

**Narrator:** Roderick Medwick (RM)

**Company Affiliations:** Canadian National Railway (CNR), Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), Cando Rail & Terminals

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**Interviewer:** Nancy Perozzo (NP)

**Recorder:** Nancy Perozzo (NP)

**Transcriber:** Sarah Lorenowich (SL)

**Summary:** Former general yardmaster Roderick Medwick discusses his career on the railway in Thunder Bay for Canadian National Railway, Canadian Pacific Railway, and Cando Rail & Terminals. He describes his first jobs with CNR as a car checker, machine clerk, and train clerk, and he shares the importance of these jobs for keeping an accurate inventory of railcars coming in and out of the city. He then describes his last job with the CNR as a grain distributor before moving to the CPR as a yardman. At the CPR, Medwick discusses his promotion to division trainer, yardmaster, and general yardmaster, with a brief period as road manager as well before moving to Cando Rail and managing their industrial operations. He describes the many changes to the railways over his career, including the switch from boxcars to hopper cars, computerization of clerical work, improvements to health and safety regulations, and the decline in alcohol and drug use on the job. Medwick also shares memorable stories of railcars falling into the lake due to mechanical failures and of a near accident while running on top of boxcars. Other topics discussed include the division of trackage and elevator service between each railway, the shift of traffic towards the West Coast, the historic and current ownership of railway land, and the difference in rail trackage around different elevators.

**Keywords:** Canadian National Railway (CNR) ; Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR); Cando Rail & Terminals; Grain transportation—Rail; Railcar checking; Switchmen; Rail yards; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Grain pooling; Grain varieties; Non-board grains; Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); Machine clerk; Train clerk; IBM machines; Train consists; Computerization; Train crews; Grain Transportation Agency (GTA); Railcar allocation; Railway logistics; Management; Yardmasters; General yardmasters; Boxcars; Hopper cars; Grain doors; Health and safety; Alcohol and drug abuse; Personnel training; Accidents and injuries; Locomotive engineers; Richardson Elevator; Viterra Elevator A (SWP Pool 7); Cargill Elevator—Thunder Bay; Mission Terminal; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Elevator 10; Consolidated Elevator (Pool 11); CPR Elevator D; Paterson Elevator; Calgary; Vancouver

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: It's March 14<sup>th</sup>, and the interview is being conducted at Academy Towers. I'll have our interviewee introduce himself so that we have his name on tape. That's 2013. Okay.

RM: Okay. My name is Rod Medwick. It's March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

NP: Great. Now, Rod, I'm very pleased to finally conduct this interview because I think we've been communicating for about three years. [Laughs]

RM: I think it's closer to about six.

NP: Well, that's true. When we first talked to you about our project.

RM: Right, yeah.

NP: But one of the reasons that I'm very pleased to conduct the interview is because, as I mentioned to you, we're a little slight on the railway side of our interview project. And you've had experience with three railway lines which we'll talk about in great length: the CNR [Canadian National Railway], the CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway], and a new short line railway, is that a good way of putting it?

RM: Industrial rails.

NP: Industrial railway, Cando. Before we start on your career, I want to ask, did you grow up in Thunder Bay?

RM: Yes.

NP: What area of the city?

RM: Originally grew up on Dease Street and then moved to Victoria Avenue and lived a majority of my life there. Once I got married, I moved to Ford Street and now to Broadway Avenue.

NP: Okay. Now, the reason I ask that question is for people who grew up in Thunder Bay, we like to know what was your first introduction to the grain industry prior to working on the railway?

RM: Well, it would have been when I was pretty young. My father worked for the railway, so on Sundays we used to go for a drive along the harbour to all the different tracks by the grain elevators.

NP: What did you learn from your dad?

RM: There was a lot of roads that you never would see, the ordinary person, if you didn't work at the railway or a grain elevator.

NP: Was he proud of his work?

RM: Yes. Yeah.

NP: Yeah. And what did he do with the railway?

RM: He was a switchman at CN.

NP: And he started--? When would he have started?

RM: Oh, I believe he started in 1943 at CP. He worked there until 1953, and then he went to CN.

NP: Because of the industry in Thunder Bay, I would imagine most of the tour took you along by the grain elevators.

RM: Yes. From one side of the city all the way to the other. From the South Side right to the North Side.

NP: Any thoughts as a kid about those elevators? Did you ever get in one?

RM: No. Actually, I did. Not inside a grain elevator, I got inside--. My grandfather worked at an elevator that's down by where Dowe Chemical was on Montreal Street, Neebing Avenue/Montreal Street.

NP: Yes. So the Electric or the Northwest Elevator.

RM: It was one of those, yeah. He was a guard there or security or something, so a few times we'd go there on a Sunday. Basically, we just entered the building. Never really got through the elevator at all.

NP: And when did your grandfather come to Thunder Bay?

RM: I'm not too sure.

NP: Really early on?

RM: Yeah. This grandfather was my grandmother's second husband after her first husband passed away. So I really don't know much about him.

NP: Any other people in your family in the elevator business?

RM: Yeah. Not in the elevator business, in the railway business.

NP: In the railway business. That tends to be the case.

RM: Yes. My father. Like I say, my grandfather, my father's father, my two uncles on my father's side. I have a cousin that works in the railway business, and actually a couple second cousins, and I have a son-in-law right now that works for the railway.

NP: Okay. Now any stories from the old guys about what it was like in the early days that you remember?

RM: Not really, no. I mean, I think when I started in 1974, '72, with CN, it wasn't much different than what they worked in.

NP: The major changes hadn't taken place yet?

RM: No. The changes didn't take place until the mid '70s.

NP: Okay. Well, unless you have some rough teenage years or skulking-around-the-elevators stories, we'll--. [Laughs]

RM: No, none at all.

NP: We'll move onto your official career. Now, I have a long list that you gave me before we started taping about the work that you do with CN. So how did you come to be involved with CN to begin with?

RM: I had just finished high school in 1972, looking for a summer job. My father worked for the CN, so he got me a job in the office. I started off as a car checker. In other words, I went out there and checked car numbers on various cars, and also on the grain trains that would come into Thunder Bay, we would write on a little six-card as they were called back in those days, computer cards.

**[0:05:24]**

NP: Six-card?

RM: Six-cards what they were called. They went into an IBM computer keypunch machine. We used to write down the type of grain that was inside the car, and then we'd walk alongside the tracks and staple it to the side of the car.

NP: So that information wasn't--?

RM: That information was for the switchman, okay, so that when they switched the cars, they could see what kind of grain was inside the car.

NP: So that wasn't put on the car at its point of origin?

RM: No. No, not these tags.

NP: Okay.

RM: There was a tag on there from whoever loaded the car.

NP: Now, this may seem sort of pointless to you, but given the intent of our project, which is to try to have as much information as we can about the grain industry right down to the person who swept out the grain cars, I'm going to ask you about each of these positions.

RM: Okay.

NP: I don't want you to dwell on it, but I do want you to tell us why the position existed, because most of the time there was a reason, [laughs] and what were the main duties. So you said you started as a car checker.

RM: Okay. The main duty of a car checker was to go out into the yard, watch what the switchman did. In other words, when they switched the cars, at the end of your shift, you'd come back in. You'd have all the numbers written down of all the cars on all the tracks, and that information was given to the yardmaster. With those checks, they would mark them up and hand them to the next crew to switch those tracks.

NP: Okay. Now--.

RM: Now, that's what the car checker did. Also what the car checker did was trains arriving and departing Thunder Bay. I'm saying grain, empty trains, coal trains—not a lot of coal trains back then—but ore trains. We checked the car, and we'd have to actually check the tare weight on the side of the car for the train clerk, who would build the consist for a crew to take the train.

NP: Okay, now, you see, you've used a fair bit of language there that to me, the unknowing, I'd like some information on. Switching means simply--?

RM: Switching means moving cars from one track to another.

NP: Because certain--. Let's stick with grain with all our examples, since this is a grain--. So what would that mean?

RM: As far as the grain trade went, it would mean that certain elevators took certain commodities. An example would be back in those days, Pool 1 unloaded two types of grain: wheat and durum. The elevator next-door, which was McCabe's, they unloaded wheat, durum, and barley, and oats. But a place like Pool 1 didn't unload oats, so those cars couldn't go to Pool 1. So they had to be switched out of trains.

NP: Okay. So I was always under the impression that the cars would, like, have an address. "Going to Pool 1, Thunder Bay." Not the case?

