

Narrator: Patrick McCart (PM)

Company Affiliations: Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR)

Interview Date: 6 November 2014

Interviewer: Nancy Perozzo (NP)

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Summary: Retired grain coordinator for the Canadian Pacific Railway Patrick McCart discusses his various jobs within the CPR before working directly in connection to the grain industry. He details his jobs in the office and the yard before becoming a roving yardmaster, then general yardmaster. He describes the busyness of the railway in the grain industry's boom years, the various rail yards around the city, the hump yard for dividing grain trains, and the various departments within the CPR. McCart shares the changes that occurred when the Canadian Wheat Board's grain pooling was introduced, like the elimination of the hump yard, working with the Grain Transportation Agency, continually communicating with grain elevators, and moving trains more efficiently. He describes the challenges of being the grain coordinator and the importance of maintaining good relationships with all players in the industry, from elevator workers to farmers. Other topics discussed include alcohol use on the job, women and veterans on the CPR staff, downsizing of the CPR operation, shifting markets and the downturn in Thunder Bay's grain handling, computerization, the closure of grain elevators, and the recent elimination of grain pooling and the Wheat Board.

Keywords: Canadian Pacific Railway; Grain transportation—rail; Rail coordination; Railway logistics; Railcar allocation; Yardmasters; Railyards—Thunder Bay; Hump yard; Car checking; Train clerk; Grain pooling; Canadian Wheat Board; Boxcars; Railcar repair; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Hopper cars; Grain car doors; Alcohol and drug abuse; Women in the workplace; World War II veterans; Westfort history; East End history; Canadian National Railway; Grain Transportation Agency; Corporate restructuring; Downsizing; Computerization; CPR Elevator D; Northwestern Elevator; Lakehead Elevator (Electric Elevator); Empire Elevator; Manitoba Pool Elevator 1; Fort William Elevator F; Fort William Elevator E (Consolidated Elevator); United Grain Growers Elevator M; Richardson Elevator; Manitoba Pool Elevator 2

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: It is November 6 th , 2014, and this interview is taking place at the home of our narrator for today, and I'm going to have him introduce himself. So if you would just give your name, when and where you were born, then we'll go from there.

PM: Okay. My name is Pat McCart. I'm 81 years old. Lived in Thunder Bay all my life and worked for the CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] for 37 years, 37 years, yeah. That's what it is. I was involved in the grain trade for the last 17 years.

NP: Of that 37 years?

PM: Of the 37.

NP: So, I think when we talked on the phone, you said you started with CP in 19--?

PM: '51.

NP: Okay. So I'm going to--. When we have people who lived their life in Thunder Bay, I like to sort of delve a little bit into the history of the family.

PM: Okay.

NP: Were any of the McCarts before you involved in either railway or the grain trade?

PM: No.

NP: No? So your family came over. Were you the--?

PM: Oh, they've been here a long time. They came from down east, my family, around Cyumen [sp?] Island, and they settled up here in Thunder Bay. Come from a family of nine, and we have a family of seven. So keeping up the tradition, I guess. [Laughing]

NP: So what did the family do when they moved up here then?

PM: My father was a city fireman all his life here, and my mother come up here as a teacher. She taught at the Mission School, the Indian school, when they had the school on the Mission.

NP: So were they early arrivees? Do you know when they came?

PM: I could tell you a date. I forget.

NP: 1900s or even before that?

PM: Well, yeah, it would be around the 1900s, actually. Yeah.

NP: Hm. So you didn't follow the tradition of going into the fire service?

PM: No, no.

NP: No.

PM: Don't ask me why. They probably never encouraged it because they never liked the father-son kind of stuff, you know. I don't know.

NP: So any of your relatives work at the railway then?

PM: No.

NP: That's unusual because a lot of people, as you said, both in the elevators and the--.

PM: Yeah, you usually get one.

NP: Somebody was there and then hired other people.

PM: Yeah, that's right.

NP: So how did you get started with CP Rail? What led to your--?

PM: Well, I was working for an outfit after I quit school that didn't pay very much, and everyday I went to work, I just "Why am I here?" kind of thing. One day, I said, "I've got to go looking for a job." I looked in the paper, and they were hiring. I forget what the ad said. I went down and run in right at the door to the general yardmaster. Jimmy Jones was his name. He looked at me, and I was all dressed up in my suit and tried to make an impression. I didn't know what I was applying for. Anything. And he come right

over and, “What can I do for you, my son?” I told him, and he said, “Well, come on in.” I never knew that this wasn’t part of the routine. He took me into his office, and he made out all my application, and when I got finished, he called the, I guess, it was the chief clerk or whatever it was—I can’t remember now—and said, “Hire this guy.” [Laughs]

NP: That was easy!

PM: I didn’t even know what I was getting hired for. I had to find out after. “What am I going to do?” But I actually worked in the office, and that’s where I started, all the office jobs right up, and then when I got into the yardmaster, you’re in the operating end, and it’s a whole different story.

[0:05:02]

NP: It would have been a big operation then.

PM: Oh, yeah. Like now there’s nobody there anymore. Had an office full of people. Everything was done by hand. All the records kept by hand. I seen both ends. I seen when the place was full, and I seen it later when it was empty, so.

NP: Yeah. Over that 37 years, a lot of changes took place.

PM: Oh, just-- Well, every time something new come up, cut more staff, you know. Yeah.

NP: If you can recall, what was the office like at that time? What kinds of different positions were there? You went in as the young guy just coming into the office for the first day.

PM: Yeah. Well, I was the lowest position, a messenger or callboy or whatever. They called it different names. That’s what I did for the first couple months. I worked there, calling crews. You worked under the crew clerk, and of course, if he wasn’t there, you better answer that phone kind of thing. Then I went to what they called a checker, checking boxcars. Did that for quite a while.

NP: What does that entail?

PM: Well, just exactly what it is. Checking trains. In those days, there was no computers, no lists of trains. Everything was checked by hand.

NP: Like for somebody who is listening to this who has no idea what checking grain cars means, so just take us through--.

PM: Well, it's checking any kind of car. They've got a number on it, and once you put the number down, then all the rest of the information is added to it.

NP: So what kinds of things would be--? Obviously, what was in the car.

PM: No, no, no. You're just checking numbers. Everything was checked through Thunder Bay in and out so there was a good record of that car arriving and departing and whatever.

NP: Ah, okay. So does every car have a serial number?

PM: Car number is the serial number.

NP: Oh. And where's that on the boxcars? Where would that have been?

PM: Well, right on the side of the car.

NP: Oh, okay.

PM: But you had no advance list of anything. The conductor had a list, and that's--. What you checked and what he brought in was compared. That was to try to make sure it matched up.

NP: And what happened if it didn't?

PM: Well, it was corrected.

NP: So you send the corrected list, and then someone else tried to find out where the car went?

PM: Yeah. Exactly.

NP: Or why there was an extra one.

PM: And those were the kind of people you had in the office. We had one guy that's all he did. We called them correctors. Spent all day just, "Should not this car read this?" Or blah, blah, blah. People keeping records. Lots of that. They had two or three stenos because everything was all hand bound.

NP: Big ledger books?

PM: Oh, yeah. Huge. Big. To keep the records. They'd get all day--. Sat there all day, and when she went home, she usually--. She never, ever finished, and the checkers, they had nothing to do, you'd be given, "Here, write this train in the book."

NP: And how many trains would be coming through at that time per day?

PM: Oh. Gee. It varied. The trains weren't as big then. I forget how big the freight trains were. The grain trains were about 50 cars, and they were 50 boxcars not hoppers or anything else, which they've got twice the amount in a hopper car. That's the tracks were built to handle 50-car trains. They just come in, boom, boom, boom, one track after another when everything was done.

NP: So with the tracks that were there, say, in 1951 or thereabouts, same number of tracks still running through?

PM: Pretty well. Yeah.

[0:10:01]

NP: Yeah. Just not as full.

PM: And when they do fill up, a train comes in--. If they had to put it into the yard, it would take up two or three tracks, whereas before it would just take one up. Things were handled differently then, the way they handled the grain and everything else.

NP: If it was one of the big trains, you said that it would need to use two or three tracks. So what would cause a train to have to be kept in the yard, as opposed to just being farmed out to where it was going or--?

PM: Well, because when I started, all your grain was humped. In other words, every car went to the elevator it was assigned to and the company it was assigned to. So on a train, in those days I said 50 cars, there could be as many as 40 passes that you have to--. 40 different switches on that train. They did it with hump riders, which is a thing of the past today.

NP: Sort of like dealing out cards, but instead of cards, you're dealing boxcars to different tracks? [Laughs]

PM: Every elevator had its own track and every car that was in it, and what elevator it belonged to, it was assigned to different tracks.

NP: We'll come back to that because once we get to sort of the grain coordinator, then you're really into the detail of what's involved there. I was just trying to get a sense of what the yard looked like back in the 1950s and the office. Now, what happened to the ledger books? Did they, once they switched to computers, just toss them out?

PM: Oh, jeez. Gone. They kept them piled up downstairs nice and neat for years and years, but sooner or later somebody tossed them, eh?

NP: Oh.

PM: Well, they didn't mean anything to anybody.

NP: Yeah. Anybody keep at least a copy or send one over to the Museum?

PM: They could have. They could have.

NP: Yeah, maybe.

PM: I never kept--. Lots of times, I think, today things I should have kept and never did. [Laughs]

NP: What were some of the things that you think would have, in retrospect, would have been nice to have?

PM: Well, I always thought I should have kept a log. Everybody should keep a log, I think. I tell my kids that, but they don't listen either. You should keep a log of everything that happens every day, whatever the highlight is of the day. But I never did.

NP: Because it means more when you look back.

PM: Oh, yeah.

NP: Whereas when you're living through it, it might not--.

PM: Well, I realize I should be keeping a log when I was working, but you just never did it. I knew guys that kept logs and knew what value they were. So.

NP: Some of those logs still around, you think?

PM: Oh, I think so. I think anybody that kept a personal log wouldn't have parted with it.

NP: Tossed it, yeah. Yeah.

PM: We had like a daily log, but it was all the action of the day. You were so happy to get rid of it. You'd never keep it. Just the whole operation, eh?

NP: Again, if you think back to those early days when you were working in the office, what comes most to your mind about those days? Different people--.

PM: Well, I guess it's the people because there were so many compared to today that it was all about the people, and that's what you remember. All the characters and what have you.

NP: Can you describe some of the characters?

PM: No, I wouldn't. No.

NP: You don't even have to put names to them, just--.

PM: No, no. You had everything. You had the clowns.

NP: [Laughs]

PM: Well, you do, eh? And probably it's the clowns you remember the best because they entertained you all day. All kinds of different ones.

NP: Anybody that you admired that set an example for you?

[0:15:03]

PM: Oh, yeah. Well, I don't know about set an example, but there was people I admired in how they conducted themselves. Yeah.

NP: What did you like about those people? How did they operate that you found--?

PM: Just how they treated other people. You get some people that don't treat other people good, and then there's people that go out of their way. We had a few guys down there that were real gentlemen, I guess, is a good word to describe them.

NP: Would all of them have been with the railway for a long time? Were you working with the generation that was--?

PM: Lot of them. Yeah. No, nearly everybody that I hired on with stayed with the railway. People didn't move much around from job to job. Anyhow. Nearly everybody went down there that I know has stayed down there. Not them all. A few went into real estate and things like that, but a majority of them stayed on the job. A lot of guys died young for whatever reason. You had guys that were dying in their fifties, guys who were still working maybe. Just offhand, four or five of them that died before they got to 60, eh?

