grain industry and opened up in 1983 and have operated this elevator since 1983, as an export terminal.

NP: So, just to clarify a few things about what you said. When you said your father bought you an elevator that's--. It wasn't even a birthday gift? It was just a present?

MM: He wasn't big on birthdays. It was a gift.

NP: And the elevator you're referring to is the Pool 5?

MM: Yes, yes.

NP: Okay.

MM: Which has been named, well we named it from the start we named it Western Grain 10. It was--.

NP: And where does the 10 come from?

MM: Well, 10 was the number of the pool number that the Canadian Wheat Board [CWB] had assigned all the elevators. They were all assigned a number, and this had been, from perpetuity, been assigned a number as Pool 10. So, I kept it. I liked the number. And we just simply, instead of Sask Pool 4F or 5, we called it Pool 10. It was known in the industry and the railroad and the grain industry as Pool 10. If you ship something to this particular facility, the nomenclature used was Pool 10.

**[0:05:10]**

NP: And you also mentioned that your father ran the pellet business out of the landlocked elevator near the McIntyre River. Did he own that for quite some time? Or was that also something that started up in the '70s?

MM: He did not own it for--. It was an offshoot of his feed business. He owned it for about a decade, but it had not been--. It was not an elevator that produced pellets. He actually put in all the operating equipment and began to produce pellets, which were, at that time, really it was extremely lucrative. No one else did it. No other elevator pelletized their waste. Subsequently, in the '80s and '90s, the other elevators did put in their--. Most of them put in pellet plants and processed their own waste grains. Some didn't and I still won't here. I send my waste to another elevator.

NP: When the other elevators started to pelletize their own waste, was that the time that your father took over these two elevators?

MM: Yes, as a matter of fact, when they started producing their own grain screening pellets, he purchased all their product. And there were boatloads of pellets being shipped from this particular elevator behind us. Uh--.

NP: That would be Pool--?

MM: Pool 11. Well, Sask Pool 5F was it's--. Or 4F, sorry, which was called Pool 11 in the pooling nomenclature. The reason that he ended up with both was they wanted to get rid of both and all the power supply to the other elevator was through this one. It had no powerhouse. It had no electrical system to speak of. Everything was underground wires from this terminal to the next one. So, this one pretty much sat derelict. It had the powerhouse and the power supply.

NP: Was that always that case? That the Pool 11 was sort of a sub-unit of this one from the standpoint of the electrical service?

MM: Yes, it was. They had no electrical service whatsoever. They had great huge cables buried from this powerhouse to the next one. When you drove in, the land you drove over was another elevator that had been demolished in 1977 by Sask Pool.

NP: Was that the Consolidated? Do you know? Do you know what that one was?

MM: No, it was Pool 4 [sic].

NP: Pool 4.

MM: Pool 4. And I have some pictures of it. Well, there are pictures of it here. You don't see it as an elevator because it's just vacant land now, but all the belt tunnels and everything else, and the sub bins, are still there underground, intact.

NP: Can you get into them?

MM: I've never tried.

NP: But--?

MM: They're there.

NP: They're there. Hm.

MM: Yeah, they could be accessed if you were a spelunker.

NP: Just before we move on to more of your experience, thinking about your dad, before he had the facility for the pellets, you said he was in the cattle feed industry. Was that here in Thunder Bay, and, if so, where was his operation at that point?

MM: He was in the cattle feed business. He delivered feeds locally. He had feed trucks and a feed warehouse, and he sold Pioneer Brand feeds. It was called Midwest Feeds. He retailed feeds. He unloaded railcars of feeds, warehoused it, and sold cattle feed, chicken feed, whatever to--. Somewhat similar to what the Co-op does today.

NP: The brand name Pioneer makes me think of Richardson. So, was that his supplier?

MM: That was one of his suppliers, yes. They had quite a few plants in Winnipeg that manufactured feeds. They would rail the feeds here. And, of course, Thunder Bay wasn't a huge buyer of feeds because there's not a big agricultural base here, but he did a lot of innovative things.

**[0:10:08]**

I remember when I was going to high school, I helped him design self-feeders for cattle. And he actually cobbled together, manufactured, these wooden feeders that were on skids and it allowed him to deliver the products to the farmers bulk. So, he moved away from bagged supply to bulk supply and mostly feedlot operations, small feedlot operations. He would just simply fill up these feeders on whatever schedule they needed, and it was a lot cheaper for them. Their feed costs dropped dramatically. He dropped the packaging costs, which were substantial.

He had a few other innovative ideas. Pelletizing was one of them. There was no pelletizing done in Thunder Bay. All the pelletizing was done in Winnipeg and west in smaller pellet plants. So, by putting in machinery that formed grain pellets out of waste, he really did pioneer something. He was quite bright, and he worked hard.

He also lived in the elevator, at the D&S elevator. He made an apartment on the second floor of one of the areas and lived where he worked. It was a little strange but--.

NP: Who owns that now? Because I've noticed that—I can't even remember—that somebody did live there or was still working on renovating.

MM: Well, actually, he made quite a nice apartment. We'd always laugh because we'd have to slide these huge steel doors and go up steel stairs to visit him. But he was so dedicated to what he was doing. He liked living there. He had a home, and he also had a home in Florida, but he liked living there.

NP: And what happened to it? Is your father still alive?

MM: He sold it. No, my father passed away in 2005 in an aircraft accident. He crashed his plane in a cotton field in northern Alabama on a flight south. He was 82. He was still flying. It was quite a bad accident—single engine, small airplane accident.

NP: Was he flying by himself?

MM: Yes, he was. I was supposed to be with him. That's speculation. He had asked me to come with him and I said, "I'm really too busy." We would fly together a lot, and this particular trip, I said, "No, I've got too many things I'm doing." And that's too bad.

NP: What happened to the inland elevator, that's still in your--?

MM: No, he sold it in the early--. Or I'm sorry, late '70s to a group that really floundered. In order to manufacture pellets, the thing has to run 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's one of those processes that everything has to be hot. In other words, you have to work at it continuously. The group that bought it weren't as dedicated. Also, the pellet business disappeared. The grain export pellet business disappeared because of a manufacture feed. There had been very few exports of grain pellets to any European country since 1985. There was a 100 percent duty put on them and the trade stopped. But they really didn't have their costs under control. I think it turned into an autobody shop for a while and just--. It declined. It was turned into a sort of rustbelt, derelict property.

**[0:14:25]**

NP: When your dad had the business up and operating, where were his markets?

MM: His pellet markets? Well, he sold his pellets through brokers in Winnipeg. So, the pellet markets were mainly Holland, France, and Belgium. Those were the predominant markets. Some markets were in Spain, but they were European markets, and they paid a lot for the cattle feed.

NP: So, he didn't have to actually do the marketing. He hired a broker who had the connections in Winnipeg?

MM: The [inaudible] and the expertise to market to Europe. Most of the marketing, traditionally, had been done out of Winnipeg, out of the Grain Exchange area in Winnipeg. It's changing. I see a lot more marketing going on to Europe and the Middle East from Toronto. A lot. The players have changed, of course, and the type of traders have changed. There's a lot more Middle East influence in the specialties grain business. Of course, wheat, oats, and barley are still Wheat Board's, so nothing's changed there. But in the grains that are profitable, the brokerage system has changed. Also, the method of supplying has changed dramatically.

NP: So, would you say then Winnipeg has traditionally been the major centre for grain--. [...*audio skips*] Southern area of Ontario as well, there?

MM: Yes. Well, the shift is more widespread than that. Winnipeg was the nexus of the grain business because the Canadian Wheat Board [CWB] was located there, and every other major grain trader were located in the Miracle Mile on Portage and Main.

NP: And the Grain Exchange was there?

MM: And the Grain Exchange was there. And there were all--. Nothing was bought or sold unless it went through there. With the advent of instant communications, small plants in let's say, anywhere—Saskatchewan, Manitoba—can make a sale, and they sell by the container load.

So, containerization of product has really taken over the grain business. Bulk shipping, monster places like these only handle part of the grain shipments out of Canada now. The orders are taken, and sales are made via containers. Buyers and sellers rarely see each other. And, of course, Eastern Ontario grows a huge amount of legumes and wheat, which is mostly sold by container now.

And, like I said, there's a larger Middle East influence coming from--. One of the companies I'm dealing with now is from Mississauga. This company is owned by the Emirates, and they have their own processing facilities in various countries, Turkey being one of the largest. So, they'll ship--.

NP: That's the company called—just for the record—called Sara?

MM: Yes, yes. That's the company called Sara, for the record. They have their own processing plants in the Middle East, and I think mainly based in Turkey. And they'll ship product into the ports of Mersin. Processing's done in Canada. It's grown in Canada, shipped from Canada, sold from Canada. Most grains and legumes take some processing. These people specialize in lentils. The lentils have to be peeled, split, and polished, and that's what they do in their processing plants. They actually form them into an edible food from a very, very basic legume seed.

NP: Have you ever seen any of their processing plants?

MM: No, I haven't. I've just started dealing with them these last couple months. Would be nice to go to Turkey and see them.

**[0:19:02]**

NP: Before we get too far away from the history, I have some questions about the two elevators that we're talking about—the one whose office building we're sitting in today and the Pool--. [...*audio skips*] Your father's time in owning them. Do you know anything about who built them, how old they are?

MM: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool were the main owner of all the elevators on the river. Sask Wheat Pool operated at least six of them, and these two elevators were operated by Sask Pool. This particular elevator, Pool 5 [sic], whose office we're sitting in, was run for about 20 odd years as a barley elevator exclusively. It handled one product: barley. The other elevator handled oats. And because they were smaller shipments, these elevators were actually minor players in the grain trade. The larger elevators in the main harbour handled the huge shipments of wheat, winter and summer.

NP: Now, when we were talking earlier before we started the interview, you had said that the elevator Pool 10 is Saskatchewan Wheat Pool as does the elevator Pool 11, which, from what you had said, was built around 1904/5? Have I got that right?