RM: Not the case back then. Back then it was called poolable grain. Every elevator in town had a percentage of the poolable grain. So a place back then--. Sask Wheat Pool would have been the biggest elevator with the biggest percentage, in around 40 percent. So a majority of the grain went to Pool 7.

NP: Did it matter what kind of grain?

RM: Yes, it did.

NP: Other than what you were saying about--.

RM: Yeah, it did. Certain elevators--.

NP: Was everything pooled then?

RM: Everything was pooled. All the grains were pooled.

NP: Mustard seed and--.

RM: No. There wasn't that much of that stuff back then. Those were called non-boards back then. It wasn't board grain. It wasn't poolable, so it had to go directly to whatever house it was destined for. That was a very small percentage of the cars, maybe two percent of the cars that arrived.

NP: So when you went out as the car checker, then, you went out just to get the numbers?

RM: I would get the numbers on the cars that were leaving Thunder Bay, going west, empties, grain empties.

NP: And the checker coming in?

RM: And the cars coming in, I would staple contents of the car on the side. I would staple barley B-A-R on the side of the car, so the switchman knew that car was a car of barley.

NP: Okay. And where did you get that information?

RM: I got that information from the grain distributor. The grain distributor looked at all the trains arriving in Thunder Bay, looked at all the consists—and the consist is a record of all the cars with the type of grain that's in the car, how much, the weight—and he'd go through and look at all those cars to see if any of those cars were non-poolable.

NP: Okay. So I don't need to get in front of myself here because we have the grain distributor who will probably fill in some of the--. When we get to that person, that person will--.

**[0:10:01]**

RM: Yeah. The grain distributor was a person who just worked strictly days only. It wasn't 24/7 like all the rest of the positions.

NP: And the grain distributor would be the one that provided you with the information to put on the cars?

RM: Yes, to put on the cars.

NP: And then the switchmen would be the ones to watch to make sure--.

RM: Yeah. The switchmen would get a consist or a switch list from--.

NP: What's a con--?

RM: A consist is what a train crew has when they're moving a freight train from one destination to the next. Okay? And a yard crew would get a switch list with the car numbers that are on there, and any cars that have to go on any different tracks.

NP: Now, before I forget, because you mentioned it, when you were sending the cars back, you said you had to go and check the tare, was it? What's that?

RM: The tare is the weight of the car.

NP: And, like, is there a scale in the yard?

RM: No. Each car is--. Stamped on the side of the car, painted on the side of the car, the weight of the car when it's empty. That's the tare weight.

NP: Okay.

RM: Okay. And then there's the load limit for the amount of product that can be put into a car.

NP: And is that load limit like a physical line or is it a weight?



RM: No. It's a weight.

NP: And when it's loaded, then, at the elevator, the country elevator, then it would be weighed there?

RM: Yeah. Nowadays with a hopper car, a hopper car tare weight is about 32 tonnes, and the load limit is 100 tonnes. So theoretically, a hopper car can weigh 132 tonnes if it's fully loaded. Okay?

NP: Okay. Now, as a car checker, what is the importance of that? I know what they did, but what is the importance of it? And if it's a little easier to answer, what would happen if the car checker didn't do the job right?

RM: I wouldn't have inventory of all the cars in the yard.

NP: And--?

RM: We wouldn't know what's out there. We wouldn't be able to switch the cars. We wouldn't be able to move the cars. We wouldn't be able to build trains.

NP: You wouldn't even necessarily know the staff you needed, the number of people you needed?

RM: Yeah, I guess you could probably say that. But back in the early 1970s in Thunder Bay at any given time, there was probably 4,000 railcars in this city, and you had to keep inventory control, and the car checking physically going out there and checking cars was the only way to control the inventory. Today, it's all done with computers.

NP: Okay. Now, with the physical set up of CN—because that's who you started with—where did the railway track go?

RM: Well, CN's main yard was in Neebing, which is the far west-southwest part of the city. And from Neebing, they ran right down the middle of the city into what they called Port Arthur Yard, which is where the elevators such as Pool 7, Canada Malt, Pool 3 back then, Pool 1, all those elevators were located, and then along to Current River where the rest of the elevators were in Current River.

NP: So when you say it went through the middle of the city--.

RM: There's about 12 miles worth of track.

NP: Is that the one that goes along behind Kingsway?

RM: Yes, that would be CN.

NP: Okay.

RM: Or the one that crosses Arthur Street, Victoria Avenue, all those streets.

NP: Okay.

RM: Okay?

NP: Yeah. Where does CP come in?

RM: CP runs along the Kam River and along the lake. So you'd cross the tracks at CP if you're going down to Abitibi Bowater.

NP: Okay. So it has overpasses along part of that.

RM: Yes. It's got one underpass at James Street, and then there's really no other crossings until it gets to this side of town.

NP: Okay. Now, since your time when you started or when you became familiar with railways, has the location of the trackage remained pretty much the same, or have there been changes in the trackage?

RM: Most of the trackage has been taken out.

NP: But the pathway, CP and CN, are pretty much the same?

RM: The pathway's the same. The only difference with CN is there used the be, actually probably right outside your window here, they had a yard here when they had iron ore. It used to go to the iron ore dock, and that's how it got--.

NP: Okay.

RM: Okay. But other than that, the rest of it's still there. The footprint is still there.

NP: Okay. So CN, then, at the time you were working for them, they delivered to all the elevators.

RM: Uh, no.

NP: Okay.

RM: CN and CP delivered to different elevators in Thunder Bay. Geographically, if you start at the--. I'm going to start at the south side of the city.

NP: Okay. So the ones by Bowater.

RM: Yeah. Okay, the one on Bowater was serviced by the CP. That was torn down before I started, but it was there when I was young.

NP: What about the--.

RM: Along the Kam River, all along the Kam River. The first ones coming along the Kam River, there was a Paterson Elevator, a few Pool 5s, a Pool 10, and a Pool 11. Those were jointly serviced by both railways. Paterson, Pool 5, and Pool 10. Pool 11 was serviced by CP, east of D was serviced by CP. Pool 8, Empire Elevator, those were all CP elevators. Then as you got along the waterfront, P&H [Parrish & Heimbecker], Pool 1, and McCabe's were CP. There was also another one--.

**[0:15:35]**

NP: Thunder Bay Elevator there.

RM: Thunder Bay Elevator was there in 1972 when I worked at CN. That was serviced by CN, and then the two Pool 7 elevators A and B, Canada Malt, Pool 3, Pool 6 were all CN. And then you had that Pool 2, which was CP. Richardson's was CP.

NP: Pool 4?

RM: Pool 4 A and B were both--. Pool 4B was CP, part of Pool 4A was CN. The majority was CP. And then you had an Alberta Pool 9 that was CN, and then you had which is now--. I don't know. They change all the time. [Laughing]

NP: UGG [United Grain Growers] at the time.

RM: UGG at the time, yeah. It was a CN elevator.

NP: Okay. How did that come about? Do you know why different railways were servicing different--? And did you compete for it or what was, was and that was it?

RM: It was all land ownership. You know, CP had the core coming through Thunder Bay in the 1800s when they built the rail line, and there were a whole bunch of other small railways in Thunder Bay. Many small railways. Probably 15 or 20 other small railways. You can look it up. There's tons. Then probably in the early 1920s, the Canadian Government bought all those railways and formed Canadian National Railway, so they acquired all that land, that all these little railways ran on.

NP: Now, we did miss out two, and that was—well, three probably, but one that would have gone way back that you might not have remembered—there was one on the island.

RM: Yeah, that was not operating when I started my railway career.

NP: So who serviced the island?

RM: That would have been CP.

NP: And then there were the two out--. Searle and--.

RM: Yeah, those are still there today.

NP: Cargill.

RM: It was all CN.

NP: That was CN.

RM: That was CN. Those are still there today as Mission Terminal and Cargill's still there.

NP: Yeah. Good. I really appreciate that. That's the first time I've had that cleared up. And I've read a lot of the history, and it just seems like a blur. So that's been really helpful to have that information.

RM: Yeah. Just it was land ownership. And actually, the Intercity area, the land was owned by CN, but CP leased the land from CN to allow the service to P&H, Pool 1, and McCabe's.

NP: Now that was how it was when you started.

RM: Mmhmm. How is it today?

NP: And that's--. Yeah.

RM: Well, today's a lot different. I worked on a project back in 2000 to allow CP—because I worked for CP—to get into all the elevators in Thunder Bay. It was a project called Direct Access, which allowed both railways to service every elevator.