NP: Was it a hard life?

PM: No, no. We had a good life. It was fun. I enjoyed going to work every day. I don't know if the place was fun, the people were fun, but the job wasn't hard. You did your job. It was a 24-hour operation, and nobody bugs you. You did your job, and they weren't trying to--. "Okay, when you finish that, go sweep the floor and stuff." That never happened.

NP: The fellow who was, I don't know if he was the general manager or was he the yard manager, the one that--?

PM: Hired me?

NP: Yeah. Do you recall what his history was? Like, had he been a long-term CP employee?

PM: He was. In those days, anybody--. They never hired anybody from Thunder Bay. All of the--. He was the general yardmaster, and that position up seemed they brought somebody in for all those jobs. He was brought in from Winnipeg, I think, he come from.

The two guys behind him on that position also were brought in from Winnipeg. I don't know if they didn't think there was anybody in Thunder Bay smart enough or--. [Laughing] Well, it was a lot of hard feelings in a few cases. People thought they should have got the job, and they hear that somebody is being brought in. You wonder why, eh? But that was just the way they did things. Superintendents were all brought in. Not that they were any smarter. In some cases, the other way. [Laughs]

NP: Any old timers that, you know, would tell the stories about the early days of the railway?

PM: Oh, yeah.

NP: Or were they all gone by the time you started?

PM: I guess there was always the stories of the past. Nothing that comes to mind.

NP: So you went from the ledger books or from the call line, I guess, getting the crews up, to the checker.

PM: Well, I was everything. Yeah.

NP: Then what did you do?

PM: Then--. It's a funny thing because it depends what you want to do. You either go for the money, get more money. The more important job you're on, you get more money, but you'd have to go nights maybe to get it. Some guys never left the day job. They had checkers that stayed checking because they didn't want to work nights, have weekends off. I was just the opposite. I had a young family, and I was always taking the job with the money. I worked a lot of nights.

[0:20:17]

NP: So what were the jobs that paid more?

PM: Well, train clerking. Train clerking is doing the paperwork on these trains going through, follow up on the checker, et cetera. It was going around the clock, plus they had one on nights from 8:00 to 4:00 in the morning, which is a great job. Had to go to work at 8:00 at night and work until 4:00 in the morning. I did that job for maybe a year, but those were the days when everything was done by hand. You wrote everything up by hand.

NP: Did you ever feel that you might want to do more of the the physical stuff? Being out on the--.

PM: Out on the--? Well, I did. When I was working checking, crew clerk--. I worked crew clerk a lot, looking after the crews. I did that probably the majority of the time I was clerking. I thought about going out on the road, and I couldn't see spending the rest of my life riding up and down the train from Ignace. Every time I thought about going—and I had every opportunity to go—I just said, “That’s not for me.” So I didn’t, and I never did.

NP: Could you see different personalities that would choose different ways? Who would like to go back and forth for the rest of your life to Ignace? [Laughs]

PM: I don't know because I never saw that. I can't tell you why they--. [Laughing] Good money, I guess, probably is the attraction to start with. You would have made good money, but other than that, I just--. You start out as a trainman, but now they end up as an engineer, and some just like the position running the train, eh? I've got grandsons now and that, that's what they're doing. They just love it, eh? [Laughs]

NP: A different kind of life though.

PM: Well, you're married to the job, it seems. You can't set anything. You don't set your time. The railroad tells you when the train is coming. You can't answer the phone and say, “Yeah, I'll be there next Tuesday,” because you don't know where you'll be next Tuesday. Not for me. I like to be home at the end of eight hours.

NP: So what was next? You did your crew clerking, the--.

PM: Different jobs in the office, just short term all of them, and then I got the chance to go to yardmaster, which is you're in charge of an area and the crews and assigning work to the crews, et cetera, et cetera.

NP: So when you talk about yardmasters, it was Fort William-Port Arthur when you first started. Was there one yardmaster or--?

PM: No.

NP: So tell us a bit about how that was organized because nobody else has. Like--.

PM: Well, in those days, the yardmasters did everything. That was the position. If you were a yardmaster, you could be at one end of the yard, the yardmaster of that area, or you could be handling crews and going out to work outside the yard, like to the Great Lakes or something like that.

NP: So physically, how was Thunder Bay divided up? Like were there several yards?

PM: Yeah.

NP: So can you remember what they were? Because I have no idea about what that looks like, how they--.

PM: Well, the main yard, of course, was the train yard, and that's where everything was run from, even sending out engines to Great Lakes or the Mission, the Island.

[0:25:11]

NP: And where was the main yard?

PM: In the trainyard.

NP: So where the station is?

PM: Yeah. Well, there and east of there. Like along Simpson Street, if that's an answer. The whole length of Simpson Street there is where the trainyard was.

NP: And what would that yard be called, central yard?

PM: E Yard was its name, and you had two main lines, and you had a whole bunch of tracks. Twenty-two tracks or something besides that that they kept cars on, mostly for going on and off trains and just working.

NP: And then the other yards?

PM: Then you had Intercity yard, which was run from a yard. The yardmasters, et cetera, would be in E Yard running that yard, and that's doing the Intercity elevators—Pool 1, McCabe's in those days they called it. All different names from today's names. Then

next to that, then you went over to Port Arthur. Everything was Port Arthur then. They didn't call it Current River. It was Port Arthur, and it was a separate yard run by the yardmaster and kind of its own thing over there.

NP: And then was there--?

PM: And then the other way, you had a Westfort, and that was your principal yard for grain. All of your grain come into Westfort in those days. When I started, it all come to Westfort because it all had to be switched, and the way they switched it was hump it over the hump. If you don't know what a hump is, it's just a bump in the track so that cars will roll down freely to create that they rolled without any power.

NP: The yardmasters--. You said the sort of central yard, E Yard--.

PM: Yeah.

NP: And the one that was in Intercity was run out of the central yard. Did the other yards on either end, was there a separate location? Like were the--.

PM: Well, the Westfort one was a strictly separate location. Handling grain was its--. When I started, that's all they did to handle grain.

NP: And was there an office building there?

PM: Oh, yeah. There was a--. It's long gone, but there used to be the yard office there, but mostly it was a day operation. The switch engines would switch at night, but everything was set up in the daytime kind of thing.

NP: And in Current River, same thing? Another yard office out there?

PM: Yeah. And it was mostly days, but not always because when it got busy and the elevators started working nights, they had more staff. The yardmaster on nights.

NP: If you had to just take a stab at guessing with the rail traffic that came through all of those yards, what percentage would have been grain versus just general transit and heading through down east? Could you say 70-30 split or--?

PM: Jeez. [Laughs] I don't know how I'd answer that because it changes. Like the grain in--. When the elevators are running, it's running 100 percent, right down to zip in the wintertime, so.

NP: Right. A good answer. Yeah. Shows the variation.

PM: Oh, yeah. We had the variation is right because--.

NP: Now, I have a question about the hump because I think--. Where was it in relationship to Elevator D, Westland?

PM: It was just west of Elevator D.

NP: Of Elevator D. So how did that--? Like could you hump in both directions? Because I'm thinking of the elevators that would have been west of the hump.

PM: No. The hump run from an incoming yard, which I'd said handled about 50 cars on a track, and the hump went over into a yard that had probably about 50 tracks. The idea of the hump, the cars were able to roll down with a rider on the car, which was, in those days, that's how they switched the cars and to get the quality and the speed because lots of times when you're busy--. The busier you were, the more hump riders there was to go faster because sometimes you had trains waiting to get in. It was that busy.

[0:30:46]

NP: So would it be humping from west to east?

PM: West to east.

NP: But then some of it would have to be hauled back west to the elevators at the turning basin?

PM: The elevators that were west of the hump, yeah, that had to be hauled, but most of the traffic was down east, Intercity, Current River. You had hauling engines on three shifts hauling.

NP: Speaking of the hump and the car riders, from my very calm, non-exciting existence, that seemed to be a pretty scary and dangerous job.

PM: Well, not really because the cars were only going probably 6 miles an hour, and you kept it at that speed with a braking system on the car. It's not like you were zooming down 80 miles an hour. So, no. Actually, it was a preferred job for the switchman. It was days, and you spent a lot of time sitting waiting for another train to come up. It gets to be a game after a while, you know, how little they ride. [Laughing]

NP: So the yardmasters then, you said you moved up to a yardmaster position?

PM: From the yard. They promoted people from the yard, from the office, and from switchman into a yardmaster position. The CN [Canadian National Railway] have the same system, but they never promoted anybody from the office. They were all from switchmen because once you went operating, you belonged to the switchman's union. The yardmasters were part of it. But on CP, they took guys from the yard. In fact, we had the same amount from the yard as we did from the switchmen. It was who was there.

NP: So what's a typical day in a yardman's work? Get into the office and what?

PM: Into a yardman's--?

NP: Yeah, when you were in the yardmaster's position, what does a typical day look like?

PM: Again, it depends on what you're doing.

NP: Let's say height of the grain season.

PM: Well, again, it depends. When you start out, you're probably on what they call a roving yardmaster's job, and they haven't got the regular yardmaster's set up, say, in Current River where you would have to go over and--. You're just checking up. You're assigning jobs to crews and doing whatever you have to do. Whatever you're told to do. [Laughs]

NP: So what's a typical crew? What would a yard crew--? Like what positions are on a yard crew?

PM: Well, in a yard crew when I started, you had three on the crew plus an engineer and a fireman. So a full crew was five people.

NP: And the three that weren't the engineer and the fireman? There would be a switchman?

PM: Yeah. A switchman, a foreman, two helpers. But every signal was hand signal. No radios. So that's why they needed the three-man crew, so they could see each other, eh? Everything was visual.

NP: What were the challenges in yardmaster work?

[0:35:15]

PM: Well, I guess you might say the challenges was getting the work out of the crews. Well, it was. It was a game to an extent. Some people you never had to do anything. They were just workers. Other ones you had to use the whip kind of thing.

NP: Coordination effort.

PM: Yeah, yeah. The term in the railway is "push and pull." So you push a little, pull a little. [Laughing] Get the work done, that's--. Yeah.

NP: What kind of contact, if any, did the yardmaster have with the various elevators? Any?

PM: Well, the yardmasters that were in the Current River area, he'd deal directly with the elevator, and Westfort to an extent. But Westfort had more of a staff, and lots of times if the elevators want something, they'd call the office, and it would be passed onto the yardmaster. Where at Current River, the yardmaster did everything himself. He had no staff.

NP: So what kind of communication was necessary or--?

PM: Well, telephone communication.

NP: Yeah, and--.

PM: He'd deal with the shed foreman at the elevator.

NP: So if you had a grain train coming in, then how did the process work? They called the elevator and said, "We've got some cars for you," or the elevator called you and said, "Where are my cars?" [Laughing]

PM: Well, as a rule, you always had more cars than you needed for the elevator. I mean, that's the whole idea that the elevator never runs short of cars. But they did, of course. [Laughs] The yardmaster would talk to the foreman and say, "I've got so many cars for you at noon, where do you want them?" And he'd tell him what tracks he wants them on, and between him and the trackman for the elevator, they'd look after their own little show.

NP: In the office—if we go back to sort of the positions in the office—we had sort of the people that were responsible for the crews, the internal people responsible, and there was the group and people responsible for making sure that you have an inventory of what's where, when. What other sort of major positions were there? Was there a head yardmaster? What kind of hierarchy was there in the office?