MM: I'm sketchy on the history of Pool 11, but Pool 10, the office we're sitting in, was originally owned by a company called Western Grain. It was the original builder and owner. It was then taken over by the Fort William Elevator company, which was a secondary owner. They then sold to Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. So, there have been very few owners. You'll still see the faded sign on the front of the elevator says the Fort William Elevator Company. Yes, that was the second owner of it. The owner and builder was a company called Western Grain. We've come full circle.

NP: So, is that why you picked the name Western Grain?

MM: Yes. That was one of the reasons. I have very little imagination.

NP: Ian, I noticed you taking notes there. Are there some questions?



ID: Well, I don't think so, actually. I have some sort of peripheral questions. Like wherever would the other companies have buried the husks, the screenings, previously? Where was that done?

MM: They hauled them to landfill. I don't know the exact locations—I could probably find out—but it was not something that was publicized. It was landfill.

ID: There wouldn't be a negative environmental impact? That would surely be a good thing to bury?

MM: Well, I don't know if it's a good thing or not because they actually don't break down. They may ferment a bit. But some of the fills were unearthed when the landfills were changed, and the grain waste screenings were still--. It was still grain.

ID: Would that husk also include pesticides and stuff from the fields in Saskatchewan?

MM: Well, I don't think in that generation there were many pesticides used. Even now, pesticides are pretty much controlled. Pesticide application isn't as widespread as popular thought thinks. We were certified as an organic facility at one time and handled organic wheats. We used no pesticides here. Zero pesticides for a decade. We used no insecticides. We used no herbicides to control even the weeds on the tracks, we used weed-whackers. We actually mowed all the lawns and for--. [...*audio skips*] A very environmentally friendly insecticide.

The other part of it was that we handled a lot of mustard seed here which is a natural insecticide. Mustard seed really does repel insects. Probably the best thing I've ever seen. Mustard seed is actually a miracle seed. Eighty percent of our handle were mustard seeds—yellow, brown, and oriental mustards. So, it was a natural insecticide. I can't speak for the industry as a whole, our industry, but the agricultural industry doesn't like spending a lot of money on--. They've spent a lot of money in the last decade to improve yields, on herbicides. Insecticides, pretty much the really bad ones have been--. [...*audio skips*] Even then, I don't think they spent much money on them.

**[0:24:49]**

NP: I have a couple of questions following up from points you just made. One is, why do you consider mustard seed a miracle seed?

MM: Oh, it's a wonderful thing. Mustard seed is terrific. It is a natural insect repellent. The mustard seed itself will grow virtually anywhere. It'll grow in the dark in the basement. We liked handling it because—I know this sounds ethereal—but it felt good.

There's something about mustard seed that's rather odd. It was an enjoyable thing to do. Without sounding arcane or strange, this place was like the Big Easy. People got along. And I always attributed it to mustard seed. We like mustard seed. We handled thousands and thousands of tonnes of it. We cleaned it and loaded it onto vessels to Europe.

NP: I think, from my experience in the grain trade—and it's just been related to this project—I think there are ways that you get attached to different processes and different products, particularly different products. Like flax, to me, is a nice product to deal with. So, I don't--.

MM: You don't think I'm strange. [Laughing]

NP: No, I don't think--. [Laughing]. Or we're in the same strange boat. Now--.

MM: Well--.

NP: Sorry.

MM: We always sort of attributed--. A lot nicer than grain. A bit odd.

NP: Now, when you were talking about at one point you were certified as an organic facility, it sounded to me like you were talking in the past tense. So, did things change over time?

MM: Yes, things changed because the sales of--. Sorry.

NP: You were saying that things changed?

MM: Yes. Sales of organic wheat and bulk sales of organic wheats to Europe really never became popular. There were a lot of organic growers, especially in Manitoba. There was a company that pioneered the whole system. Buildings had to be certified. And it really, it just was not profitable. Sales were so poor that they had difficulties.

NP: And what was the company that pioneered it?

MM: That was Paterson.

NP: Oh, was it?

MM: Paterson Grain.

NP: Global Foods.

MM: Global Foods, that's correct. Paterson Global. The process was so small and so expensive that when the price of the products increased--. Just the base price increased because they still had to go through the CWB [inaudible] to sell wheat. It had to originate and go through the Wheat Board.

The Wheat Board was also running a parallel program which, in fact, was in direct competition with these people. There just wasn't enough room for any sales to make it profitable. So, the buyers stopped buying organic products and the sellers stopped. There's probably still producers that produce organic wheat, oats, and barley, and some bird seeds, but I really believe they sell them locally. No organic wheat that I know has been shipped out of Canada in the last eight or nine years.

NP: Did your processes change then? Or you just didn't need to be certified?

MM: We just didn't need to be certified. I changed very little of what we do here. I still have an aversion to chemicals. I never liked them. We do not spray chemicals here. We use very little. If something has to be fumigated, we use a fumigation service that uses a fumigant that is gaseous by nature—in other words, it disperses. It does its job and disperses, and there's very little residue left. And we actually seal off the few bins that we use. I think in the last two or three years we've fumigated about 600 tonnes of grain out of the thousands we've handled. I don't like it. I have an aversion to pouring--. I have an aversion to the chemical solution to anything. My personal feeling. We use housekeeping instead. We just keep the place clean.

**[0:30:31]**

NP: The types of pests that you had to deal with, are they the usual? Like are there one or two that always show up or are they--?

MM: Mice. The biggest problem we have is mice. Mice and pigeons. We have a whole system of live mouse traps. [Laughs] It was my idea. It didn't really work out that well. They're large metal cages, the mice are attracted to them, and they're corralled. I had my people move the mice over about a quarter mile away and release them. And they beat the people back to the place. There was this herd of mice running back, literally. That didn't work out, so. They thought it was pretty funny. When they released them, they just scampered off straight home. So, we use traps now. Yeah, some ideas don't work.

NP: [Laughing] I can see the picture though. I love these pictures, these verbal pictures.

MM: We still have the traps.

NP: Oh, do you?

MM: Oh yeah, we still have the traps.

NP: Well, we'll get a picture of that. Ian, note that.

MM: These humane traps. We'll even donate one to you.

NP: [Laughing] Before we go back to your coming into the business at the invitation of your dad, I just want to ask one more question about mustard seed. What's it used for? Besides the obvious, mustard.

MM: Well. Mustard's ubiquitous. Most of the mustard seed that was exported from Canada to Europe ended up as a meat filler. It's in packaged meats, especially out of Germany and some parts of France. Some mustards were made into Dijon. I had the people from Dijon, France, tour once. Mustard is also used as a--. It's sewn into pillows and quilts as a sleep aid along--. Well, buckwheat, they do the same thing with buckwheat. But mustard has some other properties. It's used in some pharmaceuticals. But most of the mustard ends up in food products. And most of the food products on the shelf has mustard in it, if you look at prepared foods. Somewhere on the list of ingredients you'll see mustard seed. It's very easy to turn mustard into a food. It just simply has to be crushed. The seed does the rest.

NP: So, let's go back to, hm, '70s. Was that when you--?

MM: Actually, it was 1981.

NP: 1981.

MM: 1981.

NP: Now, we're at a real advantage here that we can speak to you because it's not like the old days when new companies are starting up in the grain business. They're usually folding. So, I'd really be interested in hearing about what it was like to come back to Thunder Bay, your initial reactions to being faced with your own elevator, the steps you took—your dad was still alive then, so working, I assume, with him—to get Western Grain products up and running.

MM: Actually, he wouldn't work with me. [Laughs] He got in his plane, and he left, and he went to Florida. This particular structure--. When you look at these structures, you think a grain elevator is a building. It really isn't a building. It's a large mechanical machine. They're all one of--. It's a machine. This one had been neglected. It was originally built as a steam-driven, rope-drive elevator. It had no electrical equipment in it whatsoever. And somewhere along, post Second World War, they updated it with some electrical equipment, but it was still rope-drive. When I took this over the elevator was still operated with transmission rope, and it didn't work very well.

NP: Before you go on from there, so you're saying that it didn't even have--. That even the power for the lights and so on was non--?

MM: No, it had lights, that was it. It had lights, but the equipment was actually mechanically driven via various shafts—jack shafts, half shafts, pulleys, and shivs—by rope. It started rope right here at the base of the elevator, and there were ropes woven all the way through the building. And everything that moved, every belt that moved, every leg that moved, was powered by rope-drive. There's even a wooden gear set here with wooden cogs, and the teeth are made from a South American hardwood called lignum vitae.

NP: Still working? The cogs?

MM: No, I won't operate it. It's still here, I won't operate it. I don't even know if it's legal to, or safe to. It's a curiosity now. It's been a curiosity since I started, I would never even turn it. I removed the rope-drives in the '80s because I consider them inefficient and dangerous, and I motorized the whole elevator.

NP: When you say, "inefficient and dangerous," can you expand on that?

MM: Well, they were very, very large ropes and they shrunk and they--. Huge amounts, they had huge counterweight systems. In the winter, the counterweight system would sink to the floor, and in the summer, they would be pulled up to the ceiling. If the rope-drive was started when either one of these events had happened, it would destroy itself. And if you overloaded them anywhere past their working limit, to any degree at all, the ropes would start to abrade, and you would have this--. They would actually get hot and burn. But they would abrade first. The pieces of rope would start falling apart.

NP: Fraying?

MM: They'd fray, yes, almost instantly if you overloaded them. It was just--. I have no idea how Saskatchewan Wheat Pool ran an elevator with a rope-drive, and it's still here. The materials really weren't good.

NP: What prepared you to even run the elevator? What were you doing in Alberta? Or was this all new to you?

MM: It was completely new to me. I taught electronic switching for a company called Eltel Data. That was my last job. I had lived in Calgary well over a decade. I had been away from Thunder Bay since I was a young man. I worked for Bell Telephone before that and then moved to Calgary. And I had no elevator experience.

NP: So, when you think about it, when you think back to then--.

MM: I cannot spell elevator.

NP: [Laughs] When you think back to that time, how were you feeling about it? I mean this was a big job, getting things moving. How did you actually feel about taking on that challenge?