NP: Was that a difficult agreement to--?

RM: Was it difficult? It was difficult locally with the people from CN because they had the ownership of most of the land here in Thunder Bay. Like right now, today, with the elevators that are still standing here in Thunder Bay, CP has two elevators on their property being Pool 10 and Richardson's. All the rest are on CN property.

NP: Hm. I'm particularly interested in this because of the extension of this project. Do CN and CP still own the land, or did they get rid of a lot of land too? Do you know?

RM: They still own all the land. The only land that's gone is where this hill yard was at one time where you're living. [Laughing]

NP: I can feel the vibes! [Laughs]

RM: Yeah. But no, they still own the land. A lot of tracks have been torn up. Back in the heyday in the late '80s when the railways were unloading 1,000 railcars a day, what they had to do was exchange cars.

NP: What does that mean?

RM: Because CP couldn't service Pool 7, so they had to hand cars over to CN to put their railcars into Pool 7, and vice versa. CN would bring cars in for Pool 1, hand them over to CP to place them in there.

NP: Would that arrangement have been made through the Wheat Board?

RM: No. Through the railways. They paid on a per diem, per car.

**[0:20:02]**

NP: Was there a fair bit of competition between the two railways?

RM: Not really.

NP: Or was it more cooperation?

RM: Not really. I mean, historically, half the grain that's grown in Canada used to come to this port. The other half used to go to the West Coast. CN gets about 70 percent of the grain on the West Coast and about 30 percent of the grain here. CP gets 70 percent of the grain here and 30 percent on the West Coast. That's how it works.

NP: Now, since we're talking about that, I was just reading the *Western Producer*, which I find to be very interesting.

RM: Okay.

NP: It's a newspaper from Saskatchewan, I guess, is where it's set up. They were talking about the new Burlington Northern Santa Fe. Is that the BNSF?

RM: BNSF, yes.

NP: Setting up a huge depot in southeastern Saskatchewan right on the border.

RM: Mmhmm.

NP: 40 million tonne capacity to fill cars and ship south.

RM: Yeah.

NP: So that, from a--.

RM: How many million tonnes?

NP: I think it was 40. I've got the article.

RM: Yeah. I don't know. This port used to only unload 20 million. 40 mil is a lot of grain.

NP: I know. That's why I wonder.

RM: I think the country only, in the best crop year, I think it's only been about 55 million tonnes.

NP: Yeah. Well, it's right on the border, so I think it may also be handling some US grain. Anyway, I was wondering whether you had gotten wind of that one.

RM: No, I never--. Nope.

NP: Okay. Let's move on then. We've got the car checker's work, and then you moved onto machine clerk. So what does a machine clerk do, why is that important, and what happens if they don't do it right?

RM: What a machine clerk did was keypunch the IBM cards with the car number, whether it was a load or an empty, the tare weights of the cars, the destination, the shipper, the consignee, and whatever was in the car. They put those little computer cards on a drum, all right, and it would print out a consist for a train crew to take a train. That's basically what he did.

NP: Okay. So clerical.

RM: Clerical inside a machine room.

NP: So if they miss something, a train would go without a car that it probably should have had?

RM: That's right.

NP: And then you just pay a penalty, I mean, that's life? You deal with a lot of cars.

RM: Well, the cars were checked before we made up the trains, okay?

NP: So it was pretty efficient.

RM: Pretty efficient.

NP: Not many mistakes.

RM: Not many mistakes, no.

NP: Especially when you were doing the job.

RM: Especially when I was doing it, yeah.

NP: [Laughs]

RM: [Coughs] Excuse me.

NP: Then you moved onto a train clerk.

RM: Train clerk was the one that actually printed off the consist. The machine clerk built the IBM keycards, and the train clerk took those cards, put them in the machine, and printed off consists, and then handed it to the train crew before they left.

NP: Now, to somebody listening to this nowadays or listening to it--. [Laughing]

RM: Yeah. Nowadays, I mean, it hasn't changed much other than everything's handled with a computer. I mean, those were the computers of the day.



NP: So you still have your printout, or they have--?

RM: Yeah, they still get a printout. Yeah.

NP: So I want to go back because I don't know if you recall or if you were working with anybody at the time, because when you started, that was really the beginning of the IBM computerization age. What did they do before that?

RM: I really don't know. I really don't know.

NP: Yeah. Must have been--.

RM: Well, I'm thinking they must have had teletype machines probably before that, but the machine room--. Actually, when I left CN in 1974, they had just built a new facility at Neebing yard, and they had a machine room that was probably 3,000 square feet, all padded walls, just full of keypunch machines and sorters. [Laughs] On a Sunday night, what we would do on a Sunday night, we'd have to sort all the cars in numerical order. You'd have to take every car and put it through a machine, sort the runoff, different reports for people.

NP: Every card?

RM: Every card of every car. We also did an inventory of cars that were on-line, you know, different sidings between here and Winnipeg, and between Thunder Bay going up north to Hornepayne.

NP: Hm! Now, the communication, then, would have switched over from this and the teletype and the telex to computerization in the '90s, mid '90s?

**[0:25:09]**

RM: Actually, probably in the '70s. I was working at CP in the '70s. We used to have, well, there was a supervisor like a yardmaster at CP in the '70s--. Again, two different railways, two different systems. They had a board on a wall that had coloured cards that had all the tracks on this great big board on the wall. You'd take the colour cards out, you'd write them down on a switch list, give the switch list to the crew, and the crew came back and told you how they switched it, then you'd move the cars to the different tracks. They had it colour coded for destination east, west, grain elevators, et cetera. And then 1979, CP had a computer system. It was called Yards, and everything was inside the computer screen. It was actually pretty fantastic for the 1970s. You could look at the

computer screen and look at a yard that probably held about 500 cars. It would be like looking down at the cars from a helicopter and said, “This car is going to Toronto, that goes to Winnipeg, this goes to Pool 1, that goes to Pool 7.” And that’s how you made a switch list out for a crew. You’d take that track, colour up the cars, “It goes here, here, here, here,” and you could issue the list to a crew, and then you could look at the screen, project it how it would be at the end of their shift, and it would show you all the cars, how they would end up at the end of the shift. It was pretty amazing for 1979.

NP: Yeah. Did CP design its own programs, or did they bring in--?

RM: Yes, they did.

NP: They did.

RM: They designed their own, yeah.

NP: And where was head office at that time for CP?

RM: CP would have been in probably, back then, Vancouver.

NP: Now?

RM: Calgary.

NP: Yeah.

RM: Yeah.

NP: Okay. And CN always out of Montreal?

RM: Always out of Montreal, yeah.

NP: The grain distributor was your last position of note with CNR before you moved over to CPR. What--?

RM: The grain distributor would look at the consists of the incoming grain trains and go through all the car numbers to see if any of the cars were diverted or non-poolable. So if they weren't board grain, they couldn't go anywhere. They had to go to a specific elevator. And that's what we do. Yeah.

NP: Now, how did the--. You had mentioned that the elevators receive the cars based upon the percentage that they were allowed under the pool. How did you know that, and how did you keep track?

RM: That was all taken care of back then by the GTA, Grain Transportation Agency, that was dissolved in 1996.

NP: And what happened after that then?

RM: What happened after that? The railways did it on their own.

NP: Okay. And was that a big pain in the neck?

RM: It was a pain for a couple of years, and then after that, everything went poolable. There was no such thing as board grain. Everything was house specific.

NP: And mentioned on the train?

RM: Yeah.

NP: Okay.

RM: Yeah.

NP: Now, who out of this list—the car checker, machine checker, the train clerk, or the grain distributor—any of them keep track of issues with cars as they came in? For example--.

RM: Plug a hole, you mean?

NP: Yeah.

RM: That would be the car checker that would have noticed a hole in the car, and then we'd get a grain door man to plug a hole in the car. That was it.

NP: Grain door man.

RM: Grain door man.

NP: Now, this really, strange as it may seem, again—this project has really affected my sanity [laughs]—but I am really interested in a grain door man.

RM: What is a grain door man?

NP: Why it was important. How did that system work?

RM: All the cars were boxcars back then, so what the grain door man did was they'd build these doors that probably went about two thirds of the way up a door on a boxcar. Some were made out of wood and cardboard, some with metal strapping and cardboard. So basically, they would strap this side of the door, nail it with wood and cardboard, both doors, and then when it went to a country elevator, they would fill it above the door in the part that was secure, then they'd close the door. Then what would happen when a car would be unloaded, some elevators had little bobcats that went inside and unloaded, some had augers, some had shovels. They'd bust through the grain door, open up the door--.