PM: Well, in the yard itself, your general yardmaster was in charge of all the yardmasters, and it was his operation, even though he didn't bother with the clerks because he had no time for--. If they did their work, that was fine, you see. But he was in charge, the general yardmaster. Then you had a superintendent and usually an assistant superintendent, and you also had heads of the departments—electrical foreman, all those other people. The shops was big in those days. Hundreds of guys worked down at the shops, where now there is no shops.

NP: Where were the shops?

PM: The shops were in the East End at the east end of the trainyard. They had a rip track, a locomotive shop, a car shop where they used to repair cars and paint cars. They did all those things back in the '50s, and probably later on.

NP: I guess by the time you started all of the old CP elevators had been demolished, or was there--?

PM: Oh, no.

NP: Well, I mean not D, but A, B, C--.

PM: Oh, the old--.

NP: The old.

PM: Yeah. Okay, yeah.

NP: They were gone by the time you started?

PM: They were gone, yeah. I guess probably the oldest one, the Empire Elevator, which is down the East End, was the one that was there when I started and went soon after. Of course, the Lakehead and--. What the heck was the name of the other one? There was two up by the Great Lakes, two elevators out there. Northwestern and the Lakehead, and they went. One burned, and whatever happened to the other one.

[0:40:37]

NP: So the Lakehead, was that the one also known as the Electric?

PM: I don't know that name.

NP: But you knew it as the Lakehead. Okay.

PM: Yeah. They were two that were beside the Great Lakes.

NP: Did any of those elevators--. You said you were a yardmaster.

PM: Yeah.

NP: At which yard?

PM: I was all over the place.

NP: All over. For the whole yardmaster time? Or did you settle in, in one location? It doesn't matter.

PM: Well, like I said before, I used to take any job. I'd take it for the money. You find when you do that, every time they need someone, you're it. If they need somebody on midnight, they'd say, "You want to?" I always laugh because what they do today, they train people for months and months on jobs. I never got trained five minutes on any job. It's, "Go there. Yeah, you'll find out what you've got to do." I worked a lot of--. When they started, the yardmaster was kind of like the top job no matter what shift you're on, but then it changed over the years. They changed them to supervisors and coordinators, and I worked all those jobs. So it's--. [Laughs]

NP: A Pat of all trades.

PM: Well, you either were--. And they knew you could go, and they could call you. I made lots of overtime because I never turned anything down.

NP: The reason I was sort of asking about where you might have been located if you sort of set up shop somewhere, I'm just wondering about the elevators and whether any of them presented any specific challenges as far as getting cars delivered, or whether it was a pretty smooth operation regardless of what elevator.

PM: Oh, yeah. Everyone had their whatever. Some were easy. Elevator D was the easiest elevator because they used to run the cars right off the hump right into the elevator. You're all finished. Pool 8, every car going by, if you needed a car, you'd give them a few cars, kept them going without any fuss or muss. Where the elevators in Intercity were more of a challenge because of the height and that. They're off the track.

NP: The distance off the track or--?

PM: The height. The push.

NP: Oh, I didn't realize that.

PM: Oh, yeah.

NP: Tell me about that.

PM: Well, they've got them up in behind the elevator, and the height of the land, I don't know. I can't remember what it was. It was a challenge putting the cars behind the elevator, and then they run them all down below when they're empty back through the elevator. It was all just, "Let them go." [Laughing]

NP: Could that also explain sometimes why cars would end up in the lake, because of the need to push?

PM: Well, it was the push. You push too much, and that's how most of them end up in the--. Lots of times they'd try two or three times, and you'd take a run at it, and gone. You can't stop it. Pool 1 had lots of cars behind that went in the lake. Not so much

Elevator M next-door didn't have too many because the track ended halfway down the elevator. So they'd go on the ground, but they wouldn't go in the lake. Pool 1, that was notorious for putting them in the lake.

[0:45:22]

NP: So if it went in the lake, was that the yardmaster's issue or was there a guy in charge of cars in the lake? [Laughs]

PM: Yeah, no. It was usually your car replacers from the car department. Your car department was looking after it. You just tell them in the morning, "We've got a car in the lake." Wherever. If it was close enough to reach it with cables, they pulled it out. We used to pull them across to Keefer, pull them out by boat, and that's where we took them. They had to get them out of there because they couldn't leave them. Couldn't leave a boxcar in there because it would be an obstruction to boats, eh? So. But it didn't happen that often.

NP: So the car department. Tell me about the car department. What positions were in there, or what duties besides fishing cars out?

PM: Well, their main job is looking after equipment and inspecting equipment. At one time, every train as it come in was inspected, was walked, and they checked every wheel, and they checked that everything was all--. Oil boxes. They had to check it. If it needed oil, they put oil in the boxes. There was a lot of work involved in keeping the cars on the train going. Where when they got the newer cars, they were sealed units, and they never even looked at them.

NP: So was that the department that also took care of boxcar doors?

PM: No, no. That was another. The boxcar door, you're talking about to hold the grain in?

NP: Mmhmm.

PM: No. They had a wooden door inside the steel door. You couldn't put the grain up against the steel door, or it would bulge it, so they had a wooden door inside that held the grain inside the car. So when the car got to the elevator, they'd break that wooden door to get the grain out. When I started, it was all boxes. There was no hoppers.

NP: So the wooden doors were recycled or--?

PM: They were recycled, yeah. They had a grain door department. They had men in Current River, men at Intercity, men at Westfort, men on what they called the transfer. We used to get grain from the Mission elevators, and they used to have to strip all these doors and fix the grain doors with--. Out of what's left of the grain door, they would make new grain doors and then ship them all west again. Started all again.

NP: We have a special interest because, to me, it's sort of fascinating how the grain industry and the railway industry surfaces within a community. So a lot of things in Thunder Bay were built from grain doors.

PM: Oh, it still is, still are. Go down to the East End and probably every shack in the East End is a grain door. Everybody did it. It was just a way of life.

NP: So what are some of the things besides the shacks or the sheds in the East End, what other things did people use them for?

PM: Well, anything. Building, putting up walls, all kinds of things. There was lots of grain doors hauled away from the railroad. They didn't call it stealing. It was--.

[0:50:05]

NP: Recycling.

PM: Yeah. Well, recycled, yeah. [Laughing] Yeah.

NP: Good quality wood, I understand.

PM: Oh, some of it really good. You had good stuff, you had rough stuff, and of course, those who were closest to the pile got the good stuff and whatever.

NP: So sort of a little disappointing when the hopper cars came in from that perspective. [Laughs]

PM: Well, it was gradual because the hopper cars took a long time to--. [Telephone rings] That's mine, I think.

[Audio pauses]

NP: Continue, and then we'll just continue. So your yardmaster work, then, where did you go to from there? What position did you move into?

PM: Well, it was kind of like a back-and-forth position because the time of year, if it was busy or not, where I worked. So I jumped around a bit, but then they started--. They were going to revamp the whole system in Thunder Bay, and they went from yardmasters that controlled the yard, they went to coordinators and supervisors and yardmasters, but they were going to run the operation from Westfort. Run everything from Westfort. It was kind of like a pipedream that they could everything at Westfort. People told them, "There's not enough room to do all this at Westfort," but they pushed ahead, and they changed all the staff. They had a coordinator at Westfort, but they still had all the operation downtown. The yardmaster, who was a lower position then—it was supposed to be just looking after the little piddly things—he was still doing all the trains, and it just kept--. So one day it all blew up, I guess, and they changed to where the coordinator went downtown and looked after the trains where he should have been, and they put the yardmaster at Westfort. It's been that way ever since then.

NP: So is the CP office in Westfort, is that on Kingston?

PM: No. It's on Gore Street.

NP: Okay. Oh, all right.

PM: You know, I shouldn't say that. There isn't any anymore.

NP: Okay. But that's where it was.

PM: That's where it was. They built what they called a tower. It was a three-storey building. It had the control office and people that worked in the yard office on the first floor, the switchmen had their lunchroom and that on the second floor, and the basement had the carmen.

NP: What are the control people? Did we talk about control people? You said there was the control office.

PM: Well, yard office.

NP: Okay. Same thing. Just sort of controlling traffic.

PM: Yeah.

NP: So where on Gore Street? Like if I'm thinking of Western Grain, Fort William Elevator E and F--?

PM: Yeah, just east of E and F.

NP: Okay. So almost on the bend, then, near Ford Street.

PM: On the bend. That's right. Yeah.

NP: Okay. Got it. It was nice because if anybody's ever--. If we ever get to the stage that we could do something like, "This is what the rail operation looked like at one time, and this was here and this was there," then it's nice to have something on record saying, "Well, it was right there."

PM: Yeah. [Laughs]

NP: So did they take the building down?

PM: I could go back further than that because they used to have a yard office right on the bend, and everything was kind of run out of the office, and they only had shacks up where the switchmen and the hump riders--. It was just a shack, that's all. It was there for years, and then they built this sparkling new tower that was going to--. They put the radios in and all that stuff. It was required.

[0:55:23]

NP: So the building is no longer there?

PM: It's gone now too.

NP: They took it down?

PM: Everything's gone now. The people are gone too. [Laughs]

NP: The Brown Street walkover bridge, any stories about it?

PM: Well, not really.

NP: It's a CP--.

PM: It's still the same problem. The CP don't want to fix it, and they want to tear it down. The people won't let them.

NP: Yeah. It's fixed. They now have a new bridge.

PM: It's fixed again?

NP: Oh, yeah. It's lovely.

PM: Okay. This was an ongoing battle since I've been there. I can remember one time when I was checker, I had to sit there all day counting the people going over, because CP wanted to prove there was nobody using it. Just as soon, the people got wise somebody was checking, they started walking back and forth across the bridge.

NP: Great story!

PM: Well. [Laughs] It happened, yeah. And the people working the elevator used to use it a lot when Pool 5, E, and F they were right there. They used to all go across, especially when the hotel was across the street on the other side. That was in their time, everybody in the elevator used to go for a beer, which was quite commonplace. Only have one beer, but--.

NP: I'm surprised they left the elevator to have their beer. Most times they didn't. [Laughs]

PM: Well.

NP: We know those stories, Pat. You're not letting anything out of the bag.

PM: Yeah.

NP: Since the topic came up about beer, it is almost notorious—would you say that’s fair, Monika?—that there was a lot of drinking done at the elevators until quite a serious incident, and then they finally took it seriously and the ethic changed. Was the railway the same, or was there better control?

PM: No, I would say it was much the same. It was pretty loose until a couple of bad accidents.

NP: On the railway?

PM: On the railroad. If you remember a passenger train, a head-on out in the Prairies. I can’t tell you when it was. In the ‘70s, probably, plus, an accident at Ignace. They had a tail end. The guy rode up the back end of a--. And there was a guy killed. That changed. The word went out that, “Don’t, and if you do and you get caught, you’re gone.” Which was a good thing, but they started checking up crews. Supervisor now had a job of being the bartender when guys come to work. You got told, “It’s up to you. If they’re drinking, don’t let them come to work.”

NP: Hard to do.

PM: Yeah.

NP: And that’s certainly what they found in the elevators was that it was sometimes the bosses that had the problem.

PM: Yeah. But once people know that you’re not going to put up with it, you might have to warn them a few times, and then they stop. The guys just stopped drinking on the job.

NP: What this makes me think of, and it’s sort of a very strange connection, I’m just thinking women working in the railways. Like a lot of the work you were talking about initially, you know, the car checking and the ledger work and so on—and I’m sure the stenographers were probably mostly female—was there, over the 37 years of your career, was there any kind of change in, maybe not philosophy, in hiring practices in trying to hire more females?

[1:00:17]

PM: I think so. I think so because most of the clerical work in the office was done by females. But the outside work—checkers and all that—it was all men. Where today, and even when I say today, when I finished working--.