MM: This is not a job. This is fun. This has been fun for--. It's a hard thing. We've all worked. We've all had jobs. I had jobs, and I had people that told me to do things that I was not happy about doing. I had jobs where you were never home. You were in Northern-Someplace doing something, and you really weren't sure what the purpose was. This has never been a job. I knew what my purpose was, and I was home every night. So, this is fun. This has never been a job. From day one it was always a curiosity. I don't know if you want to put that in perpetuity. I've never worked.

**[0:40:21]**

NP: I understand what you're saying because if you really enjoy what you're doing, it's not work, it's enjoyment. Or at least drudgery, it's not drudgery, it is work. But at the same time, you did have to get an operation--. [...*audio skips*] What were some of those things? You mentioned the outdated equipment, but that's just part of getting a business operating.

MM: The biggest challenge was to convince people that I could do what I said we would do. I travelled throughout Western Canada, talking to people who were trading and selling and actually growing their products. I went right to the fields. I started in

Vancouver and worked my way back east. I talked to everyone I could that had anything to do with this trade and convinced them that we would do what we told them—what we'd agreed on, what we contracted to do.

NP: What was your vision?

MM: My vision was to be a niche player in the grain business. To handle specialty crops, clean them, and--. Larger grain companies, there are a lot of products they really don't want to handle because they're so fussy. The lots are smaller, they're annoying, they're annoyances. And I wanted to make sure that all the rest of the grain companies did not see me as the competition, the new kid. So, I niched into that vision of handling specialty crops as a companion elevator for the grain companies. And it worked.

NP: And the niche crops were--? Mustard seed, obviously.

MM: Mustard seed, canary seed, there's a huge list that I can't remember. I think I handed something out to you. A little "Welcome to Western Grain." Yes—mustard seeds, lentils, canary seed; beans, which are soy and fava; peas, green, yellow, maple pea, a variety of peas that are used as a feed for racing pigeons in the UK only.

NP: What are racing pigeons?

MM: They're homing pigeons that they bet on. It's a big sport in the UK. They drag the pigeons off to somewhere, and they bet on who gets back home first.

NP: Maybe you should start something similar here with mice.

MM: [Laughs] I think we tried that. The maple pea is a high protein--. It's the Red Bull feed, or whatever they feed the pigeons just before the race. It gives them a lot of energy.

NP: Who produces those? Are there special--?

MM: It's grown in Saskatchewan.

NP: By lots of producers or is it also a specialty there, too?

MM: No, very few. Very specialty. Buckwheat, and of course, organic wheat, safflower. We'll be doing chickpeas next week. Lentils. Now there are about five varieties of lentils grown in Canada. They range from very large, flat lentils to little, tiny crimson lentils. So, there isn't just--. When you say, "You're doing mustard," mustard comes in three main varieties in Canada—yellow, brown, and oriental—and there are various grades of them. So, there's various qualities and various varieties. It's not quite as simple as people think.

So, we niched off. That was my vision. My vision was that--. We didn't have the storage capacity or the shipping capacity to handle Wheat Board products, the mainstream grains, so we would niche into the smaller grains. And if we could all make a living at it, we'd be happy. And we did, so that was the vision. Not a huge vision, it's not brain surgery, but--.

We also provided our customers with precision cleaning and bagging. When CIDA [Canadian International Development Agency] was providing especially peas, green peas, and grains to impoverished countries, Thunder Bay did handle some CIDA shipments through the Port Authority. And we bagged peas here for those CIDA shipments, which were gifts of the people of Canada.

NP: Canadian International--?

ID: International Development Agency.

NP: Development Agency, right.

MM: Agency, yes. They basically--. It was a food-aid program, and they gave it away.

NP: And what happened to that program, do you know?

MM: I have no idea. It waned. It waxed and waned. I have no idea what happens to some of the government programs. I never really kept up. Again, it was just an additional service we provided. We were the only terminal elevator that put together bagging systems from equipment I had purchased out of eastern Ontario, and it really worked well. We didn't lift a bag. It was sort of semi-automated. It worked well. I was kind of proud of it.

**[0:46:29]**

NP: When you think about the early days of starting up the business, what were the biggest challenges?



MM: Biggest challenges were convincing people that we could successfully load their product to their specification on a ship on time. There had to be a huge amount of trust built up. The biggest challenge was finding customers. We knew what we could do here. We knew our capabilities, and convincing people that this would be a good place to ship your grain through was the toughest. It took a lot of convincing.

Well, in the mustard business my first customer was a fellow named Wilf Chamney who operated Humboldt Flour Mills in Humboldt, Saskatchewan. And Wilf was an elderly gentleman who I had spoken to several times, and he decided to drive--. He drove to Thunder Bay. He drove in here, unannounced, and he told me who he was, and of course, I recognized the name. He said, "I'd like you to handle my mustard. I've made quite a few sales to Italy and France." And I didn't know that Humboldt Flour Mills, at that time, handled probably 50 or 60 percent of the mustard grown in Canada that went to Europe. He had the European contacts. It's such an old-boy network. He knew the buyers on a first name basis, and the players don't change from decade to decade. And I said, "Sure, I'll learn." And we actually put in cleaners and cleaned his mustard for 20 years. At least 20 years. Humboldt Flour Mills subsequently was bought out by Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, and they have their own singular pipeline of how grain should move in Canada, and unfortunately, it's their own pipeline. They don't partner with anyone.

NP: So that's now Viterra?

MM: That's Viterra. Viterra, I think, would like to handle all the grain in Canada as Viterra. They won't deal with me. And of course, all the subsidiaries of the company that they took over, they've closed them. So, there are no small players left. There's Viterra.

NP: Is this Humboldt plant still operating?

MM: No.

NP: So, who does the mustard now?

MM: Viterra at their own plants.

**[0:49:33]**

NP: So, you had your first customer, and then I assume word of mouth was--. You established yourself?

MM: People won't jump from one terminal to another. There was another customer that handled a lot of the mustard seed grown in Alberta, and they were based in Lethbridge. They traditionally had shipped their mustard through Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. One day, both them and Saskatchewan Wheat Pool called me and said, "How would you like to handle our mustard?" And I said, "Okay." I had approached them for about five or six years and never got a response from them. They really didn't want to change their method of shipping mustard until they--. That was when Pool 4 closed, too. Pool 4 was the terminal that handled their mustard exclusively. And when it closed there was no other terminal left to export their mustard out of Thunder Bay.

NP: That's Pool 4 in the Current River stand?

MM: Yes. So, I sort of got the second large mustard company by default. I had done a lot of work previously with Pioneer Grain, too. Pioneer Grain was a cousin of Richardson's, and Pioneer Grain shipped anything—they were in the specialty crop business. That was my third customer. I haven't had many customers. I think in the 26 or 30 years I've been here, I've probably had six customers. It's such a strange business. The players don't change. People stay in this business--. [...*audio skips*]

Thought, "I could always get a real job." Every year I thought it was temporary. I never thought I'd keep going. So, I always thought of this as just something that we'll try to keep it going because small companies come and go. Most of them really don't have the legs to last a decade or so. For various reasons, usually marketing. I kept thinking that, "Yeah well, I'll try this and if I can keep it going for a while, we'll kind of stave off having to get a real job."

NP: The financial end of it, having to get up and running, was that complicated at all?

MM: Oh no, that was easy, the bank gave me a lot of money. You just have to give them your house and your children. Actually, I signed up with the house. I wouldn't give them the children there. If you've got a good business plan and you can present it properly, and you have some sort of stability, and a paid-for house really helps.

I have to back up to Calgary. The years I was in Calgary, of course, was oil boom years, so we made so much money and really didn't know what to do with it. And we made money. The incomes were--. I was young. I had two young children. My wife worked before we had children, so we--. I don't think there was a year that went by that we didn't just make a huge amount of money. So, we didn't return to Thunder Bay destitute. We returned to Thunder Bay and bought a home, paid for it, car and furniture, and started the family, entered their schools here. But the bank really wanted collateral. I used a combination of my home and this place as collateral. And they were good to me. I've always enjoyed a great relationship with the bank. Anytime I needed cash they'd give it me. [Laughs]

NP: Are there banks in town that specialize in the grain area? Or are most of the companies sort of out of banks in Winnipeg?

MM: The biggest problem I have is there are no banks or insurance companies familiar with the grain business in Thunder Bay. We're the only local grain elevator in Thunder Bay. All the other grain elevators handle their finances and their insurances and whatever out of Winnipeg. I had gone though two local banks initially—I shouldn't say banks are all easy—before I ended up with HSBC, who have a real global outlook on things. I found them extremely businesslike. If I needed a letter of credit, it was produced within an hour. Anything you need in a business venue, they're capable of. So, they were good.

Insurance is another story. I'm still brokering my insurance through brokers in Thunder Bay, but it's via Winnipeg. The insurance industry, or the insurance business in Ontario, seems to have a lack of understanding about grain terminals. That worked out well though.

**[0:55:40]**

NP: So, it sounds—and you can correct me if my understanding is inaccurate—but it sounds like it was a fairly smooth transition from no business to viable business.

MM: Well, there were years it wasn't. 1985, three years after I started or two and a half years after I started, we had no business. There was a very poor crop, there was nothing to do, so I closed the place, and I built a mini storage near Intercity. Subsequently sold it. It's called Canadian Mini Storage now. Sold it to a local guy and went and opened the elevator back up. And in 1990, of course, we had, again, a whole year with nothing to do, very little to do. And I started another company called Kam River Properties. I just went off and did something else. But I didn't abandon the place, we just simply stopped operating for about a year. And in 2000 the same thing happened. And again in 2009, or '08 and '09, we had very little to do. We've just started getting busy again this year.

Has it been smooth sailing? Absolutely not, no. At one point I put my whole life's savings back into the company just to give it a cash flow. And that wasn't too long ago, that was 2000/2001. My son says I have grit. He says, "You won't quit, will you?" And I say, "No, no. Not until I have to." So, by a combination of hard work and careful planning, we got through the bad years. And hard work and probably not so careful planning we got through the good years. No, it hasn't been smooth.

The other elevators closing in the harbour really didn't help whatsoever. It actually, as each elevator closed, it gave me less and less people to work with. And as they closed, they also closed down the companies that fed them from Western Canada. They

disappeared. So, there's a whole ripple effect when one or two terminals closed in Thunder Bay, that means about 10 or 15 companies out west will be closed or assimilated by a larger company. It's changed.