**[0:30:11]**

NP: Okay. Now, I can understand how you could bust through the door with a--.

RM: Cardboard and steel.

NP: Yeah. With a bobcat. What did those people who didn't have bobcat systems do?

RM: Some of them had augers. Some of them knocked down the door. It wasn't that it was nailed all the way up. Like, when I say boards, a board here a board here. Maybe three boards holding it with cardboard on the other side.

NP: So brute strength then with a sledgehammer?

RM: Exactly. Sledgehammer, whatever. Knock through it, unload the grain, and then the grain door men, they would--. All that refuge would be left inside the empty railcar when it came out of the elevator. It would be hanging out of the door, and they would take that refuge out of the car as the switch crew was pulling the cars by.

NP: Okay. And then what happened to that refuge that you're talking about?

RM: I think a lot of people built some houses with it.

NP: So it was in pretty good shape?

RM: It was wood.

NP: Like, it was good wood?

RM: It was good wood, yeah. It wasn't pressure treated, but it was good wood.

NP: Did the railways salvage it for--. Or did they try to?

RM: Yeah, they salvaged it. Yeah, they tried to salvage it. Whatever was good, whatever boards weren't busted up, they would salvage, yeah, and reuse.

NP: Okay. So when we go--. I'm going back to the beginning of the line when you talked about before the cars were delivered to the primary elevators on the Prairies the doors would be built. Where did CN or CP build those doors?

RM: Some cars were done here in town. The rest was done out in the west of Thunder Bay.

NP: So the empty cars would leave here with new grain doors on them in some cases?

RM: Some. Some cars. Yes.

NP: And then would it be in the major yards in Winnipeg where the others would be--?

RM: I would assume Winnipeg for CP, probably would have been for both CN and CP where they put the grain doors in.

NP: Okay. Now, here in town, then, where was the refuge amassed? Was there a place where the salvageable stuff went?

RM: Yeah. Well, for CP it was down on the Kam River, right in front of the depot on the Kam River. CN, they amassed most of their stuff in Neebing yard, and then they would fill cars up with grain door boards and ship them out west.

NP: Lifted by hand into the cars or--?

RM: Mmhmm. Yeah.

NP: Summer student work. [Laughing]

RM: A lot of people started their career in the grain door department.

NP: Yeah?

RM: Yeah. And the grain door department was phased out late '70s when the fleet was just about all hoppers.

NP: Mmhmm. Now, I have a question about old boxcars. Boxcars changed over time, I believe, in size. There were little guys to begin with.

RM: Yeah. Boxcars were 40 feet long. They didn't change in size, okay? A grain boxcar was 40 feet. Yeah. Grain hopper, 50 feet.

NP: Okay.

RM: Okay? I mean, there's lots of boxcars that are 50, 60, 75 feet, but they weren't in grain service. There were only 40-foot cars. Some had a higher load limit than others.

NP: And what would make the difference there?

RM: The build of the car.

NP: Where were they built? In Canada usually?

RM: Mostly in Canada, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I never really thought about that, but yeah.

NP: Since we're talking about grain cars then, any comments you have to make about the switch over from boxcars to hoppers relative to the work that you were doing?

RM: It was quite confusing when I was a switchman filling a grain elevator. When we first started, everything was boxcars. I'll give you an example. Let's just say Pool 1, it held 16 boxcars from the spot to Lake Superior. So that's pretty simple, 16 boxcars 40 feet long. If you had 12 hopper cars, that would be the same length. Okay? But when you're pushing cars into an elevator at midnight and you had two boxes, a hopper, a box, a hopper, you started having to do the math in your head so you didn't put the cars in the lake. It was tough.

NP: Yeah. So cars went in the lake?

RM: Cars went in the lake, yes.

NP: On your watch?

RM: On my watch, yes, once. Yeah.

NP: [Laughs] So tell me that story and what you had to do after you discovered the little mix up?

RM: August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1974. I was working midnights. I was shoving into Pool 1. I was what we called the field man back then. It was three men on a crew. One was a foreman, the second senior guy was the field man, and the junior person was what we called the head-end man, and of course, we had a locomotive engineer running the locomotive.

**[0:35:16]**

NP: Head-end man meaning--?

RM: Meaning the person that's standing on the boxcar right next to the engine giving signals to the engineer.

NP: Okay.

RM: We didn't have radios. Everything was hand signals. So the field man would be on the lead car going into any grain elevator, and the field man would relay the signal to the foreman, who'd be standing in the middle of the movement, who'd relay the signal back to the head-end man that would be standing on the first car next to the engine. We were pushing into Pool 1 this particular night, and we were shoving in maybe about 45 cars. I was giving--. What we used to do is as you went into the elevator, we never rode all the way to Lake Superior. We used to get off inside the workhouse on the ground, take up a position on the grounds so that a foreman could still see you, and we'd count the cars as they're going past to make sure you're putting 16 cars into the elevator. As I got off and I'm giving signals to the foreman--. The only signal you had was "three-cars," which meant you had three cars to go before we have to stop. And three cars, depending on the speed of the locomotive engineer, could have been 500 feet because you have to judge the speed for the engineer to be able to slow down to react to your signal.

So I gave a three car-length signal, and we weren't slowing down. I gave it two, and then I started giving a stop signal, and the cars were still coming through the house. I noticed the foreman yelling, "Catch the cars!" And I thought, "Why would you pull the pin on the cars?" And he said, "The knuckle broke." So now we had a string of cars running freely into Lake Superior. So I jumped up on the cars, and I started running across the top tying on the hand brakes—they were boxcars—and then as I was putting the hand brakes on, I could feel the cars going into Lake Superior. It would be like a little extra tug as it fell into Lake Superior. So it was, two cars ended up in the lake that night, and all the rest I stopped with the handbrakes. So that was my story of cars going in the lake.

NP: [Laughs] So what, from your experience then, what process did that--?

RM: How did things change?

NP: Let's talk about that, and then I'll come back to what process did that set in motion. So how did you--. What did you have to do? How did they get out of the lake? But--.

RM: What they do is they would have to hook up the cars that went in Lake Superior. They would hook them up with a cable, and they'd drag them back to Keefer Terminal alongside where the--. I'm trying to think of where the icebreaker pulls it in. Along there where it's nice and flat, they would drag the car in because the cars would float because they had air in them. So the cars would float. The only thing that would have fallen to the bottom of Lake Superior would be the wheels. So they'd pull the car over, and they'd lift it up with a crane and then dive down and grab the wheels and chain them and bring them over.



NP: A tug would be doing this work?

RM: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Okay. And then the paperwork begins.

RM: Mmhmm.

NP: How does that work? Who needs to be informed? Who is responsible? How do you make up for the grain? Do you do anything with the grain that you salvage?

RM: I really don't know back then what they did with the grain. I have no idea. No.

NP: Okay. The hand signals.

RM: Mmhmm.

NP: I was talking to a fellow, a long-term engineer from CN, and he was talking about the hand signals. Was that a part of your training? Did you have to be actually formally trained in hand signals?

RM: Formally trained? [Laughs] Actually—[coughs] excuse me—the formal training I had when I started at CP consisted of about an hour and 30 minutes, and then you went to work.

NP: Mmhmm. But you came in as a seasoned guy from CN.

RM: No, I came in as a--. I maybe had a step over other people, yes, because I had been around the railyard, but I hadn't switched boxcars.

NP: So hand signals, were they complicated or it was just--.

RM: No, hand signals were pretty basic. There was only a few signals. A round circle was a back up. Straight up and down--.

NP: When you say a round signal, that's just holding two hand--. Oh. That's your whole arm.

RM: Whole arm going around in a circle would be a back up. Your hand going up and down would be go forward, and this would mean—going across your body—would mean to stop.

**[0:40:00]**

NP: That's it?

RM: Those were the three. And car length signals were just a move of your hand or your lamp above your head. I'll give you an example. This would be three cars. One, two, three.

NP: So people had to be alert.

RM: People had to be alert, yes.

NP: At night, was that a problem? Not so much being alert at night, but some of those hand signals if you were working at night--.

RM: No. It was difficult to see the lamp at night with all the lights. As you pushed into some of these grain elevators here, you know, there were lights in front of the elevators, there were lights in the city. You had to keep a pretty sharp eye on what you were looking for. Being the field man was probably the simplest job because you were the one giving the signals to control the movement. The foreman had the toughest job because as the cars went around the curves, the foreman would have to run four or five car lengths this way to see that signal then run back to give the signal to the other person.