NP: '88.

PM: In '88, there was all kinds of females in the checking roles and all the jobs. It was all men when I was starting, and the only females were gals that were stenos, record clerks, et cetera. That's the only females we had.

NP: Was the railway staffing very much like the elevator staffing where there were a lot of vets that had returned that would be on the job?

PM: Well, they had a lot of vets come back, and they maintained their job for them. There was two or three in the yard office that were vets, and when they come back, they just took whatever. Their seniority prevailed, eh? Unfortunately, I was in the age group where there was no vets. Nobody belonged to the service because we weren't at war with anybody.

NP: You were too young.

PM: I was always too young. I was too young for the Second World War, and there was no other war really in my time. There's nobody I grew up with, except a couple that joined the peacetime army. There was nobody in the services, eh. No.

NP: So, we sort of--. I got myself off track there because we were talking about sort of the yardmaster, and then you talked about some reorganization into the superintendents—not superintendents—but coordinators.

PM: Yeah. They changed the--. The jobs were still the same. You still did the same. Looked after--. Different titles.

NP: Sure. Because the work was still the same, the trains were still the same.

PM: Exactly. They just kept running it regardless of what you called them.

NP: Monika had a question related to checking cars because she was saying, "What kind of impact does graffiti have on being able to do the job of--?"

PM: None.

NP: None?

MM: It doesn't obscure the numbers on the side that you check? If it's all painted over, does it matter anymore?

PM: You know what? There's not that much of it that made a difference. The number was on both sides of the car on both ends, so if for any reason you couldn't read the number on the side--. And sometimes there's just junk on the car, you know. In the elevator it got all dirty. You go look on the end, that's all. So, no.

NP: Anything else in between where we are now and the grain coordinator position?

PM: [Laughs] Well, I used to relieve the night general. They have the day general and the night general.

NP: Okay. Why are they called generals?

PM: Well, the boss. I don't know why they called me whatever. You did all the work, maybe that's why. For two years, I relieved the night general when he went on holidays, and when he went on days to relieve the day man, I also--. So it was like two months or more. I did that for two years before I went on the grain job. When you're working that job, you're in charge of everything while you're working. It wasn't much of a job because, again, you went to work after supper, and you worked until 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. Sometimes you never went home because if something happened in the yard, a wreck or something, you're stuck, eh? You did whatever you had to do to make the thing work.

[1:05:25]

NP: So sitting in your office as the general, you walked in start of your shift. What would you do?

PM: Well, the whole idea is to get a handle on what is going on and to see that our trains are being ordered right. Empties coming out of the elevator was always a concern. You had to make sure--. When I started, they'd just grab 60 empties, and they'd be gone before you know it. Where, when we got into it where they were doing everything at Westfort, they started doing empties at Westfort. The trains were longer—100 and something cars—and they weren't only inspecting the cars, but they were doing a complete repair on them. So the car department was involved in not only inspecting the cars but doing all repairs on them right on the track. They had a space in between the tracks where they run up and down in their vehicles, and that was all changed. Before that, everything was just, do a minimum inspection and gone, eh?

NP: Shipped when they had the car repair or the repair--.

PM: But they spent more time in making sure the car was in perfect shape so it would take you out west and back here again.

NP: So they didn't want to do car repairs in Winnipeg. They wanted them to come in working order.

PM: And probably over the time, they went from repair shops in Winnipeg, Moosejaw. They all disappeared.

NP: Yeah.

PM: They do a lot of the repairs here in Thunder Bay.

NP: It must have been lots of fun repairing them in -30 temperatures outside.

PM: That's right. A darn cold job, yeah. Yeah. I used to often feel sorry for carmen. You'd see them lying underneath a car, 40 below, fixing some darn thing—a spring or whatever. But again, there's lots of places to get warm, and nobody was saying, "You've got to stay outside for eight hours."

NP: How would you describe the CPR--. What do I want to say? Not so much philosophy. CPR ethic? CPR--. Just how they treated their employees, how the employees felt about the company. Any change over time?

PM: Oh, I think so, yeah.

NP: How would you describe the change?

PM: Well, when I started, if you worked steady for five years—this is what I think—you would think you had a steady job. Nothing in writing, but they kind of looked after you. If you were there for 10 years, you would say, "I'm never going to get laid off." But today, they cut jobs. They got guys 30 years are getting laid off. No respect for the employee, I don't think. The dollars and cents, that's all they care about today.

NP: And from the employees looking towards the company?

PM: Well, I think it reflects how the company treats them. When I was working, I had great respect for the company and my bosses, but what I see today—and I see what I see today because I've got kids working on the railway—and they tell you what's going on. You can't believe it. But they don't care. Job means nothing to them. It's a job, that's all.

NP: Sort of a mirror of the way the company thinks of them, just a number.

PM: I think so. I think so.

NP: Speaking of sort of pride and respect for the company, how would you describe the interrelationship between CN and CP?

PM: [Laughs] Well--.

NP: How was the operation different? My understanding, which is not very deep, is that in the early days, I mean, even the elevators, they chose which company was going to be delivering to the elevators, but over time, that changed. So friendly rivalry? How would you just even describe how the work or the rail system was set up?

PM: Well, of course, I never really had much to do with the CN until I went on the grain coordinator's job. Before that, you really had nothing to do with each other.

NP: Was CP by far the bigger operation in Thunder Bay?

PM: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Always was. Well, our trains all go through here. CN, they don't go on the north line. So all the traffic into here is traffic for here or coming out of here. As you know, CN haven't even got a track east of here anymore.

NP: It's all north.

PM: Well, it has to go in and out of Thunder Bay by the track west of here. There's no track to Sioux Lookout anymore. There's only a track to Fort Frances, Atikokan. That's the only track there is.

NP: So when it gets into Thunder Bay now, does it go onto CP track?

PM: I don't know. I can't answer that because I don't know what the--. I think probably a lot of traffic does go to CP, but I don't know because I'm not there.

NP: Yeah. So the grain coordinator position, how did that--? Was that a new position, or had it been around for a while?

PM: Well, it wasn't that old. It had two previous people on it. It was set up. It was getting so busy with the grain, they just had to have somebody running the show, and there was a guy, he was a night general. He was the first grain coordinator.

NP: Do you remember his name?

PM: Yeah. Les Crooks.

NP: Okay.

PM: He was very knowledgeable, and what I say likeable because he could get along with anybody, and he never had a problem with people. When he was night general, he run a tight ship, but at the same time, "Do your work, and then play your games." But he was the first grain coordinator, and he retired on the job. The guy that followed him, he come out of the freight office, and he also come through the coordinator. I don't think he ever worked yardmaster, and then he was given this job.

NP: And who was that?

PM: Dino Burella.

NP: Okay. Yes.

PM: Then Dino went to work for the government grain, and then I got the job.

[1:15:06]

NP: Now what was the name of that group? Oh. It was Grain Transportation Agency or something, GTA.

PM: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

NP: Right. Okay. So in your job then when you took that job, would you be working with that Grain Transportation Agency? Not with them, but coordinating with them?

PM: A hundred times a day.

NP: Oh, okay. Good.

PM: Dino Burella and I, we must have talked to each other how many times a day.

NP: Did he just pass away, or he's--?

PM: Yeah.

NP: Yes. I thought that because we had him on our list to interview, but by the time we sort of got in touch with him, he was--.

PM: He would have been excellent. While you're on that subject—I'm trying to think—Tony Kaplanis, is he on your list?

NP: Yes. Now, I don't know why I haven't interviewed him yet. Tell me about Tony.

PM: Well, I say he'd be good because Tony come from the CP. He was night general.

NP: Oh, okay.

PM: And he went from night general over to the government job as the assistant. They brought some guy in—I can't think of his name offhand—and Tony was his assistant. He was the first assistant government, but he's worked night general a couple years anyway—two or three years.

NP: Do you still keep in touch with him?

PM: I saw him once in the last year.

NP: Okay. Because I can't recall. I'll have to take a look at my notes because I can't recall whether I called him, and he said no, or I haven't.

PM: Uh-oh, maybe.

NP: I'm not sure. In which case, if he said no but you are still in touch with him, maybe you could give him a call and say--.

PM: No, no. Like I say, I run into him. I forget where.

NP: Yeah. I'll check my records and see.

PM: Knowledgeable. The knowledge. He not only worked in Thunder Bay. He worked down in Ottawa with the--. Now when his job was done, I can't remember, and then he come back here again.

NP: Well, if I've forgotten whether I've talked to him or not, maybe he's forgotten whether he's talked to me. [Laughs]

PM: I don't know what his--. I never see him. He's not a guy you'd see around town.

NP: Okay. Maybe he's moved.

PM: Eh?

NP: Maybe he has moved. I'll check. Do you think Ted might know? Ted Landry?

PM: I don't think Ted had anything to do with him.

NP: I'll have a look and see.

PM: But he might know.

NP: Yeah. So what interested you in the grain coordinator's position?

PM: [Laughs] Well, it was an interesting position, of course. Because I worked the yardmaster at Westfort, and I worked yardmaster at Current River, I had a pretty--. And I worked night general, which you're in charge of everything. So I probably, I wouldn't say I had an easy time going on it, but I didn't have to learn a lot of things because I knew. I worked in the yard office in Westfort for a couple of years, so I knew all the routines.

NP: What was the routine of the grain coordinator?

PM: Well, it changed so much over the years. When I went on it, the government grain commission, they were just really getting started, getting their fingers in.

NP: So what year? You said, I think, you were in the position for 18 years, so you would have started--?

PM: 17 years, so whenever--.

NP: '71-'72, you would have--?

PM: Yeah.

NP: Oh. So that was when things were really starting to hop here.

PM: That's right. But the government grain commission, they controlled everything. They controlled, like, how much grain, who to send it to. They talked to all the elevator companies, and they kept the grain. It didn't matter. If you didn't unload what you considered your quota, that was tough. If you didn't put the staff on and get the grain unloaded, you lost. You lost out on the grain. And they controlled it. If I told, say, Dino how much grain had come, they used that figure, and they'd tell the elevators. If the elevators didn't put the staff on, they lost that grain. Whereas in normal times, whatever they loaded in the west, they were entitled to unload here. But when it got busy, it was like dog eat dog, I guess. The aggressive grain companies got more than their share.

[1:21:06]

NP: Was there sort of a pecking order in the grain elevators at that time or the grain companies?

PM: In what way?

NP: Well, just as you say in sort of the dog eat dog--.

PM: No, I just think the way they were run. Like we had no preference to who we serviced. I tried to, when I was doing that job, everybody was the same. I treated everybody the same. You make everybody think you're treating them better than everybody else, but I never had a problem with any elevator when I was working.

NP: Again, if you can, take us through a typical day, what your interaction would be, who at the elevators did you work with? Just give us a sense because here we are, people who know nothing about it.

PM: Yeah. Well, like I told you before, the government grain--.

NP: Do they give you a list or--?

PM: Oh, no, no. It was strictly back and forth. They didn't tell us what to do.

NP: So who would you be working with there?

PM: Dino.

NP: Oh, okay. So that group.

PM: I dealt with Dino all the time I was working. All the time I was the grain coordinator, he was the government guy I worked with.

NP: Okay. So there's a distinction here between the Grain Transportation Act people and the inspection staff, the ones that operated out of Archibald Street. The grain inspectors. It's a different group.

PM: Oh, yeah. Nothing to do with that.

NP: Okay. Yeah. So these were strictly the transportation of grain.