NP: And that has been a big change in just the last five years.

MM: Oh yeah. Yeah, it has really changed. That and containerization has changed the whole way that bulk export shipping works out of Thunder Bay, and even out of Vancouver. Prince Rupert opened up pretty much an automated container facility, and the railroads will guarantee containers from Chicago to Prince Rupert in three days—train loads of containers. And they actually do it. So, its containers are loaded and gathered and on a ship in three days, bound for China. That's amazing.

NP: So, for specialty crops, that would work. Does that also work for the bigger crops like grain?

MM: Yes, yes it does. There's no limit. Container ships are huge. They'll handle--.

NP: But you have to have the rolling stock to--?

MM: You need the empty containers that require a backhaul back to China or Asia. So, the US and Canada requires the imports—the containers, to come west and be emptied—in other words the television sets and cars and computers. The millions of containers have to be in-country, empty, looking for a way to get back, and this is one way to get back.

**[1:00:20]**

NP: That brings us to talking about the other side. We talked a little bit about bringing the product into the elevator, at least where it came from—we didn't talk much about rail, but we will—but then there's the other side of it, and that's shipping it out. How did you establish connections then for actually shipping the products out? What did that entail to start that whole end of the business up?

MM: Actually, I've always kept this business very simple. I'm a service. We will handle and clean the product and load it onto a ship, but I don't buy or sell grain. I refused to from day one because I really didn't know what I was doing. And to me, it's a form of gambling. It's very difficult. You stay awake all night. So, while everybody likes to think they're important, we're just a simple service here. We unload railcars and load railcars and ships. Do a little processing in between.

NP: Who arranges for the ships then?

MM: The buyer and the seller. Or both the buyer and the seller, or a combination of.

NP: Brokered out of Winnipeg largely then? Up to this point?

MM: Up to this point, out of Winnipeg. I would say that eastern Ontario is picking up more and more impetus in the brokering. But, because of our electronic age, it could be brokered out of--. Well, the ship we just did was brokered out of Miami. There's no geographical boundary anymore. I will--. I'm sorry to flip papers in front of the--.

NP: The *Puffin*?

MM: The *Puffin*, that was brokered by a company in Miami called Sea Rice Marine. Sea Rice Caribbean, I'm sorry. They do a lot of products out of South America and the Caribbean. In other words, they'll handle anything. Their biggest trade is sugar. But this one was done--. Now here's the strange part. This was done out of Miami by a person that I've only ever talked to on the phone. He entrusts all his products to me to get it onto a boat. The buyer also entrusts that same trust, sight unseen, and I trust that when I invoice him, he'll pay me. There's little or no litigation in the grain business. The contracts are simple. The dealings are handshake, via telephone or, well, now it's via BlackBerry. And the players have this insanely agreeable trust in each other.

NP: Have you ever been burned?

MM: Never. I've never had a bad account. Never. I've had dicey accounts. [Laughs] I've had people I've had to ask them when they were going to pay me, but I've never had a bad account. I've never heard of anyone in Canada who's stolen grain. It just doesn't happen. There are no fast players.

But to develop that trust from the start, in the '80s, people really didn't believe in me. They didn't know me, they--. I sat down to dinner in Calgary one evening, and the two people that I was trying to convince that I could handle their mustards both asked me, "Give us one good reason to trust you." And I said, "Because I want to do this. This is what I do. I don't want to do anything else. This is my vision, my dream. This is what I want to do." And that seemed to be good enough for them. If I'd said, "You know I'd like to try it." Or if I was--. I just said simply, "This is what I want to do."

So, in 30 years I have not met most of my customers. At the start I did. After that, very few people visit here. I see very few people. I travel very little in business. Most of it is telephone and email and fax. Of course, I phone my home day and night. But it's almost, in a strange way, a personal relationship. It's all first name. You have met the players at conventions or meetings or awards, but

that's the only time you see them. It's very hard for people to think--.

**[1:06:33]**

NP: When you talk about conferences and so on, what are sort of the major conferences that--?

MM: Grain Elevator and Processing Society [GEAPS] and the Special Crops Association [SCA] are the main conferences I go to.

NP: Are they international?

MM: Yes, they are. Well, yes. Yes, they are. The GEAPS is usually held in the US in the winter. They did hold it once in Winnipeg in the winter, but people refused to ever go back. The big grain handling port is Mobile and, of course, New Orleans. A lot of these people were from the southern Gulf Coast, and Winnipeg in January was a cultural shock to them. [Laughs] It really was. They actually refused to even come back to Canada.

NP: [...*audio skips*] The famous port. From your experience with those associations, is Thunder Bay still recognized by markets around the world as being a port? Or has that just disappeared completely?

MM: I don't know if you remember when Toronto was a big grain handling port. Well, I'm afraid the same may happen to Thunder Bay. Buffalo was a great--. Buffalo actually began, invented elevators, and I really don't remember anyone telling me Buffalo was a great grain handling port anymore. I think Thunder Bay, probably, is on the verge of being bypassed by technology and politics. I haven't seen any--. [...*audio skips*] Into even infrastructure maintenance in the last decade. It has been simply a decade of closures.

Will it dwindle to nothing? Possibly. Will Thunder Bay continue handling grain? There's no reason why it has to. Technology has changed the way grains move, and it's possible that with better rail service, they may even compete with moving grains by boat, up to a point. That means though that more infrastructure has to be built at both the West and East Coast. Someone has to handle the stuff and you need the places to do it. Right now, Thunder Bay is in a great [inaudible].

NP: Is it fair to say that part of this is the containerization that you were talking about? The technology, the going straight from containers onto a ship as opposed to having to put it through an elevator, having the cleaning done on the Prairies where it's harvested?

MM: Of course.

NP: Are there other technologies that fit into that category that you're talking about? Bypassing Thunder Bay because of technology? And I can't remember the other thing you said. Oh, politics. So, we'll get to politics in a moment, but let's just talk about the technologies. Are there other technologies that--?

**[1:10:32]**

MM: Well, very few people in Thunder Bay have figured out how to make grain elevators more efficient. There are a lot of ways to make these facilities a lot more efficient than they are. Storage in big silos is not a prerequisite you can use--. [...*audio skips*] Or you load directly from a railcar to a vessel. There are incrementally cheaper ways to handle product bulk. There has been very little innovation, or reason to, in Thunder Bay to handle product more efficiently.

Now, on the other hand, grain elevators are being paid a lot less than they were being paid even a decade ago. So, their profit margins have shrunk to the point where it's a very easy decision not to operate. And the companies that own grain elevators, for the most part—except for this one—they do something else. They have something else somewhere else. The grain elevator is just one finger of their organization. So, the incentive to get faster, better, smarter, cheaper really isn't there. You get the mindset, "Well, we'll just operate until we can't. When we're not profitable, we'll close." And that's what's happened.

NP: Along with that, technology differences and overcapacity in Thunder Bay, comes the discussion of the markets and the shift in markets. At one point in Canada's history, just about everything went through Thunder Bay because most of the markets were there, plus the infrastructure on the West Coast was not developed to the extent that it is today. So, you talk about the markets for your specialty products being the Middle East and the Caribbean and so on, what do you see as the future for those markets? The ones that would go out through the East Coast, whether it comes through Thunder Bay or not, you've already commented on.

MM: In my opinion, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and Africa are going to be buying increasing dramatically. Their arable land's decreasing dramatically. None of these countries can sustain any sort of grain production. Saudi Arabia, with their gazillions of oil dollars, for 20 years tried to grow wheat. Well, it's difficult to grow wheat in a desert. You need a lot of water. They've quit. They've simply stopped with that vision. Their new vision now is to buy up arable land and form their own growing corporation. You will see companies from Europe and the Middle East and Africa actually buying chunks of Canada, growing their own products, and shipping them through, again, the infrastructure that's here.

NP: Is that market still through Thunder Bay? Or is it because of availability of ships and so on, even if those are what we consider to be the market, even those being shipped out through the West Coast?

MM: The eastern part of the Seaway in eastern Canada has very little elevation shipping capability. To rail from Western Canada past Thunder Bay is difficult, problematic, because of the geography. It can be done. I don't see any reason why Thunder Bay should shrink any more as a port unless we let it. I mean, with a little innovation and some smart people, Thunder Bay can actually thrive as a port. And really thrive as a port. We've done nothing to attract containerization. Zero. Silly. I've tried through various companies, but there are simply no container ships—intercoastal container ships—capable of operating into Thunder Bay at this point. Or wanting to be attracted to Thunder Bay.

**[1:15:14]**

NP: Is that because of the mass of shipping from the West?

MM: No, it's a question of it's never been done. No one wants to take a flyer on it. When containerization first became more popular, my smaller customers wanted to know if it was possible to ship containers through Thunder Bay. And I said, "I'd love to do it. I have the perfect geography here for it." But we couldn't find a way to get containers past here. We couldn't find ships small enough to just take a few hundred containers. They like to take thousands at a time. And there are some Great Lakes container vessels, but no one ever thought of being innovative enough to do it.

Financially, it really does make a lot of sense if there were--. Most of the goods in Europe are moved around through small--.  
**[...audio skips]** Floating something around is a nice cheap way of moving things. You just have to convince other people that Thunder Bay could do it.

NP: Now, something that you said earlier makes me think that out of the cloud of the disappearance of the viability of the larger elevators, that that changing dynamic might feed into what you're talking about?

MM: Yes. I really do. Or I agree with you. We're getting a little esoteric now, guessing.

NP: Okay. How are we doing for time on our--?

ID: We're doing just fine, but I think we should, in any case--



NP: Take a break?

ID: Take a pause and just stretch and run around, yes.

NP: Stretch. And it's such an unusual viewpoint.

ID: Yeah, this is, we're learning a part of the business. This is not a historical exercise.

MM: I noticed this.

ID: That's what's interesting.

**End of part one.**

### Audio Part Two

Time, Speaker, Narrative

MM: We had this plastic clock. Actually, he sent me about two or three of them, and I've kept them. And we use them. It's got to be probably, what, \$5? And we kept them just because, to him, it was important.