NP: Now, the--. You were talking about hopping onto the top of the car, plus there was another guy standing on top of the car.

RM: We were all on top of the cars.

NP: You were all on top of the cars?

RM: Yes. All of us.

NP: Now, this sounds really safe to a layperson. [Laughing] Balance must have been one of the things you needed as a train person.

RM: You had to be fairly athletic, okay, because that's all you did. You were always on top of the cars. The hand brakes were on the top of the car, running boards were on the top of the car.

NP: Did that change over time?

RM: Yeah. Radios came in in 1978, and the crew was reduced from three on the ground to two.

NP: And what about being on top of the cars?

RM: On top of the cars? Didn't have to be on the top of the cars anymore.

NP: What about for the brake?

RM: Hand brakes were--. All the boxcars, the running boards on top of the cars were removed probably in maybe '77, '78. Hand brakes on the boxes were actually removed from service on those type of cars, and the hand brakes were lower down. So there's no need to go up high anymore on cars.

NP: Okay.

RM: It was actually fun running around on the top of a log car. [Laughs]

NP: Why is that?

RM: Well, you had to run across logs.

NP: In work boots.

RM: In work boots. Didn't have a running board on those cars.

NP: And the other cars you could? There's a running board actually on the top of a car?

RM: Yeah, which was a platform about maybe 18 inches wide, metal grating, that you could actually walk across to get to the next car.

NP: Oh, okay.

RM: Yeah. It was a flat surface about this wide.

NP: Okay. And on the logs, you had to be just like a log driver.

RM: Like a log driver.

NP: Hm! Now, when you talk about that--. I don't know about the railway industry, but I do know about the grain industry. Alcohol was an issue.

RM: Definitely.

NP: So this running around on top of the cars on an 18-inch--.

RM: Nobody got killed.

NP: Nobody got killed.

RM: Nobody got killed. No.

NP: And why was that do you think?

RM: I don't know. I really don't know. I mean, all the years I worked there, there was only one major injury. A person lost their leg, but that was it. Out of all the railcars that moved between both railways within the yards, it's amazing.

NP: You mentioned a number of 4,000 railcars at one point. Was that the high? And did you say it was 4,000 a week?

RM: At any given time.

NP: At any given time.

RM: Any given time, yes.

NP: And what would, just for comparison, those would be boxcars?

RM: Yeah. Whatever freight was in the terminal itself?

NP: Right.

RM: CP's capacity for their trackage was about 6,000 cars, and CN's capacity was about 11,000 cars.

NP: Wow. And what is the any-given-time right now? How many would you see?

RM: Any given time right now? I guess at peak time right now, maybe 1,400-1,500 cars.

NP: And only part of that would be made up for by the size of the cars.

RM: Yeah. Only part of that would be made up of grain cars too.

NP: Yeah. Hm. Since we're on that topic, over the time that you were in the industry, make comments however you like about the change in the product handled.

RM: Well, the 1970s, I want to say probably about 70 percent of the grain elevators worked 24/7. Okay? Three shifts. You don't see that anymore. We were unloading 1,000 cars a day. Probably a good week in Thunder Bay, a good week—a seven-day week—might be 2,000 cars.

**[0:45:24]**

NP: Sorry, run that by me again.

RM: In the late '70s, early '80s, there was 1,000 cars being unloaded per day. Per day. Now, there's probably maybe 2,000 unloaded per week. Unloaded per week. So, huge.

NP: Types of grains, did that change too? Or that didn't really matter to you guys anyway?

RM: No, it didn't matter to us really, no.

NP: You were also around, then, for the change in closing down elevators on the Kam.

RM: Mmhmm.

NP: And closing down gradually along the rest of the waterfront. What impact did that have for the railways?

RM: [Coughs] Excuse me. I'm trying to think. When all those elevators were open in the '70s, and most them were closed by the '80s, early '80s--. In the early '80s, we were still unloading 1,000 cars of grain a day, it just meant that the elevators were working three shifts rather than one shift. It was just more cars going into less elevators.

NP: And you had mentioned that tracks were torn up. So as soon as an elevator closed, was the track closed up?

RM: No, no. The track stayed. The only elevators that the tracks were taken up from were the elevators that were actually torn down. So on the ones that are still standing, the trackage is still there.

NP: And who is responsible for taking up the track? Like how is that dealt with?

RM: It would be whoever owned the elevator to take it up.

NP: And did you have crews to do that, or did you just hire some--?

RM: They would pay people like, I guess, today it would be MAC Rail. Back then it would have been Baziuk. Private railway contractors.

NP: Oh, I didn't know there were such things.

RM: Yeah.

NP: Tell me about them.

RM: They're the ones that work on the tracks on the industries. They're not owned and maintained by the railways.

NP: So where does the ownership end?

RM: There's a certain point, a certain switch or a certain point where the ownership ends.

NP: There will always be a switch?

RM: Always will be a switch.

NP: Okay.

RM: Yeah.

NP: And what are the names of those companies again?

RM: The only one in business right now is MAC Rail.

NP: Okay.

RM: Back then it was Baziuk. There was Great Lakes Rail, and a couple other ones. There was an awful lot of infrastructure they had to maintain.

NP: So it would be worth the while of whoever the owners were to get rid of it when they could.

RM: Yeah.

NP: Do you want to say why you moved from one to the other, CN to CP? I thought if you were a CN guy, especially with your family being CN guys, you were a CN guy until you died.

RM: No, I went for money.

NP: Ah. Is CP known to be a more generous company?

RM: No. A switchman made more money than someone that worked in the office, and I didn't want to go switching at CN because you'd get laid off in the wintertime. Because CP is a main terminal, so it's a busier place in the wintertime, right? I was making \$96 gross a week as a clerk, and when I went to CP in 1974, I got a raise, and I was making \$3.50 an hour, which was huge money. When you were a foreman, it was \$4.00 an hour. That was a lot of money.

NP: So you moved there as a yardman.

RM: Yes.

NP: So tell us the story of the yardman.

RM: The yardman is the person out in the yard switching boxcars, building trains, filling grain elevators, servicing industries.

NP: So are you the one that tells the other guys what to do, or you moved up to yard foreman, who, I guess--.

RM: No. No, the yardman--. The yard foreman would be the one, yes.

NP: So you were the actual person moving around pulling the switches.

RM: Yeah.

NP: Do you actually pull switches or was it automated?

RM: No, it was called lining the switch. Yeah. You pull. You pull. You lift a lever or a handle, you pull it, line it, to line the switch the way you want.

NP: Is that hard physical work or not too bad?

RM: It's physical work. Applying hand brakes is physical work too--probably apply maybe 100-150 a shift.

NP: Now, when people know this--. Do people know this when they apply for jobs, and does it do a lot of them in?



RM: Yeah, I don't think so. In 1974 when I started at CP, they probably hired that summer--. I started in April of that year. They probably hired maybe 125 people. Of those 125 people, maybe 30 or 40 made it through the year.

**[0:50:05]**

NP: Some decided to go to school because they didn't want this kind of work for their--? [Laughs]

RM: Well, you know, some people decided once they got on top of a boxcar, they really didn't want that. Yeah.

NP: Yeah.

RM: Yeah.

NP: The whole issue of safety, why don't we talk about that now and the changes that--? What not so much horrified you, but as you look back on it now, you think, "My God, what were we thinking?" And what, if any, changes have taken place over the time of your career?

RM: Well, the biggest changes was the radios, when the radios were introduced.

NP: To get people off the top of the cars?

RM: Yeah. Off the top of the cars. Then the hand brakes were moved down lower, right, so you weren't climbing up to the top of the car. The top of the car was about 14 feet high. You were climbing a ladder up and down and up and down. Those changes. Safety glasses, footwear, high visibility vests, all changed.

NP: Were they--.

RM: A lot of the procedures that we did in the '70s, early '80s are all gone now.

NP: So what would be an example of a change in procedure that would have--?

RM: An example we used to get on a car at 15 miles an hour as it was going by. Now you get on when it's stopped. You get off when it's stopped. You used to get off when it was going 15 miles an hour. Now you get off when it's stopped. Those are the types of changes.

NP: It must have been difficult to make those changes for people who came up through the system like you did.

RM: It was very tough. Those changes were made near the end of my career, probably, I don't know, maybe 2004, 2005. It was tough changing people. Tell them something they've been doing for 30-some years is no longer safe. You can't get on a car that's moving anymore.