PM: And they were in charge of the movement of grain. They had a lot of power. They used to phone up an elevator and say, "You better work tonight." This is the kind of stuff they did. If the grain was there, the thing was to get it unloaded. At the same time that that was being set up, the CPR set up a grain--. I don't know what the hell they called it.

NP: A grain group?

PM: A grain movement--. What do they call when it was a set rate?

NP: The Crow Rate?

PM: Eh?

NP: The Crow Rate?

PM: The Crow. When the Crow come off, the CPR starts spending money, and one of the first things they did, they set up a whole outfit to look after the grain. The people that were in it all the time I was in it, because they were the originals, was a guy who was superintendent was the head of it, and a guy from transportation was his assistant, with a whole bunch of other people.

NP: This is in Winnipeg?

PM: In Winnipeg, yeah. I dealt with them lots—anything I wanted or wanted them to do. If we saw we were going to be short of grain, I'd phone them and say, "Get off your butt. We need that grain." They had lots of power too. But that all come gradually. You know. It started out with nobody, and then you've got all these people who you've got to talk to. I had a phone in my ear most of the day. That's the kind of job it was. Then I talked to all the elevators. I talked to every elevator every day.

[1:25:42]

NP: So what would that conversation be?

PM: What they need, what the unloads, like "Are you unloading what you're supposed to be?" We know how much grain was on track in the morning, and you'd say, "Are you going to get all the grain unloaded?" I'd know if they were getting any more. I'd already know that, but they'd let me know. Or once you have a good rapport with these guys, they tell you everything. I used to deal with the foremen in the shed, and they'd tell you. They'd say, "Oh, no, no. We're all filled up. We've got no more room." They'd say, "We didn't unload any barley today." Well, then you'd know how many cars you need for the next day. You're always looking at the next day, what you're putting in there and how much grain you're allotting to each elevator.

NP: So if you came into a situation that you were talking about before where the people at the Grain Transportation Agency would say, "You don't get on this, you don't do this, you lose your opportunity." Did you ever then have to pull cars out of--? Cars that weren't unloaded, pull them back out onto the track?

PM: No. I think that maybe happened a couple of times. I was a non-believer in taking cars out of an elevator that were already there. Put pressure on the elevator to unload them was a better idea than taking them out. It happened, but not too often.

NP: So when things were really moving, like, having to get stuff really pouring through, did it then become more obvious to you about what elevators were able to do a better job than others?

PM: Oh, you always knew that because you knew by their performance and by the guy you talked to.

NP: Yeah. So what, in your mind, which elevators was it--. Which elevators did better? How much of it was a question of just upgraded facilities versus management issues?

PM: I think the best-run company was Sask Pool because, I think Sask Pool, they let the superintendents run their elevator. When you dealt with the superintendent of any individual elevator, if you dealt with Sask Pool, you knew what he said, went. He wasn't going to call you back ten minutes later and say, "I can't do that." I wouldn't say that about some of the other companies, and I'm not going to say who.

NP: Yeah. What facilities tended to be able to get the job done faster?

PM: I don't know what you mean.

NP: Well, some of them had unloading rates or just--. I'm thinking of the elevator that's near and dear to our heart, Fort William F, which is a pretty old operation, and at the time you were working, hadn't been upgraded probably from when it was built in 1913.

PM: I don't think it was, yeah.

NP: Compared to, well, Richardson's, which seemed to be upgrading regularly.

PM: Well, it was a different operation altogether. When the grain was flying, you jammed as much grain as you could in every elevator. Elevator E and F were unloading 30, 40 cars a day. When it slowed down, they'd only have a few cars, two cars, whatever, eh? But when the grain, when you were trying to get everything--. They were unloading grain at Pool 2. You know where Pool 2 is?

[1:30:14]

NP: That's the one north of the Marina?

PM: Yeah.

NP: Manitoba Pool at that time?

PM: It was a Manitoba Pool house, yeah. They were unloading grain there in the '70s. It was old then, falling down, and they were taking grain in. It was in such bad shape, the crews that were putting the grain in couldn't go behind the elevator. They had to just shove the cars back because they were afraid the whole thing might give way someday. Well, you know what shape it's in if you've been near there. They were even--. And Elevator E and F, they were just smiling all the way to the bank because it was always somebody else's grain they were unloading. They didn't own the grain. Whatever you could get.

NP: Did it make much difference who owned the grain in those days? Or you just sort of switched out as you needed to and made arrangements?

PM: Well, then you're getting into a whole new ballgame. When I started, I told you, every car was assigned to the elevator who owned it. Well, when they started pooling the grain, then the grain could go anywhere. That changed the whole operation.

NP: For the better?

PM: Oh. Well, you could just picture that 50-car train, for instance. Instead of that 50-car train going into Westfort and being broken up into 40 pieces, it went zooming by Westfort and maybe end up in Current River and right into the elevator. Actually, the only thing that was being pooled was the wheat, durum, barley.

NP: The Wheat Board products?

PM: Yeah. But we also had a little local agreement that let us take cars like malting barley. So many malting barley you could steal from—not steal—that was lined up to go, say, to Sask Pool, but if you were having this grain going to Cargill, you could send that car to Cargill. I think the limit was 15 cars that could be out of whack.

NP: Who would keep track of that?

PM: My staff.

NP: And then it would go--. Like, who cared? Like was there a central--.

PM: Well, they cared.

NP: Ah, okay.

PM: Because that grain was worth more money. The malting barley was worth whatever it was. If it was [No.] 1 Feed barley--. As long as it was the same quality and not more than 15 cars, they let you play with it a little bit. But that was just a local agreement, and it lasted while the big rush was on it.

NP: So that would have been the Lakehead Terminal Association sort of group of managers that sort of agreed to that.

PM: That's right. And they used to have a meeting once a month along with us, the railroads, and the government boys, and run by the government boys. Dino and I had a great relationship. You knew what--. We did things. If we wanted an elevator to do something, we talked about it first, and it would get done.

NP: Your strategy. Plan your strategy.

PM: Yeah. It was kind of like that, nothing dirty or anything. He was a nice guy. But when you've got that kind of relationship, it makes the job go very easy.

NP: Did CN have a similar grain coordinator position?

PM: [Laughs] They never for a long time. They had a grain clerk, and he was a union job, and he did it and controlled by their yardmaster. Like, he kind of, this clerk, give him the [inaudible], but in the last years I was on the job, they changed that. The superintendent, he got kind of my job specks, and they give that clerk, he boost up his--. So then he was just a clerk. He had no responsibility or anything of his own. He was done.

[1:35:35]

NP: So when you think about when you entered the position of the grain coordinator, what did you learn about Canada's grain industry and elevator operation that you didn't know before you started that job?

PM: I didn't know anything, except that we had a service. As a yardmaster looking after the service, you know, but what they did internally, I knew nothing.

NP: So what did you learn?

PM: Well, I learned all about the loading, what they can handle, what they can't handle, where they can handle it. Everything. Not only were we unloading piles of cars, we were loading out hundreds and hundreds of cars to the east by rail, and all this was--. And if you knew who could do what, and who not to do what. [Laughs] Made all the difference in the world.

NP: So there would be some--. You referred earlier to different kinds of workers. You had worked who, you know, you give them a job and they do it, and then you get workers who are you give them a job and you have to--.

PM: Yeah, but that's more your own staff.

NP: Yes. But same kind of people are working in other operations too.

PM: They are in the elevator, but you have no control over any of them, except your good relationship or whatever. I mentioned Sask Pool because I had probably the best relationship with them.

NP: Who was running Sask Pool here at the time?

PM: Oh, God.

NP: Because there'd be a whole new crew compared to--.

PM: Oh, they changed completely.

NP: Yeah, since the ones I've talked to.

PM: I can't remember. There was different superintendents.

[Audio pauses]

NP: Can we put this on tape?

PM: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

NP: [Laughs] Okay, we're back on now.

PM: Larry Carrol, who was the superintendent of P&H [Parrish & Heimbecker], he worked in one of the elevators. How he got this job, I don't know. He made a good superintendent. Anyway, he told me this story. That's when you mention Mr. Parrish. Parrish phoned him one day and told Larry, "We're going to start handling sunflower seeds. You're going to have about 500 cars of sunflower seeds coming at you." And Larry used to fly off the handle over anything, and he said, "I'm not handling no sunflower seeds!" he says, "They're dirty. They clog up all the machines." On and on and on. And Parrish just let him rant away. When he finished, he said, "You all finished, Larry?" He says, "Do me a favour, Larry. Just step outside the office there and tell me whose name is on the side of the building." [Laughing] And Larry said, "I'm all the way outside before I had realized what he told me." [Laughing] Parrish. "Yeah, okay, Mr. Parrish. We'll handle those sunflower seeds." Yeah.

NP: You know, I can still remember interviewing Mr. Parrish, and I guess he might have been one of the first owners of the companies that I interviewed.

PM: Yeah.

NP: But the thing I liked, I always worked in an office environment, and a lot of times, the office politics was just so awful, but nobody ever came out and said anything. But what I really liked about working with and interviewing people like you and Mr. Parrish and so on was they didn't think that conflict was a bad thing, it just was. Yeah. You had to say, as you said with Mr. Parrish, you had to say what you had to say, and the grudges weren't held. You said, "Oh, yeah, right. Okay." And then on you went.

[1:40:14]

PM: There is a way of going about it. That's the whole secret if you've got a little knack. I always thought I got along with everybody all the time I worked on the railroad. Not just the grain job. Everything. I got along and made my job simple. I could

phone anybody up and say, "I need a favour," especially in the grain. If I wanted a car loaded, I'd phone up. "No problem." Get it done. You find out the more you can do for them, they'll do back double for you. Yeah.

NP: Did everything go smoothly in that position?

PM: Never. Never.

NP: No?

PM: Never.

NP: So what was the bane of your existence?

PM: [Laughs] Well, when you line up, you've got all the grain coming and where it's going, and then you find out half of it ain't coming. [Laughs] Just everything. Somebody's supposed to unload so many cars, didn't do it. Just change, eh? You've got the grain going here and before it gets halfway down the track, it's going someplace else. If you can't handle the change, you'd be lost because it's part of the job. Well, the railroad from the start is that way. If you made a plan, you better have an A, B, C, D because you'll use it.

NP: Sure. Because even you could have failures in the rolling stock or anything.

PM: Oh, just continuous. Engine breakdown, crew don't show up. It's just part of that game, that's all.

NP: I could also see why it could be fun.

PM: Well, I don't think you think it's fun when you're doing it because you're under the--. But I think after that, you had lots of chuckles after. I worked with a lot of good people. I worked I wouldn't say a lot of my years as grain coordinator, but about half of them under one general yardmaster that we got along like the best of friends. Those kind of things make the job go so well. When you can pick up a phone and get anything you want, you've got it made.

NP: Did you have to do much dealing with the Winnipeg group then when you were--?

PM: The CP Winnipeg group.

NP: Yeah.

PM: They dealt with anybody other than CP. I dealt with them and dispatchers. I knew the two guys that were principals, the superintendent and his assistant. I knew both of them from way back and, again, it's nice when you pick up the phone and say, "Hey, Jack."

NP: So what were they doing in Winnipeg? What was your sense of what they did that--?

PM: Well, they controlled the movement of the grain and the empties, who got the empties, and getting the grain coming to us in an even flow. All the while, they controlled their shipment with putting the units in the right place, et cetera, et cetera. They were both really knowledgeable guys. Again, if you called them up and say, "I need this, need that," they'd break the door down to get it done. You might even know them, the guy that was doing that job. Did you know the Mansons at all around here?

NP: Mm-mm. No.

PM: Hugh Manson, he owned--.

NP: How is that spelled?