NP: I like that. "The Mustard Man."

MM: "The Mustard Man." That's exactly who he was, and that's what he sent us.

NP: And it's a nice mustard colour plastic clock.

MM: It's coloured the same colour as yellow mustard. And that was his thank you. Very practical, but--.

NP: You see it every day. A lot of those fancy cut-glass things are away.

MM: I have some beautiful vases and beautiful dessert bowls and gorgeous things, but. We sent gifts to our customers that consisted of locally made—grown and made—food baskets, along with a gift to a charity. It's amazing how many people have called back and said, "You know, it's unusual, but when you really think about it, what you've done is made a donation to a charity on our behalf." And I used their names. "And besides that, we liked the crackers and food," and whatever I'd sent them.

NP: A very thoughtful gift.

MM: Well, unusual. Yeah, in the original grain days, gifting was alcohol, and I didn't agree with it. Suppliers and people would show up here—and I'm talking about equipment and parts and everything suppliers—would show up with, like, alcohol. And most of the time I said, "No, thank you." As politely as I could, I'd say, "We really don't do alcohol here. You don't have to do this. This is very generous of you but give it to someone else." I may have hurt some feelings, but I didn't care. Just, it was me.

NP: Speaking of that, we've done several interviews of people in the industry in Thunder Bay, and alcohol often comes up as an issue. Not just in the gifting part of it.

MM: Well, I had problems with alcohol here when I first started. The people that worked here were, the people we attracted here, were originally elevator people, and there was a hotel that served beer right across the tracks. So, at lunchtime, they would go and have a "barley sandwich" they called it. And they'd come back half-gibbled, and I didn't like it. So, I changed the hours of work, so we worked through lunch. Took a half hour break for lunch only, worked through lunch, and quit early. And that stopped it. Nothing else stopped it.

I couldn't tell them, "You can't do this." They didn't listen to me. It didn't help. Disciplining them didn't help, so I just simply changed our hours of operation, so they didn't have the opportunity to leave. And that worked. Alcohol use pretty much disappeared. I had one or two that would bring alcohol to the job and drink on the job, and I stopped that quickly. I just simply confiscated their alcohol. [Laughs] I wasn't popular at first.

NP: So, you didn't have to let people go?

MM: I would never do that. In the 30 years I've been here, I've never fired anyone. I really have found no reason to. If you can't get people to see that they're not working effectively--.

**[0:05:03]**

I'll back up. Everyone that works has their own idea of their usefulness, and their function, and what they want to do. And most grown men really do want to work. They want to identify with getting something done properly. You simply show them that if you drink, you can't do it properly. It helps. Or their behaviour's improper.

And the actual biggest problem I had was people being polite to each other over the radios. They had a tendency not to be. So, I had several meetings where I said, "We're using paid-for public airways. Other people can listen to us. And if they sat and listened all day to our behaviour, then I would either be fined, or our license would be revoked." And then we went through various ways of being polite on the radio. We should be businesslike and polite. And it took a while, and now the radios are business. And that works, so.

NP: During your time, when you started up to present day, was that also when more women were coming into the trade?

MM: I've never noticed that women were attracted to the elevator business. It's, by its very nature, not a clean job. I've had very few women that have applied for a job here. So, I can't comment on that.

NP: They would be mostly with, say, the CGC staff?

MM: Yes. The Grain Commission staff, the inspection wing staff hired--. When I first started, it was exclusively a man's club, but I notice it's about 50/50 now. Now, I don't know if that's by design or not, but it probably--. The same thing happened to the customs service, where they were mainly men now it matches the demographics of the area, you know. It's 50/50. But I've had very few women that have wanted to do the physical work, or work the hours, or work the type of work we do. It's not glamorous. And working an elevator takes a particular type of person.

I should back up a little. When I first started, the people I attracted were ex-elevator employees. They were all retired elevator guys. And I think they ignored me a lot. They really did. They just did their job. Our head weighman was 79 when he told me one day he wanted to retire. He just said, "I really don't want to work anymore." And I said, "Well, I don't blame you." During the '80s and into the '90s, right into the mid '90s, most of the people who worked here were retired from some other industry or the grain elevators. There were a whole bunch of grumpy old men working here.

NP: So, when you--. I'll just let that go by.

MM: [Laughs] It really was. They were.

NP: When you started up, then, what kind of workforce did you need? Numbers and--?

MM: Oh, I needed 12 to 15 people. We peaked at 18 to 20 when we were really busy, and now we're down to 8. We actually aren't as busy as we were.

NP: And your initial crew was made up of--?

MM: Retired elevator employees.

NP: Who did--? Like there would be a millwright, and a--.

MM: I had two millwrights, an electrician, four guys in the car shed, two head weighmen, an annex man, and a foreman. We had a greaser—his function was to grease everything—and a couple of spare guys. When the *Welcome* ship would go by, the captain told the tourists that, “This whole grain elevator’s run by a bunch of retired employees.” And some of the older guys would stand on the dock and wave at them. So, kept the myth going. Some old elevator run by a bunch of retirees. But the good part about it was I never had to tell them what to do. The job got done and they were effective. They were just--.

**[0:10:06]**

NP: Are there some names you'd sort of like to record, for history, that were particularly helpful to you that you think they made life a lot easier for the new guy?

MM: Yes. Kent Hammond. There was Lang and Boyd McNally, brothers. There was the Morrisseaus, the McKinnon brothers. It was interesting that, for the most part, the people that worked in grain elevators were related or had some kin relationship with each other. There was more cousins and uncles and brothers working together in this industry. It's what it seemed to attract. Off-hand that's some of the names I can remember.

NP: Did you have to actually, formally advertise? Or you just used the grapevine?

MM: Up until this year, I never advertised for employees. It was all grapevine. Someone would bring in their brother, or cousin, or nephew and say, “He's a good guy.” [...*audio skips*] This is Kevin King, who is the elevator superintendent. Both his brothers worked here. Actually, three of his brothers worked here at one time. Peter King played hockey—almost played professional

hockey—Mark King and Chuck King. So, there were four brothers working here at one time. Mark King still works here. His brother Mark is a weighman here.

One of the other problems that we had, besides alcohol, there was some bigotry in the industry. Probably something that's never talked about. Some groups were poorly treated. Native Canadians were very poorly treated. They generally weren't allowed in the industry. They weren't hired, which I thought was really strange. Some of the ethnic-- [...*audio skips*]

NP: So, how would you get the message that this was the way things were?

MM: Observation. Just by seeing who worked at where. I ignored it all. I'm only aware that it was prevalent at other places, but never here. Never. We simply didn't operate that way. But again, I didn't grow up in the elevator business. My father never taught me to be a bigot, and I never learned, so.

NP: Was your dad originally from Thunder Bay?

MM: No, he was from Three Rivers, Quebec—self-educated, French-Canadian. One of the smartest people I've ever known. Great guy he was.

NP: And how did he--. Did we talk about how he got here?

MM: He spent his whole life in the—actually, he had an interesting life—he spent his whole life in the woods industry before he thought of selling feeds or handling grain. Actually, he was a yacht captain. He worked for a lumber baron called Don Clark. He was a captain of his boat, and they sailed down the East Coast and into the Caribbean all winter. This was the days of the lumber barons. The company was called Great Lakes Lumber and Shipping.

NP: Head office in--?

MM: Head office in Thunder Bay, the Public Utilities building. He was his captain. The name of the last boat he had was *Converted Corvette*. It was a large ship. Yeah, it was converted into a yacht. And when I was growing up, I hardly saw my father. When I did see him, he had his uniform on. He spent 90 percent of his life in the woods industry. He didn't start the grain industry into the-- [...*audio skips*]

NP: What happened to the wood baron? The lumber baron?

MM: He passed away. His son took over the business, did very poorly, the business floundered, the yacht left. My father was unemployed. And all that happened within a year.

NP: Are representatives of that family still here in Thunder Bay?

MM: I don't know. Now, Don Clark Jr. may still be in Thunder Bay, that's quite possible. I really don't know. When it comes to certain things, locally, I have blinders. I'm not cognisant of everything that goes on.

NP: Having been away for a number of years in your early adulthood, that can--. Having the same experience, I think that's a double-edged sword.

MM: Well, I remember once I hadn't seen my father in about a year, and I met him in Nassau. He had brought the--. [...*audio skips*] Always loved to scuba dive, so I had gone to Andros to go scuba diving and met him in Nassau. He had some interesting stories.

NP: I bet.

MM: He was quite a man. He was an excellent boat captain and a superb pilot. He was really a great guy, and you couldn't tell, you'd have to drag it out of him what he did. He marched to his own beat. [Laughs]

NP: Do you have siblings?

MM: Yes, I have a son and a daughter.

NP: But do you have brothers or sisters?

MM: Oh, oh no, siblings, I'm sorry. I have a sister who lives in Australia. It's a little arcane from there. Can we just go off the record for a minute?

ID: Yes.

**End of part two.**

### Audio Part Three

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: You had mentioned something about the ethnic biases. And what I've heard in some of the interviews that we've done is way, way back there was one elevator—and I don't even know which elevators were which—one was you got a job there if you could speak Gaelic because the people running those elevators were Gaelic speakers. Now, people haven't spoken Gaelic for some long time, so that was a long time ago. But I'm interested in anything that you might be able to add related to the Aboriginal people. I mean their First Nation is right across the river here, so they were within walking distance of several of the establishments. But you say it was difficult for people who were Aboriginal to find work in the elevators?

MM: My opinion, it was almost impossible for them to find work in the elevators until actually recently, the 1980s. And when people became more politically aware that bigotry was stupid, then they actually actively went out and looked for Aboriginals to work in the elevator. There was a complete flip-flop. When I first started, I had several people who were from the First Nations working here, and I actually had to handle some bigotry with the rest of the crew—racist remarks, stupidity, and the stereotyping that went with it. Kevin King, who runs the elevator, is First Nations, and he's been with me for 30 years. And like I said, he worked here along with his four brothers.