NP: Did that lead to discipline issues then?

RM: Yeah. We disciplined a lot of people. Yeah. We sent a lot of people home that weren't following the safety rules. But it's a better environment. Much better. Much safer.

NP: Were you able to track the change in injuries then, the improvement in--?

RM: Yes, yes. Huge. Huge reduction in slip injuries, you know, twisted ankles, knee injuries, back injuries. The pound of getting on and off all the time, peoples' knees were just shot by the time they turned 50 years old. So, yeah.

NP: Now, when that was the case, when people were working and there was no choice because of the way the cars were configured, what happened when somebody was 50? I mean, I really see this as young--.

RM: 50? They were 65.

NP: And still doing it?

RM: And still doing it, yeah.

NP: So ones at 50 who weren't able to do it, would they be pensioned off or--?

RM: No. Pension was 65. It didn't change to 55 years of age until probably the late '80s, early '90s. Yeah.

NP: So would they go on disability, or you would find other work?

RM: There would be other work, something simple that they could do, but there wasn't very many of them. I remember in my first winter working at CP, 35 below, there's a guy 63, 64, climbing up the side of a car.

NP: Frosty, slippery.

RM: Frosty, slippery. That was the reason why I became a yardmaster because I didn't want to be doing that when I was 65. So that's why I went on the management end. But things changed anyway.

NP: Now the other thing that changed in the elevator industry, and you mentioned it before, was the alcohol use.

RM: Yes. I think they--.

NP: Were there policy changes in the railway too that got a handle on that? And was alcohol just taken over by drugs once we got through the '60s? [Laughing]

RM: Well, it's funny. Actually, in the '70s, there was the younger group was on drugs. The older group was doing alcohol. Then all it took was four people to get fired. I want to say in maybe late '79, four people got disciplined for drinking, and that ended the drinking. It was over.

NP: That's all it took.

RM: That's all it took. Everybody used to turn a blind eye to it before. That's all it took.

NP: So I would suspect that was after several warnings.

RM: Well, it was a new superintendent came into town, drove up to Ignace, found a crew drinking in the bar, fired them all. That was it.

NP: Did they take them back eventually?

RM: They got back eventually, yeah, but two years.

NP: A real wake-up call.

RM: Wake-up call for everybody. Yeah.

**[0:55:03]**

NP: So I would suspect there were some that were too far gone to salvage?

RM: Yeah, there was--. I'm just thinking back to--. I only made a few--. I didn't like going from Thunder Bay to Ignace on a train for the simple reason when I got called to go to work at 2:00 in the morning, the engineer was drunk, and we were taking a freight train from Thunder Bay to Ignace. The last trip that I made—I always tell this story. It's quite ironic. It's 1:00 in the morning. This guy can't even stand up, and he's the engineer. I just want to go home, but I've got to go with this guy to Ignace, eh? because there was two people in the cab in the locomotive: the engineer and the head-end brakeman. And in the caboose, there was a tail-end brakeman and a conductor. That's how the freight trains were run back then.

So we got on the engine, we switched our train, and then we started leaving Thunder Bay. As soon as we left Thunder Bay, he fell asleep at the throttle. So it's not too bad. As you leave Thunder Bay, the train is going up hill, so you're not going that fast. I watched him for a while, and then as we started getting into the Kam Valley where you start going downhill, the train started to pick up speed. So I walked over and woke him up. He was awake for--. I don't know how long he was awake for, but he was awake for a bit, and then I had a sandwich, and I fell asleep. It was dark when I fell asleep. I remember that, and when I woke up, it was broad daylight. And I looked around, and I thought I was in Saskatchewan. I had no idea where I was. I looked over at him, and he was fast asleep. And obviously the two guys in the tail-end of the train in the caboose were fast asleep. We were lucky we never ran into another train. That's the last time I went out on the road. [Laughs]

NP: Now, why were you on the train? Was that part of your job, or you were going--. I'm trying to think which job that would be that you actually needed to go to Ignace.

RM: Yeah. I left the yard and went out onto the road for one month, summer of '77. That's when I had that experience, and then I went back in the yard. I didn't want to get killed.

NP: Now, did you say when those fellows had the wake-up call that they were--. [Laughs] Very literally wake-up!

RM: Wake-up call, yeah. For sure, wake-up call.

NP: Yeah, when they started to take alcohol seriously.

RM: Yeah, I think it was 1979, 1980, in that area.

NP: Okay. Yeah.

RM: Yeah.

NP: Yeah. Amazing to me that there weren't more accidents, just because of the abuse, the substance abuse everywhere. Were you aware of the grow-op on the top of UGG M?

RM: No. No, I didn't know that. No.

NP: A well-kept secret, I guess. Although, I think they had a burn when management found out, and it was wafting through the--.

RM: We had some grow-ops in the yards. Some people planted in the different areas of the yard. They had a little grow-op going, lots of places. That's what it was like.

NP: Was Thunder Bay different, or was that pretty much the railway trade across Canada from what you were able to--?

RM: That's what it was like right across the system.

NP: Yeah.

RM: Yeah. I think other terminals probably took a little longer before they stopped drinking. I don't know.

NP: What division was Thunder Bay in--the railway division? Like, it's divided up into--?

RM: Kaministiquia subdivision.

NP: Did divisions across Canada have different reputations?

RM: I would think so.

NP: What was ours?

RM: What was ours?

NP: Yeah.

RM: Ours was a busy subdivision.

NP: Did people like to work here? Did they transfer in, or did they like to get out as fast as they could because it was busy? [Laughs]

RM: Oh, it's hard to say. No, it depended on the individual. Some people transferred out, you know, went to Winnipeg because they wanted to run a locomotive year-round. Because Thunder Bay, when the port closed down in January, February, March, things got slow. If they didn't have enough seniority, they would be sent back to be a switchman. Some guys who were locomotive engineers didn't want to go back to being a switchman, so they would transfer to places like Winnipeg, Kenora, where they could hold a job year-round running a locomotive.

NP: Yeah. Did you ever think of moving out of Thunder Bay?

RM: I had lots of opportunities. There was nothing good enough. They couldn't offer me enough money.

NP: What pulled you here?

RM: What kept me here?

NP: Yeah.

RM: Family, lifestyle.

NP: Pretty good.

RM: I had opportunities to go to Vancouver head office and places like that, but why?

NP: [Laughs] Now you had the yard foreman. We're now heading back to your career.

**[1:00:01]**

RM: Okay.

NP: Did you need a little bit of a break?

RM: Sure. I wouldn't mind something to drink. Alcohol. [Laughing]

**[Audio pauses]**

NP: Okay. Let's do that.

RM: I don't care. If you want. Okay, we were just talking about being on top of the cars. We used to take cars from Current River—grain empties from the elevator—and we would take them from Current River all the way to Westfort, which is approximately nine miles distance. As the field man, once you, we used to call it doubled-up in other words, picked up all the tracks of empties, we'd have about 160 cars. We'd take them to the other side of town. That's where they'd get repaired before they went west. So as the field man, you would have to line the switches back, and we didn't have any cabooses or anything, so once you lined the switches back at Current River, you'd get on the last car.

NP: What do you mean by lining the switches up?

RM: Lining the switches for the main track, okay, so that everything's okay. You get on the last car, and you start walking 160 cars across the top, probably doing about 15 miles an hour. The cars would be rocking as you're walking, and you'd walk all the way. And by the time you got to the engine, you'd be in Westfort. That's how long it would take.

NP: Did you ever have a close call?

RM: Oh, I had many.

NP: Yeah? Any that stick in your mind?

RM: Nothing related to alcohol or drugs or anything like that. [Laughs]

NP: Yeah.

RM: Yeah, one sticks in my mind. It was, god, probably maybe 1977. It was a fall night. It was raining, and I'd just finished buying myself a new pair of safety-toed rain boots. The railway at the time was starting to take the running boards of the top of the railcars. Most of the CN fleet, they already had taken the tops of the running boards off, but we were still on top of the cars, so that little 18-foot piece of steel--.

NP: Or 18-inch?