PM: M-A-N-S-O-N. He owned the optical shop there in Victoriaville.

[1:45:08]

NP: Okay. So--.

PM: This was his brother.

NP: Ah, okay. Do you know if he's still alive? The guy in Winnipeg?

PM: I don't know.

NP: I wonder.

PM: His assistant is dead. I don't know about him.

NP: So what was his--?

PM: Jack.

NP: Jack. You know, I'm going to check because I'm going to Winnipeg in November, and I'm doing a few interviews there. So maybe I'll check and see if he's around.

PM: Yeah. He's long--.

NP: Does he have relatives here still?

PM: He has, but I don't know.

NP: Okay. M-A-N-S-O-N.

PM: But he was a superintendent, like, of Moosejaw. He was superintendent there, and I forget where else he was.

NP: But he was a Thunder Bay person?

PM: He was an operator at Thunder Bay. That's where he started as an operator. He was a smart young fellow, and up the ladder he went. He was a good superintendent.

NP: Did you keep statistics at all on sort of your best day ever for getting stuff through? Or what would be considered a good day, to have how many cars unloaded sort of at the peak?

PM: Well, the peak was just over probably both railroads unloading over 1,000 cars per day.

NP: Wow.

PM: That was peak. I can't remember a figure. I wasn't interested in keeping records or [inaudible] it all. It just wasn't my cup of tea.

NP: Well, I just wondered because I know with the elevators, I don't think it was anything official, but they had fastest time ever to load a boat. So they--.

PM: Yeah. Everybody keeps something, but like I said about too bad Dino wasn't still around. He was one of those guys. He kept his log, and he had all those. If I wanted to know what was the best day we had last year, I'd phone Dino. He'd tell me. [Laughs] But I just never kept records at all.

NP: I'm sure somebody was keeping records.

PM: Well, they kept them, but you know.

NP: Not that you checked or had--.

PM: But you know, you find out most records, if the book gets full, put it on a shelf. It gets to the top of the shelf. Some day somebody needs room. They look around. Nobody's looking. It's in the garbage. That's what I think.

NP: So what was your worst day?

PM: Ha! [Laughs] Oh, my God. I have no idea. I have no idea. My worst day? It was probably when I was night general because then you're involved with discipline. I wouldn't pick out a day, but that's the position because you've got to do things. Where in the grain job, I didn't have any of that.

NP: None of the personnel issues.

PM: I had no personnel issue at all. Actually, the staff wasn't my staff, but it was there. Whatever I wanted, they were there. But I never had to fight the battles. No. When I was on the grain, no bad days. Bad days--. There was a bad day, drove you nuts, but nothing I went home and wanted to quit or anything over it. No.

NP: So roughly you were working in that position between '72 and '88.

PM: Yeah.

NP: So what changes occurred in that position over your time?

PM: Oh. Just in that position? Okay.

NP: Mmhmm.

PM: Well, the pooling of grain was the biggest. When they decided to pool the grain and stop sending it to the elevator that owned it, that just made the car movement of grain to the terminal full speed ahead, and it changed things dramatically. They went from a big day on the hump before that, you could have 25 riders, and it went from 25 riders down to no riders.

[1:50:29]

NP: Because a whole--.

PM: They weren't switching the cars anymore. The whole train goes *pssht!* And the speed of handling the car. Like, I was working—in fact, Dino and I were working—the first night that we took a train by the action of the trainyard and that, instead of putting the grain train in Westfort, we had no room, and we took it to Current River. You thought that we had committed murder. “You can't do that.” “Oh, yeah. We can do what we want.” Of course, we stuck by each other.

NP: Who was complaining, the yardmaster?

PM: Oh, the crew. The crew. “We don't take trains to Current River. Where's Current River?” “Well, you'll find out. You need some help? You need somebody to hold your hand?” I remember that day just like yesterday. We didn't know what to do with this train. It was just sitting there. “Well, let's take it to Current River.” We knew what was going to happen. Now, they're just a regular thing now.

NP: It's like a rival gang coming in from out of town.

PM: Well, you just didn't do that. “That wasn't my job. I get off at Westfort.”

NP: Yeah. So there would also have been--. You would have seen the big switchover from boxcars to hoppers.

PM: Oh, yeah. Well, that was, right away, the hopper takes twice as much grain as the boxcar did. But everything, the handling--. The grain door staff, they also disappeared while I was working. Used to have a huge grain door staff, and they just started getting less and less boxcars and more and more hoppers. That all disappeared.

NP: When did the repair sheds shut down, do you remember?

PM: Well, they did it gradually, eh? They used to repair paper cars, bring them up to date, paint them, do everything.

NP: Paper cars?

PM: The paper cars for the mills.

NP: Oh, okay.

PM: That's when everything went by boxcar. No trucks. But all those cars they used to take to the mills were in perfect shape, right down to the new paint. It closed down. I remember in the car shop it burned down actually. Used to have a rip track. They had three tracks and the rip track, probably all about, I would say, 30 cars roughly.

NP: What's a rip track?

PM: Where they fix the cars.

NP: Okay.

PM: That's gone. Tracks are gone. They built a beautiful carshop down in the East End there. They were fixing cars outside, and the carshop's used for storage. Just unreal. If they can get rid of manpower, that's all they care about.

NP: So the size of the operation here--.

PM: Oh. When I started here, they had a freight office. You know where the freight office was in Thunder Bay?

NP: I don't think so.

PM: Well, it's not there anymore. You know where the old passenger train down below the depot?

NP: Yes.

PM: Well, there used to be an office down there. Freight office used to look after all the billing. Full of people. They had all different jobs. Don't ask me what they did. [Laughs]

[1:55:02]

NP: So freight office. So grain would be freight as well, or was it separate from grain?

PM: Well, they didn't have a lot to do with the--. The billing was done in the west, and they never saw any of that stuff. They did more of everything else. But all that--. There's no freight office anymore. In fact, they amalgamated the freight office with the yard office. Not only amalgamated the offices, they amalgamated the staff, with the unions going along with it. So the yard office suffered because they had all the jobs, and they brought all these people in from the freight office and bumped them into jobs and that. So I was just lucky. The day I went steady yardmaster was the day they amalgamated. So I can't remember what year it was. I never went back in the office, so.

NP: So the cars--. The elevators started closing down too in that time period.

PM: Well, yeah. Well, they started closing down when the CPR and the elevator companies did the job and took everything west. That's when they really started to close down. I was gone then.

NP: By the time it started moving west?

PM: Yeah.

NP: So that would have been the early '90s, then, that it really started moving--.

PM: I guess the '90s, yeah. It was happening while I was still there. You could see what the end result was going to be. They weren't going to be bringing grain to Thunder Bay, though we had a better record than they did out west of turning cars around.

NP: Why do you think that would be?

PM: Because we were better.

NP: [Laughs]

PM: We were!

NP: In what way?

PM: We did everything quicker. The turnover of the car in a terminal here was fantastic. The West Coast, cars sit out there. We never had that problem here. They used to handle all kinds of grain here. Anything. Nothing was turned down here. On the West Coast, they only handle certain grain, and if they couldn't see a boat coming for that type of grain, it wasn't unloaded. That didn't happen here. And the way they used to put on paper how efficient each way was, wasn't honest. We weren't getting credit that we were doing--. That's right! You know, I forget all the details. I forget what they used to call the west. We call it the same, but we didn't get credit for the less days we handled or something. I just forget that point.

NP: So make it look as if it was more efficient than it was.

PM: Oh, I think so. Yeah. The CPR did all kinds of things to make it look like they were doing a great job. Well, they didn't make that big hole in the mountain for nothing when they put the hole through the mountain to handle the trains. Now it's got to handle the grain. So, yeah. Oh, yeah. We were always more efficient here. [Laughs]

NP: Unfortunately, you can't fight the location of the markets.

PM: Of course not, no.

NP: Yeah. Unfortunately.

PM: And they did what they wanted to do.

NP: Yeah. Lots of mouths to feed in China.

PM: And they built up the West Coast. Nothing was done in the West Coast at one time. It was all done from Edmonton, and Edmonton and Calgary were the main, and then they just moved everything to Vancouver.

[2:00:03]

NP: The head offices of CP?

PM: Yeah. Yeah.

NP: Or at least the--.

PM: Well, they weren't head offices. Montreal will never change from being the head office until they move to Calgary.

NP: Mmhhh. Did you follow—after you left—did you follow the industry at all? Do you read the newspaper articles where the farmers are complaining about the--.

PM: Oh, yeah. I'm interested in what happened, but--.

NP: What are your thoughts on what's happening today? You know, why the issues with--.

PM: Well, the biggest mistake was getting rid of the Wheat Board.

NP: How so?

PM: Well, because they run such an efficient operation. When they couldn't sell grain, the Wheat Board always covered the grain. They knew. They had an operation where they dealt with all kinds of countries. Who's dealing with the countries now? Nobody. Each one selling their own grain, and it's--. I don't know what shape it's in, but I can imagine with no Wheat Board.

NP: What did you know--. Like, I'm sure when you went into the railway you knew very little about a Wheat Board. What did you know--.

PM: I didn't even know there was such a thing.

NP: Yeah. So what did you learn?

PM: Well, I didn't have very much to do with it because we dealt a lot with Dino, and he dealt with the Wheat Board. But we did--. They used to come down here a couple times of year and have meetings and tell us, what their goals were. I can't remember the peoples' names now, but they were very knowledgeable people. I could phone them up and say, "Hey, why are we doing this?" And you'd get an answer from them, not "None of your business." That's the way they were there. I just can't think of a name offhand.

NP: Yeah. I'm trying to think who might have been--. Like Frank Rowan was a person who we interviewed. Several. Dennis Stephens. There was just a whole slew of very knowledgeable people.

PM: Like I only knew a few of them who I could talk to like that, but they'd take your phone call, and they'd answer your questions.

NP: One elevator manager referred to the Canadian Wheat Board [CWB] as a bunch of paper pushers, so you wouldn't--.

PM: Oh. Yeah. An elevator manager. Need you say more? [Laughs] No, but all they're interested in is the grain coming to their elevator. If the Wheat Board isn't sending any grain, it's what they're doing.

NP: Did you, in your job, did you feel any kind of connection to the farmer at all, or was that just--?

PM: No, not really. The only time we ever had any connection with farmer is Richardson elevator one time brought a 50 farmers from out on the Prairies, brought them here, and we had them for one day. I really enjoyed it because they know how to ask the questions. Of course, they're only interested in one thing. "Why is my car taking so long to get unloaded?" But a few of them, I got letters from a few of them after saying, you know, "I wasn't trying to put you on the spot, but you answered my question pretty good." They were interesting people. Went and had supper with them. That was the only farmers I ever had anything to do with, except the few people that wanted to know and see their cars going through. Got a few people that wanted to see what happened to their cars coming in. We did a little handling special for them.

NP: That's sweet.

PM: They were happy. Yeah.

NP: Just knowing what's going on. It's not just they put it in the car and then what? Like out into the east?

[2:05:03]

PM: We had a case one time, one of the Richardson farmers had a car of barley that sat here for three months. Right away, I knew. Just as soon as he told me it was a car of barley. They weren't unloading barley, but he couldn't get the answer from his elevator. They just said, "No. It hasn't come in. Hasn't come in." It was sitting there because they weren't taking any barley because they weren't shipping any barley. We had about 200 cars of barley sat here for a couple months one time. I knew just as soon as he told me what it was. It didn't take me long to find out who it was, and I showed him. And I told him. I said, "I'll take you over there if you want, but it's over there. Those cars are not going to move from there until the traffic clears up in front of it." I said, "We're not going to go over there and bring those 200 cars on top of what we already got jamming up our system." He was quite happy. He said, "I couldn't find that out." They would just say, "No. Hasn't come in."