I can't see any difference between the capability of one race over another. To me it's illogical. And I even think the bigotry in the industry towards Middle Eastern, East Indian people, will dissipate. And there is a mild sort of undertone of bigotry there, and that'll dissipate soon. But the local bigotry—well I don't know if it was localised only—but the bigotry towards First Nations people, to me, was just stupidity, absolutely idiotic.

NP: Initially in the grain industry, and this is going back long before your time, of course, was an awful lot of the workers within the industry were Eastern European or Italian, working at a certain level within the organizations. And then the English-speaking group was quite a--. They were two separate groups at that time.

MM: The English and Irish were the elevator managers and superintendents. They ran the elevators. The people that did all the hard, manual work were probably of East European heritage. They were Slavic, or Ukrainian, or Polish, or whatever. And the people that worked in the basements were the Italians—and worked the railyards. And that's the way the pecking order was. For someone Italian to become an elevator superintendent would be impossible.

But, of course, those days were very odd. The elevator superintendents, right up until probably when I started, had their own parking garage. They were God. They were virtually one step from being driven to work, and they had their own parking garage. They were royalty. They pretty much ran that whole elevator as a sort of a benevolent dictatorship. And whatever they said went. They hired and fired at whim and at will. And they, of course for the most part, they were either Irish or English. And if you look back at the history of which elevators had what superintendents, you'll notice the names were either "Mac-Something" or very, very, very English, or Irish.

**[0:05:08]**

NP: How much of that do you think could be put down to ability to speak English?

MM: Oh, well, probably 90 percent of it because the whole industry was predicated on the ability to communicate in English. For the most part, the immigrants were functionally illiterate in the English language. There still is a small ethnic group in Thunder Bay that really don't function well in English, you know, and we're talking three generations.

NP: Which makes it difficult to move into supervisory positions?

MM: Almost impossible. Yeah. It was, I believe, the way in any society wherever you have massive immigration to fill in the labour workload, that's what happens. The immigrants that can't communicate well, they get the jobs where you don't have to, where it's not necessary to.

NP: Your dad, coming from Trois-Riviere did you say?

MM: Yes.

NP: So, was he English speaking or was he French speaking? And did he experience similar difficulties?

MM: He spoke no English at all when he moved to Ontario from Quebec. And he learned his English from comic books. [Laughs] He had some quirks. He still had—right to his last days—he still had a very thick French-Canadian accent. But he was bright. He was smart. He communicated very well.

NP: The fact that he was not English speaking, at least not originally, did that ever present problems for him working in and with others in the industry?



MM: No. He was an extremely personable man, and what he did in the industry that he was in, in the feed and feed manufacture industry, he was well-treated and well-liked. He was very good at what he did—really excellent at what he did, as a matter of fact.

NP: The cream rises.

MM: [Laughs] I guess it does.

NP: Shifting gears a bit here, then, and going forward from when you started out the business and built it, how would you describe a typical day for you now?

MM: A typical day now? I'll come in in the morning, and we'll check what we've got scheduled to do that day against what we had expected. If we've had railcars delivered, we will start the process of unloading them. Normally, I have two or three messages, either fax or voicemail or emails, from customers with requests or requirements or information. We'll check off what we know against what we have to do.

If you have a plan in this business, and you have your day planned, you will become really disappointed. This business is chaos. You have no idea exactly when the railcars will arrive or exactly when the vessels will arrive. There are weather and equipment constraints, and nothing seems to go according to plan.

NP: So, let's take a specific case, because last week we had a big blow here on Lake Superior. How did that impact the business here?

MM: Well, the *Puffin* was supposed to arrive on the 25th and load the 26th, and it did not. It arrived the 29th and loaded the 30th. So, we were expecting the vessel and had every expectation of loading the vessel earlier. The weather simply slowed it down. It slowed it down by several days which meant that--. We ended up loading the boat until midnight Friday night. Then it's back again Saturday so that it would finish loading before the end of the month because the contractual obligation was that the grain was to be onboard before the 1st of November.

In every contract, there's a date, and this one had a date of October 31st. So, everyone has to jump in and work around the clock so that happens. Contracts are very difficult to change. The buyer had an agreement with the seller that he would provide him with the grain by the end of the month. And it's not easy to change. So, the weather in this case really changed the way--. So, I had planned

to load a boat earlier in the week and it didn't happen, and we ended up loading the boat Friday night and Saturday. That's a typical day here.

NP: Where was the boat? Just out of curiosity, where was the boat during the storm? Was it one of the one's that--. Whitefish Bay?

MM: It was in Whitefish Bay at anchor. They were sheltered. I think they were talking about eight to ten-metre waves on the lake and really, really strong winds. While these vessels are big, they're not that big, the waves do affect them.

**[0:11:33]**

NP: Some specific questions about what might surprise people most about the work you do or have done, would you say?

MM: For the most part, the local area, what surprises people the most? I don't think there's anyone within a two-mile radius of this terminal that knows we're operating. People think that we're just another closed elevator. From the street and from the railyard side, it doesn't look like a brand-new business. It is really difficult to convince people that we work every day here. It's quiet. We don't emit huge clouds of dust or a lot of noise. From the river, it's neat and tidy. I think the most surprising part is just the fact we're here.

NP: And it must surprise them, too, to see a ship every once in a while on the Kam River.

MM: Yes, we have a lot of photo-op people that show up when there's a ship, and they want to know what it's there. They're amazed that there would be a ship coming up the river and parked. Especially at night because everything's lit up. That seems to be the most surprising part with people.

NP: Are you pleased that they don't know, would you like them to know that you're still operating? Or is it sort of nice just to operate under the radar?

MM: It's nice to operate under the radar. In a business sense, it makes no difference whatsoever. As far as my ego goes, it makes no difference whatsoever, too. There are a lot of people that have no idea what I do. They really, on a social aspect, they know I do something with grain, but they're not quite sure what it is. And, of course, my interaction with the local community is limited. It's schools for the kids. And I work a lot of hours, and we travel a lot. So, there's not that many people in the local area that know me that well. I can't say much more about that.

NP: We've talked about the interconnectedness of your company with other components of the industry. For example, the producers or at least the people who handle the products that the producers harvest. Anything you'd like to add about your interrelationship with the carriers, either rail or the ships, that we haven't already touched on?

**[0:14:47]**

MM: Well, again, both rail companies are rather large companies and very hard to deal with them on a personal basis. We have, I think for the most part, again, a good understanding of what they do and what they run into. We're sitting on the main CP [Canadian Pacific Railway] yard. We can see their problems. And not getting deliveries on time can be frustrating at times, but we have always tried not to complain. We understand they have operational problems. Normally they're 100 percent upfront, and the people that actually do the work look like they are really doing their best. They're working hard at what they do. So, from an operational standpoint, I have no complaints.

NP: I understand, from another interview, that somebody had said that the elevators contract with either CP or CN [Canadian National Railway]. Do you contract with one or the other?

MM: No, I don't. I'm an equal opportunity rail person. Whatever railway wants to put a car in here or supply cars, I'm happy with.

NP: Do farmer's themselves-- Do you get producer cars?

MM: Yes, I do. Farm-loaded cars—fewer now that we're not handling some of the seeds we were—but yeah, we had, I would say, about 10 percent of our cars were producer-loaded. We see no difference between producer-loaded cars and cars that come out of plants, except the cars that come out of plants are 25 to 50 or 100 at a time and the producer-cars are like, one. It's taken them all day to load that car. [Laughing] As far as what's in the car and unloading them, everyone just wants to get their product to market.

NP: Interaction with grain handlers?

MM: Grain handlers are the stevedores that actually-- In my opinion, they're the stevedores that actually make sure the cargo is properly placed in the boat. People think grain handlers are people that work in the elevators--.

NP: You're talking the trimmers?

MM: Yeah, the trimmers. Elevator people, traditionally, aren't really called grain handlers. It's an odd oddity, and yet they're the ones that do handle the grain. Again, we found that by telling the grain trimmers and the grain handlers—or the stevedores—exactly what we have in store, what we're capable, and what is going to happen during the loading process, that they're about the most professional group you could ever meet. They're very hard-working, and they want to get grain onto a vessel as efficiently as they can. On the other hand, if you don't tell them anything or if you mislead them, they can be nasty. So, the best way to handle them is upfront, truthful, and straightforward.

NP: So, how do they actually get involved? Like if we look back at your last week, and the ship that came in, what would've been your interaction with the grain trimmers, the stevedores?

MM: We don't hire them. They're hired through the ship's agent or the vessel agent. They have a listing of what ships are loading at what dock at what specific time period. They'll assign a crew to that terminal. Now, here, they use six to eight people, depending on how much work there is. Sometimes the work can be complex. They'll have to lay separation cloths and separation targets between the cargos. In this case it was very simple—fill up one and a half holds. They really like on-time starts, don't like delays. They like to know what the elevator's capable of. In other words, if an elevator can only ship at half-rate, it's nice to tell them that.

NP: What does that mean?

MM: Well, let's say you only have grain on one side of the elevator, and you can only ship out of one pipe—and some elevators have four to six pipes to load a vessel with. If you can only ship out of two, they put all six onboard and sit there waiting for grain and don't get it, and no one tells them, “Gee, I'm sorry guys, but we're going to be down to one-third rate.” Or, “You're only getting this grain, at this time, for that time period.” It frustrates them. Towards the end of the loading, they really are in control. They have to trim the holes. In other words, put just enough grain in--.

[Unknown]: It's Greg Phillips again.

**[Audio pauses]**

NP: Actually, we have a good segue for this next question. Okay, we we're talking about the stevedores when we went on pause. And the next one on my list is Canadian Grain Commission [CGC].

MM: CGC, the problem is that some of the industry sees the CGC as an unnecessary cost. Their services are pricey. I see them as a way of ensuring there's a third party that's completely independent of the grain industry, determining that whatever is shipped is the

said-to-be quality. In other words, they're the hall monitors. I think they're necessary. I think they could be a little more effective and efficient. I really don't agree with the fact the trade has to pay 100 percent of their costs because they are rather expensive. So, I have my own views on it because they're a political organization, and they're mandatory.