RM: Wasn't there anymore. It was like the top of a roof of a house, and it was painted, and it was slippery. It was raining that night, and we were pulling out of P & H. We were pulling the empties and the loads out of P & H. We weren't going very fast because we had too many handbrakes on the cars, and my lazy helper hadn't taken the brakes off. So I started walking across the top of the cars to release the brakes, and as I knocked the brakes off, we started going a pretty good speed. As I went across the last CN car, I jumped onto the CN car, and the brakes was at the far end. So I walked across that top, and as I was walking across that top, it was slippery. I was starting to slide, eh, like on the pitch of the roof. I got to the end of the car, I knocked the brake off, and I decided, "Hm, do I want to walk back across that car, or do I want to jump to the CP that has a running board right there?" What CN had done when they had taken these running boards off, at the very end of the car they had left the bracket, the metal bracket, on the side of the car. As I went to jump, I caught my toe on this piece of steel, and I fell down. And as I was going down, I grabbed with my right hand and caught the running board on the car, and I was slung in between the car hanging down. [Laughs] As I was hanging there, I was going by my helper, who was now on the ground looking at me hanging in between the cars. [Laughs] And I pulled myself up, and I looked, and I could see my head-end man still standing on the first car. Nobody has stopped the cars, right? And I got off the cars, and my legs were just like rubber. But I was lucky I didn't fall down. I was lucky.

NP: Good thing you were fit because I wouldn't imagine you could actually catch yourself if you weren't.

RM: No. If I would have fallen down, I would have been run over by the cars. Yeah. Got rid of those boots. [Laughing] Wore them once and that was it. Never wore them again. They sat in my garage for years.

NP: A reminder.



RM: A reminder. Yeah.

NP: Yeah. What did you say to your helper and the other guy?

RM: [Laughs] "Take the engineers course." They were lazy, so that's what they did. They both became locomotive engineers. One of them got fired for a grow-op, and the other guy went back to England. He retired and went back to England. Anyway, that was my close call.

NP: Hm! Your life flashes in front of your eyes! Now, we are still working your way through your career. So we got the yardmaster, and now we're the division trainer.

RM: Okay. After being a yardmaster, I was asked in 1987 if I would accept the position of division trainer. Division trainer was the one that did the hiring and the training of new employees at CP. So I accepted, and I would put an ad in the paper. If we needed people we needed hired, put an ad in the paper. I'd hire. I'd interview them. I would train them, put them through a rules course. Train them. If they were good, they would stay. If they weren't any good, I would get rid of them.

**[1:05:33]**

NP: Now, how did you--. I always find it interesting when people are in positions of hiring, especially those who've had experience previously. Was the employment market such that you had your choice of people, or you just took everybody and hoped at the time that you were doing this job?

RM: Back then in 1987, I was receiving--. If we were hiring a class of, let's say, 12 individuals, I would get applications probably close to 100 applicants.

NP: And how did you screen? And did you have some kind of second--. What is it? Fourth-sense, whatever sense, that--. Some spidey sense that you could pretty much tell?

RM: Well, you could pretty much tell. You wanted somebody that's athletic, whether it be male or female.

NP: Were they hiring women at that time?

RM: Yes, we were.

NP: For physical work?

RM: Yes.

NP: Well, let's come back to that later, but finish this question first.

RM: Yeah, you could tell. You know if somebody was athletic, that's what you wanted. It was a very physical job being a yardman.

NP: Personalities make a difference?

RM: Yeah, in some respect.

NP: What did you look for there? What were warning signs for you?

RM: I looked for people that were a little bit outgoing, not too introverted because you have to work with three or four other individuals. You can't be introverted. So outgoing people, athletic, hopefully young. I never discriminated against people, but I always thought you really--. And we did, we hired older people, but you didn't really want to hire somebody that is—I guess I can say this—you know, 45, 50 years of age. They're going to only contribute, at the most, another 15 years. I had grown up in an environment where all of us were 18, 19, 20 years of age. We had a good 30-year career. If you're going to spend a lot of money to hire and train somebody, you'd hope that they're going to be around for a while.

NP: Most of the jobs were the physical jobs at that point?

RM: They all were. All those jobs. The only jobs I hired for were to be a yardman. Yeah.

NP: And would you--. You have several foreman positions within the yard. Was that mostly done by internal advancement as opposed to bringing anybody in, say, like you came in from CN?

RM: What do you mean?

NP: If you had a yard foreman position, for example.

RM: No, everybody would start as a yardman. It would take a while to become a foreman. Minimum was six months before you could become a foreman.

NP: People were coming over from the other railway, same thing?

RM: Yeah, there was the odd time that we hired people that came from CN to come to CP. If they were qualified, of course we'd take them. Mmhhh. But back then, that's when drug testing started that year for new employees only. Right. So, yeah, I was in charge of the drug testing for them. I'd arrange the medicals for them.

NP: Was that--.

RM: And that was the chain of custody for their drug test, right, to make sure that nobody had tampered with it. Yeah, I did that from 1987 to '93.

NP: Did people drop out before they even did the drug test? As soon as they heard there was one, they stopped the process?

RM: No. When we put the ad in the paper, we clearly stated there would be a drug test.

NP: Now, you commented that when those fellows earlier on were dismissed because of alcohol abuse and that seemed to be a wake-up call to a lot of people, was it also a wake-up call for the drug users?

RM: That were at the railway?

NP: Yeah.

RM: No. Not at all.

NP: So that just continued on because they were grandfathered in the testing?

RM: I mean, I knew people who were still smoking dope, possibly. But unless I smelt in on them, I couldn't drug test them. There was no way of knowing. I mean, you never smelt alcohol on anybody. The drinking was over. There were probably a lot of users using marijuana.

NP: The division trainer, then, you were hiring people. What was the training program in general? Because I know it can be pretty substantial.

**[1:10:10]**

RM: Yeah. The training program in general, when I first got them in, I had two weeks worth of classroom rules instruction for them, right? Then they were out in the field. I put them in the field for maybe five or six weeks, and then they come back in the classroom for another week or two, and then a little bit of road work, which meant going from Thunder Bay to Ignace on a freight train. And I guess the course probably was about 16-18 weeks long. Some of them made it though, some didn't. In those first years—'87, '88, '89—I hired about 150 people, and then CP decided to take the cabooses off the train and go to two-man only. So they offered anybody that wanted to leave the railway \$65,000 to quit, and anybody that had more than ten years' seniority would get \$85,000 to quit. So out of all those people that I hired, three people did not take the buyout. The rest took the money and left.

NP: So did that leave you with short staff then?

RM: No. We weren't short staffed until 1994. We never hired again until 1994. So yeah, '89 to '94, we never hired.

NP: Wow.

RM: We hired in '94, and then we never hired again until 2002.

NP: In general, was it a mixed bag of the people who left and the people who stayed?

RM: Yeah.

NP: What would cause people to stay in those circumstances?

RM: What, the ones who stayed?

NP: Mmhmm.

RM: They were just hanging around hoping they would get a job within a few years, the ones that left, because they were getting laid off. They were being hired, they were being trained, they never worked. They'd get laid off. So they left and went other places.

NP: So that was out of the 150 that you had hired. Three were left.

RM: Yeah. Three were left.

NP: Wow. Then you went to general yardmaster. What's the difference between general yardmaster and yardmaster?

RM: As far as supervisory staff at CP, there were eight yardmasters. We had ten coordinators. We had four assistant general yardmasters, and then we had the general yardmasters. So that was the supervisory staff: yardmasters, then the supervisors, then the assistant general yardmasters, and then the general yardmaster.

NP: Now, to somebody from the outside that knows nothing about railway operations, that seems like a lot of masters.

RM: Lots of, you mean, support staff as we called it? Not really. The amount of employees we were supervising was probably in around the, back then, close to 250 employees.

NP: And working 24 hours a day.

RM: Yeah. 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. We never shut down even for Christmas.

NP: So when you left CP in 2009--.

RM: Right.

NP: What was the staff down to? You said 250 at one point.

RM: Oh. Just to give you an example, in 1974 when I started, we had 49 yard engines in Thunder Bay. CP had 49 yard assignments. Okay. When I left in 2009, we had 18.

NP: And to 250 down to approximately--?

RM: It's probably, right now for operating staff, maybe 100 left. And on the management side when I left there were 22 managers. More than there were when I was the general yardmaster.

NP: How'd that happen?

RM: They put a layer of management in in 2000 where they eliminated some jobs in the places like Schreiber, Kenora, all the little towns along the road. They used to have what they called supervisors there, so they moved them all into Thunder Bay and put another layer of managers in Thunder Bay.

NP: Just to keep them employed?

RM: Yeah. No, to take care of those areas from Thunder Bay rather than be in all the little towns. They were in one central place.

NP: And why would they do that, do you think?

RM: Why would they do that?