Again, things improved in the information department. When I started, CPR never told anybody anything. But when I finished, a grain company could punch in the number into a computer and tell you exactly where it is on the railroad. They were connected to the CPR computer system. To a certain extent, they could find out anything they wanted on it. None of that was there. When I started, none of that was there, but there was no computers. [Laughs]

NP: Yeah. That's right. Even leaving in '88, there's been a major changeover since even then. Producer cars, did you have to deal with those? Like there would be individual producer cars, but the elevator would be the one that would be dealing with those. You never had to--.

PM: In what way?

NP: Well, you'd have cars that were loaded directly by the farmers as opposed to ones that came through an elevator system, whether it was the Wheat Pool or whatever.

PM: We didn't distinguish between them.

NP: No.

PM: Everything was billed. When they started pooling grain--.

NP: It didn't matter.

PM: If it was [No.] 1 Feed wheat, that's all we cared. Made a big difference when they started pooling because all of a sudden it didn't matter who owned the car. We never realized what a big difference it would make to outgoing grain. When we were busy shipping grain east, we were shipping 10, 15 trains a week. Every train had car numbers. It was all car numbers. When we started pooling grain, we started looking at all this grain, and you've got 20 train loads of No. 1 Red, and here we were going by car numbers. And we said, "Why are we going by car numbers? Let's start--. Anybody's grain. Shove it all together. As long as you got so many cars, you're gone." It changed the handling completely, eh? We were switching cars and switching cars. You stop switching them and speeded up the whole system.

NP: So were those the unit, what they referred to as unit trains?

PM: Unit trains east, yeah.

NP: Yeah, that went east. Mostly to Montreal, Quebec City?

PM: Quebec City, Montreal, Three Rivers.

NP: All the way out to Baie-Comeau?

PM: I don't think so.

NP: No. Mainly because that's Cargill, right, way out there?

PM: Yeah. I don't know.

NP: Yeah. I don't even know if the train goes out there.

PM: Hm?

NP: I don't even know if a train goes out there, or is it just ship, that Baie-Comeau operation? Don't know.

[2:10:01]

PM: I don't know. I was there too. I don't know.

NP: Well, you probably got there by train, no?

PM: No. On a boat.

NP: Ah, okay. Do you like elevators?

PM: I like the people in the elevator. I don't like the dirty elevators, but they've improved a lot in my lifetime when they started putting in decent venting systems. I don't like going to an elevator. If I can go and just go in the office, I'm happy. I don't like it. They're still dirty. I wouldn't work in one unless I wore a mask. As long as I don't wear a mask, I wouldn't. I'm sure half of them are all clogged up down below that spend their life in an elevator.

NP: One of our interviewees referred to the "elevator cough."

PM: Yeah.

NP: You go to a bar, and he said you could tell which guys worked in the elevators.

PM: Yeah. I think that's Pool 4. [Laughs] Yeah, that's right. Yeah, I've been in the elevators, I've been through elevators, and it's not my cup of tea. If I never go in another elevator, it wouldn't bother me. But I sure met a pile of interesting people in the elevator. Good people. The people I dealt with at the elevators, most of them would do anything for you. That's the kind of people that work in the elevators. You learn a lot about people, let me put it that way.

NP: In what way?

PM: Well, how good--. Like you don't try to con anybody because you don't have to. You're not trying to con them to do anything. You call them up and you say, "I need this." And they say, "Yep." What's easier than that? But they expect the same thing from you. If they were in trouble with something—cars that they can't handle or they wouldn't—or something they wouldn't want to show on the books, they call me up and say, "Hey, we don't want to show those cars in and out of here three times." I'd say, "Well, don't worry about it. It won't be." You just don't show them, that's all.

NP: Why would they be in and out three times?

PM: Well, I'm just saying that a couple of times where they were loading out in particular, and they do something wrong or something that it shouldn't be or too much of--. They say, "Can we get that car back quietly?" "Yeah. Don't worry about it."

NP: Yeah. The problem was fixed so we don't need to show it as a problem.

PM: Yeah. And the days I was grain coordinator, whatever you did was done. Because I worked most of my career there before computers. Now with the computers, everything is in the computer. Every move. Every time the car moves ten feet, the computer knows. You think that isn't a problem, just the phone calls you get because the computer tells somebody that this car is in such a place that it shouldn't be. Before computers, we'd load CP hopper cars, load them east of here, but I'd take cars in there and a certain service that should go out to Moosejaw, but I'd look at the track of Moosejaw and see that they've got 30 of them sitting out there, and he only needs ten a week. Well, I'd steal ten cars, load them up here, and send them back. By the time anybody gets wise that I've stolen them, they're already halfway to wherever. But when the computers come, steal something, two seconds later the phone rings. "Why are you stealing my cars?" Just unreal, eh? They've got bells going off. [Laughs] Different ballgame. Yeah.

[2:15:13]

NP: And no pooling anymore, so some of the issues that you said existed before pooling are back on the table again.

PM: I don't know. Is there no pooling?

NP: Mm-mm.

PM: I don't know that.

NP: Wheat Board's gone.

PM: I know, but they don't need the Wheat Board to pool. You mean all the cars go to the elevators that they're--?

NP: That's my understanding. I could be wrong. Check it out with your relatives that are working there.

PM: Well, I haven't got any relatives that are in that game.

NP: In that. Yeah.

PM: As a carman, he wouldn't know.

NP: Well, you know, as you said, who's marketing the grain now? The grain's being marketed by the various companies, so what do they gain from--?

PM: I don't know.

NP: Yeah. That's a good question. We should check that out. I just assumed that nobody is coordinating that any longer.

PM: I can hardly believe they'd go back to putting the car of grain to whoever was shipping it. I can't see them going back there. I could be wrong.

NP: We should check that, check on whether pooling is still be done at all. Like, where--. Because, you know, most of them are loaded at the country elevators owned by the company and shipped here.

PM: Oh, yeah.

NP: Because now they do no inward inspection of cars, so I don't think there's any pooling. There's no inward--.

PM: Inward inspection?

NP: You know how every time a car came in it had to be inspected to be sure that what was--. The Grain Commission would inspect it to be sure that--.

PM: But they haven't done that for years either.

NP: Oh, no. They just got rid of it last year at the elevators.

PM: Oh, you mean inspecting at the elevators.

NP: Yes.

PM: Okay.

NP: None of that anymore. And the argument for that was that, “We shouldn’t need inward inspection if it’s coming from our elevator, our Prairie elevator, you know,” which makes sense. But then it also, that would speak against pooling because then you’d want to be sure that what you were getting--.

PM: Well, you think they would check it anyways so it says what’s on the side of the car is inside.

NP: Oh, for sure. They do. But they don’t have any need to protect the farmer, which is what the issue was earlier. Yeah. It would be interesting.

PM: I don’t think the railroads would get into that much handling. Like that was a tremendous amount of handling of the cars compared to pooling. When you consider how long it took you to bring a train into Westfort, switch it all, and then pick it all up at the different--.

NP: Yeah. You’ve got a point.

PM: Oh, it was, well--. Eliminate the hump riders, up to 25 of them. I believe we often had 25 hump riders working because we had the grain coming out of our ears coming down the track.

NP: Yeah. Well, I should--. I’ll check with our people at the elevators and find out.

PM: Yeah. Like, I don’t know anybody that--.

NP: Yeah, you’re right. It would be a real big change.

PM: Yeah. Well, just the handling.

NP: Yeah, it would be very expensive. Back to inefficiencies. Do you watch the ships in the harbour that are sitting there for a week?

PM: I see them there and--.

NP: What do you think is happening there?

PM: Well, I guess some of it is waiting for grain, but I don't know if it all is. And of course, they're waiting for an elevator spot because there's no elevators anymore. You know, at one time it would be nothing to have that many boats in the harbour because there'd be an elevator to go to, but not anymore. And how many of those ocean boats are waiting for instructions that they're ahead of time waiting? They can't go into the elevator until a certain date. That's the way it used to be anyhow.

NP: Yeah, the last one that we saw was waiting for the grain to come.

PM: To come? Yeah, well, that's not efficiency.

NP: No. But that's sort of--.

PM: Do the elevators--. Are they kicking themselves they shut down all these elevators or not?

NP: No, my sense is that there was over capacity.

PM: Well, there was because the grain wasn't coming here anymore. Right.

[2:20:03]

NP: Yeah. So over capacity, and they're so much faster at just getting this unloaded and loaded if it's here that they could deal with it.

PM: But now that the grain has increased, you would think that they'd just love to have, say, Pool 4. Pool 4 was their most efficient house. They used to unload more cars than Pool 7 because of the way it was handled and the way they got serviced by that good CP. That's right though.

NP: Yeah. No, my understanding is they're still over capacity.

PM: Oh, okay. And they just tore everything out of that Pool 4, tore all the machinery out. That's when I retired. I was shocked when they phoned me one day and told me Pool 4 has closed the doors. I said, "Get outta here!" I thought that would be the last elevator on Earth to close their doors because they were so efficient. But no. Old stuff. They weren't buying anything new. Yeah.

NP: And the elevators, almost all of them then on the Kam, are gone by the time you left.

PM: Yeah. That E, Elevator E is still--.

NP: F.

PM: Is it F? Okay.

NP: Yeah.

PM: Well, it was E and I think they changed it because nothing worked in it anymore.

NP: I'm only looking on the outside, so it's E and F.

PM: Yeah. Mailhot? Mailhot owns that?

NP: Yeah, Maurice, the son of the fellow who would have probably been operating E at the time that you were working. So his son operates F.

PM: Yeah.

NP: Yeah. And they're loading ships. It's amusing to see the big ships. The ship is bigger than the elevator.

PM: I know. I've seen them. I've gone up the Kam River and thought, "What the hell is that boat doing?" Yeah. And with nobody. I think the staff used to be there. Sask Pool used to operate those elevators when they called them Pool 10 and Pool 11 and that, but then when the Mailhot gang took them over, lots of times they unloaded a car by themselves. I can't think of his name. He used to run the elevator for him. Turner. That name is--.

NP: Ted? Was it the fellow that we interviewed out in Arthur Street? Bill?

PM: Bill Turner. Oh, yeah. He worked for the government, and then when he retired, he went to work for Mailhot. He'd unload a car by himself to take a break from--. And that's hand shovelled. The shovel days. They had no dumpers.

NP: Yeah, and no augers.

PM: Just for something to do. That's the way he was. He used to drive me crazy at Westfort.

NP: Because it was slow?

PM: Wanting cars. "Anybody wants to get rid of any grain, just call me. I'll take them. I'll unload them. Come back at night, and I'll unload them." He was a nice guy, but one of those guys just phone you all the time, eh? Yeah. I don't know. I guess he's still alive? He could be.

NP: Mmhmm. Yeah. We interviewed him for the project.

PM: Okay, yeah.

NP: Yeah, and Maurice, the son of--. He runs a similar operation.

PM: Oh yeah?

NP: Yeah. Although yesterday, we took a tour of the elevator yesterday because--. I just want to make sure--. Well, maybe I'll say it now because we're pretty close to the end of the interview anyway, but our project is--. I think in the letter you received it said that ideally what we would like to do is set up a grain industry centre that would focus on the history and the industry as it exists because it's still an important industry.

PM: Oh.

NP: Yeah. So we have put in a request for Historic Site status for that elevator, Elevator F, because he's kept stuff from 1913 that still--. He's still using the old scales and everything.