NP: So, who would pay part of the costs if the industry didn't pay it?

MM: I would think that the government should fund part of them. And the industry should fund the working part. CGC it would be, I think, tantamount to say that the health inspectors should charge every place they inspect for every one of their costs.

NP: Has that changed over time? Was there once--. Like it seems to me, again in other interviews, that at one point not all of the costs were charged back to the companies? Was that in your lifetime, or--?

MM: Well, at some point, not all the costs were charged back to the companies, but at one point previous, they weren't mandatory. They've only become mandatory since 2001/2002. Before that, there was an opt-in clause. You could operate under a different section of the act without CGC mandatory involvement and use their services on a request basis. So, whenever you needed them or wanted them for a particular shipment, you'd phone them. And, if they were available, they would supervise that shipment. So, it was on a voluntary basis. But, with the changes in the industry and less players, they decided that their services should be mandatory. And everyone who's in the grain business who's exporting grain is licensed by the CGC and provides them with financial guarantees. The producer is protected 100 percent now against any grain company change or failure. There's layers of protection.

NP: So, there was a time when people could export and not be licensed?

MM: I operated from 1982 until 2002 under an exemption from licensing. Most of the products we handled weren't covered by the Canadian Grain Act, and we had them here on a voluntary basis. Although, I always used their weighing division as a back-up on vessel lots. I would actually pay for the weighing, weighing supervision, because that was my guarantee that the weight said to be on board was actually supervised by someone other than me. And it gave us credibility.

**[0:25:01]**

NP: Would you have your own inspectors then?

MM: No, the companies that bought or sold the grain supplied their own inspectors. There are independent inspection services, and they're about one-tenth the cost of the CGC.

NP: Do they operate in Thunder Bay, any of them?

MM: Yes.

NP: What's the name of--?

MM: Well one is SGS, which is an international--

NP: SJS?

MM: SGS. And it's an international firm. Actually, it's a French firm, and it translates to the Society of General Inspection Services. There's another one that's started up. They inspect everything besides agricultural products. They inspect paper or they inspect pulp, any exports. They inspect coal that's exported. They'll inspect any product that's loaded onto a vessel.

NP: But the SGS would do private inspections prior to the mandatory inspection by CGC coming in to being?

MM: Yes. They still do. At some point in time, depending on the buyer and the seller, we could have three layers of inspectors gathering samples and inspecting for various reasons. The last boat, the *Puffin*, the buyers sent their own surveyor and inspector. They hired through a firm called Merchant Marine, and he does a ship's survey, he collects samples of the product, and he also collects any other information he can to make sure everything is done correctly and properly.

NP: And where does Merchant Marine operate out of?

MM: This particular company operates out of Minneapolis, I believe. But he was from Mississauga.

NP: So, he would come up here at the time just to supervise that?

MM: Just to supervise. Just to stand back and supervise the vessel loading. It's a benign supervision. He observes—to observe everything. He also calculates based on ship's draft—beginning and starting draft—whether or not the proper amount is onboard.

There are various ways to weigh product. One is a simple chalk line on the hull as to what the ship was empty and a chalk line on the hull as to depth it is, filled. Every ship knows exactly, right to the centimetre, how many tonnes lowers them in the water.

NP: Would every ship have one of these people, or this was just a special case? Like is this a normal process for--?

MM: It depends on the buyer. If the buyer really wants top assurance that he's getting his weight and his product and everything is done properly, he'll send his own inspection. It's similar to buying a house. The homeowner can have a home inspection done, but the buyer will also want a home inspection done. I would say it happens in about one-third of the cases or a quarter of the cases.

NP: And that would be something that the CGC wouldn't do-- .

MM: They don't.

NP: Because where they can tell you how much is going out, and whether it matches the weight on the order--.

MM: That's correct.

NP: But not necessarily doing anything on the ship itself.

MM: The CGC has very little, if anything, to do with the buyer or the receiver at the other end. They--.

NP: Other than the certificate final?

MM: The certificate final is what they produce, and they have no other involvement with the receiver. Let's say the product wasn't there, or it was an entirely different product or something—who knows what could happen, theoretically what could happen. I've never seen it happen, but let's say the buyer, they open the ship and half of the product wasn't there. Well, he could only get back to the CGC and say, "Well you said there was 3000 tonnes on that hold, and we looked at it and there's only 1000." The [CGC] will say, "We loaded 3000 in that hold." Where the private inspector actually inspects it at both ends, and they do vessel draft, and they do surveys. At some point, for a price, they will actually guarantee the cargo. It's a one-time insurance plan. Whether or not they've gone that far in this cargo, I don't know.

**[0:27:56]**

NP: And the *Puffin* was under the—I don't want to say rent—but it was being rented by what company?

MM: It was being rented by Globeways Canada. It sailed under a Jamaican flag.

NP: There's a word, not rent.

MM: Chartered.

NP: Chartered.

MM: Chartered from Globeways. Now, some of the time, the buyer will actually charter his own vessel. The product is sold in-store, and he'll pick it up at his option. So it could sit for two months.

NP: You had mentioned, but maybe you want to add to this, your interconnectedness with competitors, or maybe we should call the competitors other grain companies like Mission Terminals, Cargill, Richardson's, and so on.

MM: I have no competitors. I don't trade grain. I don't buy or sell grain. And the service that I do really is just a companion service to their own terminals. Their terminals are usually only one part of their business. Terminal exports, for the most part, are just one facet of the company. In my case, that's all I do. So, when they run out of terminal or they don't want to operate their terminal with certain products, they'll come to me.

NP: That's that niche marketing you were talking about before.

MM: The niche marketing. I've never been seen by any of the grain companies as the competition. I am more the go-to guy. "We have this product to move, we don't have time, we don't have room, we don't like it. It's not what we do. It's fussy. Send it to Maurice." That's the way it works, which makes my marketing rather simple, too.

NP: I have a little question here about what is your sense of the role your company has played in Canada's success as an international grain trader?

MM: Our role? Hm. We clean products here. We also have stewardship of the product. There isn't anything that left here that I wouldn't eat. It was as simple as that. If I was unhappy with it, I told the owner of the product what the problems were, what the problems were with his product, what the problem was with the product he was trying to sell. And I do not remember an instant



where a seller misrepresented the product that came out of here to the buyer. When the people of Dijon, France said they didn't want the hilum forks in the cleaning of the mustard seed, we found a way to get rid of them. It's the little stems, sort of like the stems you get off a tomato only on a much smaller scale. We figured out a way to clean them out, so that the mustard was cleaner and easier on their equipment. They squeezed it through cotton cloths, and the hilum stems are sharp, and they would puncture the cloth. When other people wanted a different type of cleaning done, or precision cleaning done, we did it.

I had some traders over the years tell me that what we did was too good. That the buyer didn't deserve it, which might sound like a strange statement. But buyers based what they're willing to pay on the amount of dirt or dockage that they'll allow in the material. And they often want a big discount if they'll allow two and a half percent dockage or two percent or—the export's standard is normally one in the products we handled. We cleaned things to less than a half. That was my standard. My standard was half of export quality, or 50 percent better than export quality. To me that was our--. We were proud of what left here. The products that left here were clean.

NP: Just a little clarification--.

MM: I'm sorry, they were slightly better than what was said to be sold. How's that? By spec.

**[0:35:21]**

NP: So, under-promise, over-deliver.

MM: I'm sorry?

NP: Under-promise, over-deliver.

MM: Exactly.

NP: You had mentioned you had some, was it, trainers?

MM: Traders.

NP: Traders, okay. Yeah.

MM: Grain traders.

NP: I do some transcribing, and I know that I would've had difficulty with that one. [Laughing]

MM: Grain traders. Some of them thought they were losing money by giving a product that was too good. And I tried to convince them, "You're not losing money, you're gaining loyalty. They'll be back. They will return, and they'll buy from you." And their claim was, "No, these people only buy based on price." And I said, "Not necessarily." It may seem like that on the surface, but they'll be back because they were happy with what they received last time.

NP: In the interviews, one of the things that came up over and over again was the reputation that Canada had for quality. And, in speaking to people, for example from the CWB who were constantly out competing with other countries, their comment was that you couldn't really compete on price because you could always find somebody to undercut you. But reputation was, in their minds, critical. Is that sort of what you're saying there?

MM: That's exactly what I'm saying. On the other hand, it's not that you are required to or have to turn out a premium product. There is a price point for every product. The actual point I think I'd really stick to is deliver what you promised. If it's medium quality or poor quality, promise that, sell that. Do not rely on a sterling reputation for premium products to pretend that this particular product is also a premium. There is a sales point for every product. Some people will buy at the bottom end of the market. As long as they understand that that's what they're buying, and all the--. The whole system is geared--. I was going to use the wrong word. The whole system is geared to the fact that this is the bottom end of the market, and this is a junk product, and it's a filler. Then it's fine.

For instance, refuse grain screening pellets—grain screening pellets, the things my father made—are the bottom end of the market. They have somewhat less feed value than Styrofoam. Really have no protein. There's not fat in them, there's no real nutrition. They're a filler. And everyone accepted the fact that grain screening pellets were a filler. You mixed them with a higher protein product, and that allowed you to blend the feeds. And they could blend up feed--. Ruminating animals, animals that ruminate, require fillers. They cannot eat a high protein product. They would, actually, they would probably die. They would bloat, and they would gas, and they would die. They're just not designed to handle high protein, so they require fillers.

That's the bottom of the market. And if you're selling bottom of the market, be honest about it. Don't use Canada's reputation or the industry's reputation, or a particular reputation of someone to pretend it's a premium product, and you can get umpteen gazillion dollars more for it. So, in a way, Canada shot itself in the foot by--. The CWB, and the CGC, and our checks and balances are predicated on premium products. Yes, there is a market for that, but there is also a market for less than premium. And not all of it

can be used domestically, some of it could be exported. Americans export nothing but their poorest quality corn. And they out-export us by 1000 to one. But they don't pretend it's good. [Laughing] They tell it like it is. Anyway.

**[0:40:32]**

NP: Down to the last few. What would you say the major challenges your grain company faced over the years, beyond anything we've talked so far? Or have you pretty much covered that?

MM: Our main challenge is the fact the infrastructure is shaky. There's been very little maintenance or work done to improve the infrastructure. There's been zero dollars put into the port as a port. Everyone's avoiding the fact that everything needs some sort of remedial work. People treat it as if the port's going to disappear tomorrow, probably because of the companies that just pull out and leave these derelicts around, probably because there's a defeatist attitude. I think that's the biggest problem I have. I will probably go out of business because the port has reduced capacity, not for any other reason.

NP: What do you mean by reduced capacity? From your perspective.

MM: The river's silting in. I can no longer load vessels the way I used to, and that's a fact. I can see no possible remedial work being done on this particular access. Although it's part of the St. Lawrence Seaway, it won't be done. The mouth of the river is also silting in, and the other two terminals are seeing they're loading less and less also. It's almost as if everyone's waiting for the next terminal to close. Sort of like, "We're not going to fix the highway or repave it, because the gas stations are all closing."

NP: So, the other two elevator's you're speaking of are Mission Terminal and Cargill--?

MM: I have to grab this.

**[Audio pauses]**

NP: Oh, hm. Okay. Last couple of questions. We had mentioned that I'd ask about major incidents, anything that, you know, sticks in your mind as, "Wow, that was really a time," or, "That was a wonderful experience." Or anything like that, other than what we've already heard, which there's a lot of those.

MM: I can't actually give you an over-the-top experience. I'm sure there's some, but it's probably because it's later in the day and I can't think of any.

NP: [Laughing] We've really put you through your paces here.

MM: I really can't think of any. I know there are some, I know it.

NP: Well, we can always add a--.

MM: Oh, I have one! The latest one. The other grain terminals think I'm the go-to guy when there's an unusual problem to solve. So, one of the terminals had a problem with mould and infestation in their lower sub-basement levels, and lack of lighting. And they had this grandiose plan to spend millions and millions of dollars painting it and adding lights and changing things around, and you just pencilled it in in passing. And I said, "Why in the world do you want to do all this?" And he said, "Well, we want to solve these problems." And I said, "There's an easy way to solve this—whitewash. It's been used in barns for generations, just whitewash it. All your problems are gone. You have enough ambient, and you have enough lighting in place, and whitewash is a natural astringent. Whitewash it. Save yourself \$5 or 6 million."

They thought I was insane. And he said, "Where do you get whitewash?" And I said, "You don't. You make it yourself. And here's the recipe." I handed him the recipe because we had whitewashed at one time, and we still had it in our files somewhere. And they did it. They did a test patch, found out it does have astringent properties—it killed the little mites and spiders and bug problems—and it brightened up their area. And they're going to continue to do the whole place.

**[0:44:59]**

NP: And they sent you a cheque for \$6 million to take care of it?

MM: No, they didn't. [Laughing] As a matter of fact, they didn't send me any. Like I said, I'm their go-to guy when they have something unusual. They called me and they said they needed--. Exporting flax is difficult now. You have to have a lab do a genetic check of the flax to identify the genus. If there's any genus "triffid" in the flax, then it will be turned down in Europe. It has to be triffid-free.

NP: So, non-genetically modified?

MM: Absolutely, 100 percent no gen--. So, the only lab that actually, successfully does it is a little lab out of Metairie in New Orleans. They called me one afternoon on a Friday, and they said, "Maurice, would you fly two samples to New Orleans tonight?"

They need it tomorrow morning because we have a boat. And the boat can't wait." And I said, "No. But what is the real problem?" And they said, "Well, we have flax coming in. It's not unloaded yet. We've got to get the samples, and it's got to get to the lab and be there for 7:00 AM tomorrow in Louisiana."

And I said, "Well, okay. When will you have the samples?" And they said, "Well, probably about 5:30 this afternoon." And I did some thinking, and I did some checking, and, from what I remembered, it could be done. So, I phoned them, and I said, "I'll get it to your lab, but here's how I'm going to do it. The samples have to go to the CGC for sealing. And I'll get the documentation done. I'll have a guy at their building on Archibald. He'll pick up the samples. He'll bring it to me at the airport. By that time, it should be 6:00/6:30. I'll fly to Duluth—it takes me an hour—get through customs really quick with these two cotton bags of material. Not a problem. I think I can do it with all the proper paperwork. I'll have a car ready, and I'll take it to FedEx—they close at 7:00. And I'll FedEx it overnight to their doorstep, not to a particular person, their doorstep, in the lab in New Orleans."

And he says, "You really think that'll work?" And I said, "Not a problem." And it was like, I saved them--. A vessel sitting, per day, is like \$20 or 30,000. And I said, "Well why don't you guys do this yourself? You have your own jet." And he said, "Well, it's down for maintenance. It's not available." [Laughing]. So, I did it. Everything worked.

Talking to the American customs guys, the Homeland Security people, it's a little difficult. It was hard to tell them these two sealed samples in cotton bags were flax seed, and here's all the documentation, and no, you don't have to look in them. [Laughing] I said, "Honest, it's flaxseed. It really is." And I had some in a little baggy. And they were a little skeptical at first, but because I'd crossed the border so many times, they knew me. I think that helped.

Anyway, I got it done. They got it to the lab the next morning, had the results by noon, and loaded their ship. To me that was a big event. The big event, working backwards, is they all seem to call me as the, "Maybe he will solve this problem for us." The go-to guy for something unusual. And I really believe that's why this person called me about corn.

NP: So, the possibility of corn being shipped from southern Ontario--.

MM: Here.

NP: We haven't had it on tape, so.

MM: Yeah, it's okay.

NP: So, did you want to tell that story, quite quickly?

MM: There's a possibility--. The whole St. Lawrence Seaway system is congested this year. And some of the brokers are looking at moving Ontario corn west in order to load it onto vessels in Thunder Bay and then ship it back down the Seaway to Europe. And it'll work. They called me last week, and I worked out how it will work. It won't work through any one terminal because no one has enough free space this time of the year to attend to it, but it'll work if you use two terminals. And I found a companion elevator that's willing to do it with me, and I think it's going to happen. As soon as they arrange some of the other freight rates, nail the cost down, I think it'll happen.

NP: Great. We'll look forward to having the second episode of the corn. "The Great Corn--."

MM: "The Great Corn Movement".

NP: "The Great Corn Story". The last thing, then, is, we are—just to tell you a little bit about our project—we have sort of two levels of the project. The first level is called "Friends of Grain Elevators," where ideally what we would like to have is to designate an elevator as a national historic site and have an activity centre, not in it, but around it and focusing on it. Also, as part of that, a science centre component that would focus on biosciences related to the grain industry because we feel there's all kinds of potential there. So, there's a dichotomy of the historical piece and the what's happening now and in the future in the grain trade. So, given those two potentials, if that kind of thing were to happen, if our dream is realized, what do you think is important to feature in an entity such as that?

**[0:51:16]**

MM: People are fascinated with machine age equipment. It fascinates them. They just stare at it. First of all, most people aren't used to large industrial equipment, and machine age—old gears and things—they just stare at it. When I tour you around, you will even stare because it's just something that's--.

NP: Intriguing.

MM: Totally intriguing to people. Yeah, they just cannot fathom how this turns the wheels of industry or whatever it does. They've never seen it. You need an elevator in the main harbour, near the new condominium convention centre.

NP: Marina area?

MM: Marina area, yes. Unfortunately, they're really difficult to move. This one would be perfect if it was over there, but it's rather heavy. You need one over there. And unfortunately, the Harbour Authority, too, probably has a really short outlook on what they were given. They have no idea what they were given, M House and S House. To them it's something that should be knocked down. I'm going to say they're probably--. They're going to overlook them so badly that they'll be vandalised to the point where they're unsafe soon. My opinion. See if I'm right. They're the wrong people to give grain elevators to. Anyway.

NP: The bioscience side of it?

MM: Biosciences, oh. We've never explored the biosciences of any of our grains or oil seeds. Not successfully that I--. Other than cross-pollination, and grafting, and maybe some GMO that was just totally--. Who in the world would name flax, a flax genus, triffid? I mean that's from--. Who wrote that *The Day of the Triffids*?

ID: *The Day of the Triffids*, John Wyndham, sci-fi.

MM: John Wyndham. Exactly. That was the original apocalyptic--.

ID: That's right. "What happens when the plants take over?"

MM: When the plants take over, yeah. You didn't know that?

NP: No.

MM: Oh, that was mandatory reading when you were going to university, right?

ID: Well, I heard it as a little kid.

MM: You heard it as a little kid?

ID: On the BBC.

NP: Interesting.

MM: Oh, okay, in Europe this was mandatory. *Day of the Triffids* was mandatory. You're right it was on BBC, it was a show. I think I remember that now. So, they GMO a flax and name it triffid and try to sell it to the Europeans.

ID: [Laughing] A bad idea.

MM: There's nothing wrong with it except it's resistant to Monsanto's Roundup because flax, to Roundup, is a weed. It killed it. Triffid was the only genetic chain, supposedly, that was made as Roundup resistant. Nothing else, no other special properties. But it became a kiss of death for exports. Who in the world? Jeez, somebody's missing part of their education.

NP: And, to add to the history part of it, I understand you have a little bit of archives that might form part of our historical background?

MM: I have drawings, I have books, I may even have some old hand-written time books. I will look through our archives and, actually, there could be some things that you spot when you tour through and ask me. I deliberately didn't throw anything old out of this place the last 30 years because I didn't want to. I kept it even though some of it's stored away and packed away in little corners. I didn't want to tear up the past of this place. Whatever was left, I kept here.

NP: Our kind of person.

MM: Well, somehow, I felt it was important.

NP: Are there others that you think we should interview as part of our project?

MM: I think you should go to Parrish & Heimbecker, P&H. It's a small little elevator. It's been around a lot. It may have some historical documents. And Parrish & Heimbecker are nice people. And they have a grain system. They have an inland system, and they have other entities besides their export terminal. So P&H would be interesting.

NP: Well, thank you so much for your time. This has been an extremely valuable interview and wonderful addition to our collection. Thank you.

MM: Oh, you're welcome. Thank you.

**End of interview.**