[2:25:23]

PM: Exactly, yeah.

NP: I don't think he's thrown anything out.

PM: I still think he's pulling the grain up on the rope like that, you know.

NP: No, he got rid of the rope drives. [Laughing] But he was saying, I think, he had eight people working that day because they were getting several cars in and because of the size of the backlog of grain on the Prairies he's loading more ships now. So I think he's--.

PM: They used to have a lot of cars on that--. They used to have that E and F, Pool 5, Paterson, and in between them, like with overtime--. At one time all the elevators worked overtime every day and worked Saturday and Sunday and worked overtime. That's in the busy years there. I say Pool 5, for instance. He'd unload like 40 cars a day, and Paterson's the same way. Paterson's about 50 cars. When you take all that out, they're not even unloading that in the port what they unloaded up the river. They're all efficient operations. Sask Pool had the best guys in those elevators. They just got things done. They never said no. "Can you stand ten more cars?" "Yep."

NP: Yeah, because every car was money in their bank.

PM: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Did you gain an appreciation for Thunder Bay's part in the grain trade?

PM: Thunder Bay's--?

NP: Part. Part in the grain trade. Like did you begin to realize just how much was done here and how it fit into sort of--?

PM: Well, you realize how important the grain trade was, but when it all started falling apart there, you started to wonder why. You knew what was happening. You knew that the grain companies and the railroads together were going west, and they didn't give a damn about Thunder Bay. You never appreciated what was happening while it was going. It was a pretty busy place, this port, and like I said, with the elevators working seven days a week, overtime every day. Besides a 24-hour day, they were working an overtime shift in there. You just couldn't--. Grain was going in those elevators. We didn't even know how the hell we did it lots of

times. As far as putting crews on and engines on, nobody ever questioned. If I come into work, say, at that night job, and I could see things are falling apart, I'd just order, "Give me three extra engines on midnight." Sometimes you win, sometimes you lost, but nobody ever questioned you. Not one question because it was just so busy that you had to keep ahead. So.

NP: I would suspect it would be hard to find three idle engines anywhere to get these days. Things are pretty lean, would you say?

PM: Oh, now? They haven't got any engines, and what they've got is a bunch of junk. But when we were in our best grain years there, we got a lot of nice power here. I don't know if you know engines at all, and I don't know because they change them all the time, but the 8100s you ever see—8000-unit engines there—they're kind of like a slick unit. They usually had doubles, and we had about 20 of them here at one time and only because the guy that was in charge—. Again, the CPR put a guy in charge of engines—the whole country worked out of Montreal—he used to come here once a month, and he loved our general yardmaster, and he got whatever. He'd tell him, and he'd get it for him. It just went to show you if you had the right connections, you weren't getting junk. You got the engines. You could put it on the train, and you could pick up and go with it rather than spend all day trying to get going.

[2:30:50]

That was another thing when the CPR did that. The general, what would they call him? They were like district bosses. [Laughs] I can't remember their name. They looked after all the power, and each one looked after his own power, so they were always trying to get all the power in there. Come Monday morning, the power was never in the right place. They opened up a power centre in Montreal, and they looked after the whole country's power from Montreal. It just smoothed out the whole system over.

NP: So when you talk about power, you're talking essentially the engines?

PM: The engines, yeah.

NP: Yeah. Any vivid memories that stick in your mind?

PM: I don't know what sticks in my mind one more than the other.

NP: You know, if you were talking to your grandchildren about, "When I worked on the railway--." So any of those stories that stick in your mind.

PM: Well, I think mostly how you treat people, you get treated yourself. You learn that lesson very quickly. Like I said, I never felt there was anybody on the CPR that give me a hard time, or I give a hard time to, and I think it's the way you learn how to treat people. You treat people right, you'll get treated back right.

NP: Have you had a chance to talk about the most significant events of your long, illustrious career? Most significant events?

PM: No. Well, the most I enjoyed was on that grain job because of two things. Straight days, though I went back lots of times at night for different reasons. But working on the railroad on the midnight shift and working on the railroad on the day shift, it's a different life, different people, different things happen. They used to have the trainmen, and they took the trains to Ignace and back. The switchmen were in the yard and did all the yard work. Well, they combined those two so if you had the seniority, you could either work yard or mainline. And because the guys in the yard worked ten times as hard as the guys on the mainline, all they did was sit on their bums. They didn't do any work really. So when they made that change where a guy could, we lost all kinds of good switchmen went out on the mainline, and in return, we got these--. I don't know what you'd call them. The trainmen come into the yard, and all of a sudden, there's a guy. "You know who he is?" Well, you saw that was a trainman. He's written up foreman, but he doesn't know anything about--. You'd say, "Why don't you go down to Keefer Terminal." "Well, I've never been there before." This is the kind--. And he's a foreman. Why the CPR ever agreed to any of this, who would know. If they had to deal with the result of it. It took probably a couple of years before it smoothed out, eh? [Laughs]

[2:35:26]

NP: Yeah. People making decisions, not realizing how it impacts at the level.

PM: You've got the position, but you never worked.

NP: Yeah, no. I understand what you're saying. If you think about your career, do you feel that what you did—I mean, I think this is a question that says what the answer is—but what your contribution was to Canada's success as a grain trader because it has had a lot of success for a small country with real geographical issues related to where the markets are versus where the grain is grown. What part did you play in helping Canada be a successful international grain trader?

PM: Just the way we moved the grain. We, I guess, kept the process going just by the efficiency that we moved the grain. Like, I don't care what you say about the Thunder Bay, but we handled the grain better than anybody.

NP: And that translates into success as a--?

PM: Well, they sold the grain. It had to get moved. It had to get moved, and we moved it successfully better than anybody. We had a lot of good people. Like I said, they went out of their way in whatever needed doing. I think the years I worked, nobody questioned you on what you were doing. Maybe because things were so busy for a lot of those years that nobody dared question you. I don't know.

NP: [Laughs]

PM: But you just made decisions. Nobody ever phoned me in the morning and said, "What are you doing?" Maybe they knew better to leave you alone. I don't know. [Laughs] But today, you hear now it's pick, pick, pick. When you hear what a guy's got to do, they treat them like kids rather than men, eh? Can't do that, all kinds of forms to fill out. I don't know. When I hear about it, I'm glad I'm not there because I don't know how I could work under that.

NP: Do they have a grain coordinator any longer?

PM: No. No grain coordinator. No Westfort staff anymore. They've got carmen in Westfort, but they're there to do the empties, and that's their job. They moved a couple of times. They used to be in the yard office, that three storey building, and then they moved around, and they built another place, and then they stuck them up at the west end. They're in the end of a building, just like back to a shack damn near. I don't know why.

NP: A circle.

PM: Yeah.

NP: Any questions that I should have asked you that I haven't?

PM: I have no idea because I had no idea what you were going to ask me. I thought a lot of things, but I didn't know--.

NP: Oh, were there some I should have asked?

PM: No, no, no. There's lots I wouldn't tell you either. [Laughing]

NP: "If she asks me this, I'm not going to answer."

PM: Oh, no, no. I would, I would just lie to you. [Laughing] No, but I grew up on a railroad that if you had to tell a lie, you told a lie, kind of thing. That's the railroad I grew up on. If you had to tell a lie, you tell a lie. I think the railroad taught you how to lie. For instance, if something happened, a little accident, well, if you could cover it up, you cover it up. An engine broke down. Well, the CPR used to tell you, "You can't show engines breaking down. We don't have engines breaking down." So what do you do? You tell a lie. But that's the railroad that I grew up on that if you told a lie and they caught you, you went, "Oh, well." You never thought anything of it. It was just part of the job.

[2:40:37]

I'll tell you a little story just involving me one time. The coal terminal, okay? It has to have one more car than the coal cars to advance the whole system. It comes like in between and it pulls the whole train up right in the shed, eh? So you always need one more car. So you never wanted to put a van on there because you need lots of time. You run out of vans, and you couldn't have it sitting over at the coal terminal when it should be going back west again. That's how short they were of vans then.

NP: What are vans?

PM: The caboose. Back when they had cabooses. [Laughs]

NP: Okay.

PM: So you'd take the van off, and you'd throw anything on it. A couple of times when they advanced that last car, the pressure of that whole train—the last car was usually an empty—it would jump the track. Well, twice they had a picture in the *Chronicle Journal* of a car standing up sideways or whatever it was trying to do, government hopper. That was a no-no, putting a government hopper in a position like that. So our superintendent, he put a word out, "No more government hoppers, and if you do I'm going to fire you," was his exact words. So about two weeks later, I see the coal train going over. What's on the tail end of it? A government hopper. I say, "Why'd you put a government hopper on?" He says, "That's the only car there was. There was no--." I said, "There's a million cars. Put some old broken down--. It doesn't matter." He said, "Well, I never thought." I said, "Well, you know what happens if what's-his-name sees that car."

Next thing you know, the phone's ringing. Superintendent. "Why have you got a government hopper on the tail end of the train?" I said, "I don't think so." [Laughs] I thought he was looking at the computer and saw it, and I started telling him that I think that guy made a mistake and put that on. He said, "Don't lie to me." And I thought, "Oh-oh. How does he know?" And he says, "I'll tell you

where I am. I'm standing on the Jackknife Bridge, and it's going underneath me." "Oh, oh." He hung up the phone. Never heard anything more. He knew why I was lying. He knew I didn't put the damn thing on, but that's just the--. You just did that. You covered things up automatically, eh?

NP: So were the elevator managers doing the same thing when they were doing something they weren't supposed to be doing relative to the--?

PM: Well, if anything, they would call you. Most of them would call if something got broken. They would say, "Well, can you get a carman up here and wire it up?" You'd never show it, eh? But that's just the way it was. Better to just keep 'em going.

NP: So what you're saying—at least to me, a layperson—what I'm seeing here is you really have to be leery of statistics that come out and say certain things because they may not be showing the accurate picture. [Laughs]

PM: Oh, of course not. Well, they're not. For instance, trains. All these trains running through east to west. They're all on schedules, the fast ones. But if you look and see a train on-time from Vancouver to Montreal, it could have been four hours late at one point. It won't show it on that report. As long as it gets to the destination on-time, it's on-time no matter what. I've been on a passenger train that was four hours late leaving Moosejaw come into Thunder Bay on time. [Laughs]

[2:45:24]

NP: Well, I went on a passenger train that was on-time but 24 hours late. [Laughs]

PM: Yeah. I've been that way too. I've been that way too. Catch the next day's train, yeah. Yeah, in the wintertime.

NP: Well, Monika, anything that you wanted to--? If you can speak! Anything you wanted to ask or add?

PM: I don't know if I've been helpful.

NP: Oh, yes!

PM: I have?

NP: Yes, just what I was hoping. You filled in a big void. Like we have not talked to anybody who was grain coordinator, so this is really good. Did you ever keep any memorabilia?

PM: You know, I had a little bit when I quit, but over the years I just--.

NP: Tossed it out?

PM: I don't know. I passed it on or I gift my kids some stuff that they don't want.

NP: Pictures and things?

PM: Not really. Just things I wanted to have, eh?

NP: Because if we do get the grain centre going, we obviously want to have something about the railway to be a critical piece.

PM: Yeah. No, I haven't really got any pictures. I took--.

NP: Too busy working!

PM: I'll bet you that was the reason, yeah.

NP: Yeah. Well, thank you very much. It has been a wonderful time, and I just gazed at my watch. I couldn't believe what the time was! So we're saying goodbye officially, and Monika is shutting us up. [Laughs]

PM: Yeah.

End of interview.