NP: Mhmm.

RM: To eliminate jobs. All these little places had four supervisors in each place. What they did was they brought five supervisors into Thunder Bay. They took care of like five different terminals. Centralized it.

**[1:15:14]**

NP: Did that work out fine?

RM: It worked out fine, yeah.

NP: General yardmaster and yardmaster or manager was--.

RM: Yeah. They changed the title in 1996. They reorganized 1996, and the general yardmaster became the yard manager.

NP: And was that for the whole division?

RM: Yard manager took care of Thunder Bay terminal, and then the road manager took care of from Thunder Bay to Ignace.

NP: So the road manager, then, was just the same job but a broader territory?

RM: Taking care of the road crews, the people that go back and forth from Ignace to Thunder Bay. The yard manager took care of the terminal, all the crews that worked in the terminal, and the supervisors. The road manager took care of the locomotive engineers and the conductors that ran from Thunder Bay to Ignace.

NP: So if we look at the road manager job, then, when you say you took care of--.

RM: A monkey could do it.

NP: [Laughs] What's involved in taking care of the crews?

RM: [Laughs] Well. I'll say it again, a monkey could do it. Anyway, that was a wasted four years of my life.

NP: So why do you say that?

RM: They paid me to do nothing. They paid me to take care of a bunch of whining guys that went from Thunder Bay to Ignace. They would call me and tell me, "We're out of salt in the bunkhouse." Call somebody who cares! [Laughing]

NP: And if they didn't like the guy they were working with, they called you?

RM: Yeah. It was babysitting a bunch of senior railroaders. That's all it was. Mind you, the good thing of it, I became a locomotive engineer during that time because I had to manage the engineers, so I had to be an engineer. So yeah. I--.

NP: So what did that involve? What kind of training did you need to do that?

RM: What was it I went through? Because I had the rules background, I missed the two weeks worth of rule instruction because I used to teach rules. So I went to Calgary for three weeks of mechanical and locomotive engineer training on the simulators. It's not different than a pilot. So we have a C-Train in Calgary. We have a huge simulator, which is the cab of a locomotive, and you go

inside. It's got the computer screen. We look out the window. The engine has a computer screen that can put you on any run anywhere across Canada.

NP: Have they ever switched out those simulators? I'm looking for a used one.

RM: They have the small laptop ones that they use too.

NP: That sounds to me like a good activity for our centre.

RM: A simulator? Yeah.

NP: Mmhhh. [Laughs] So you were not a happy camper for that part of your career.

RM: Yeah. For that period, yeah. That was from 2000 to 2004.

NP: Okay. So what salvaged you?

RM: What salvaged me?

NP: Yeah.

RM: Asking them to put me back into the yard because my knuckles were dragging every day.

NP: And you went back to--? [Laughs] Getting calluses on your knuckles.

RM: [Laughing] God!

NP: I won't ask who took over your job. So you went back to the--?

RM: Yard manager.

NP: Yard manager.



RM: Yeah.

NP: Now, was that easy to do to move back? Did you have to bump somebody out or there happened to be a position available at that time?

RM: No. Yeah, there happened to be a position available at the time. We were moving--. Somebody was leaving or somebody was going somewhere back then. I can't remember. Yeah, but there was an opening. When I first became a yard manager there was--. When I was the general yardmaster, there was one, right? When I became the yard manager, when they changed it, there became two yard managers. Then when I retired, there were four yard managers, right? Because the general yardmaster used to work days, weekends off, and the support staff was the assistant general in the off shift. With the yard managers, they wanted the yard managers there 24/7 so you could sit there at 2:00 in the morning and stare at the wall or see if you could find a video game to play. But it was ridiculous. It became 12-hour shifts on the weekends. And I went--.

**[1:20:04]**

NP: So did they change that at all? Like, working from home or on-call?

RM: Nope.

NP: You always had to be there?

RM: Had to be there. Yeah.

NP: And why was that?

RM: Yeah, when I was a road manager, it was days, and that's why I took it. It was days, weekends off, but I was on call every weekend, which wasn't that good. You know, "We're out of salt."

NP: [Laughs] That stuck in your mind.

RM: Yeah, it really did. Yeah.

NP: So I'm going to ask you some questions now. We worked your way through your career, and as a result, we've dealt with what you did. And because you've had such a long and varied career in the industry, it might be difficult to focus in on some of these, but what might surprise people most about what you did as a railway employee?

RM: Okay, rephrase that again?

NP: What would surprise people most about your job as a railway employee? So people, like me, who have not worked on a railway, have sort of preconceived notions about what railway people do. What do you think is the most surprising thing about the kinds of things you did in your career that people just wouldn't think would be--?

RM: I'm baffled.

NP: Yeah?

RM: They wouldn't--.

NP: That would sort of be, "Oh, gee, I wouldn't have thought that." For example, I think what I've learned from what you've talked so far, how highly physical it is until you got into the managers.

RM: That's probably it. Yeah, that's probably it. I think people just see trains go by, and they think trains just go from one point to the other. I don't think they realize that trains come into a major place like Thunder Bay and have to be switched and cars classified to go to different places and put back together again before they go somewhere else. There are trains that run from coast to coast, ultimately, but there's an awful lot of switching that goes on in the major centres. And Thunder Bay is the largest terminal CP has, believe it or not.

NP: Really?

RM: Capacity wise, the infrastructure is the biggest.

NP: Hm! At one time it was probably the only terminal that they had, major terminal, but then as the West Coast opened up. I think we talked earlier about the amount of grain that went through here, 30-70, was that--?

RM: That's the split usually. Yeah. CN-CP split.

NP: Yeah. So have other terminal areas grown in relation to Thunder Bay? Or has it still maintained its sort of--?

RM: Well, Thunder Bay has dropped off. Thunder Bay is handling about a third of what they used to handle. The terminals that have gotten larger on the CP side are places like Moosejaw. Moosejaw is a place that's handling an awful lot of freight going into the United States.

NP: Really?

RM: Yeah. There's a lot of potash goes to them. It's a very small place, but it handles an awful lot of traffic. You see, Thunder Bay has what we call the overhead trains, the trains that are running from Toronto to Vancouver, Toronto to Calgary, Montreal, et cetera, that are running right through Thunder Bay, but then Thunder Bay handles all the bulk that comes from the west—coal and the potash and the grain—which other terminals don't handle. That stuff is running right through Winnipeg, and it's all coming to Thunder Bay, and that's where it has to be handled to be offloaded and then returned back west again.

NP: CP, then, when you talk about Moosejaw and heading south, does CP travel as CP into the States?

RM: Yes.

NP: Okay.

RM: Yeah.

NP: They bought out--?

RM: CP owns a line all the way—I don't know what line they bought—but they own all the way into Minneapolis, right through to Chicago. That's CP's major gateway to the US is through Portal, Saskatchewan.

NP: Why didn't grain go in the same direction as the potash?

RM: Some grain goes south. Not an awful lot.

NP: To Minneapolis or just--?

RM: Yeah, just to different milling companies in the States.

NP: Unit trains would have been a change over your time, or no? Just coming into their own?

RM: Yeah, I guess that's been a change since the 2000s when they went to poolable, non-poolable grain, house specific. They started giving incentives to the grain elevators to load 112-car blocks.

NP: And they just go straight through here or--?

RM: Yeah. I think the biggest change that has happened is the amount of cleaning that they do in the country elevators. I mean, that was all done here in Thunder Bay.

**[1:25:21]**

NP: What were you most proud of in the work you did or brought you the most satisfaction? Now, you're still working, but say you're CN and CP, what--? If you're talking to your grandchildren and saying, "Grandpa did this."

RM: Well, changing the operating plans. When I was in the position of general yardmaster, yard manager, changing the way we did things.

NP: Oh. Tell me about that. What didn't you like about how things were done and what did you do to change it?

RM: Well, once you got into a position where you could actually make changes—reduce yard assignments, make things more efficient, those are the types of things.

NP: So what--. Give me a couple of examples of what specific changes you made.

RM: Moving cars. Moving cars differently. Back before I was the general yardmaster, we used to—and this is a different word—interchange cars with CN in three different places in Thunder Bay. We used to interchange in Current River, we used to interchange in Intercity, and we used to interchange in Westfort. Which means--.

NP: And what does that mean?

RM: Which means we would give CNR cars for some of the industries, local industries, in Thunder Bay, and they would hand us cars for the local industries in Thunder Bay that we serviced. Three different places. So when I became the general yardmaster, I eliminated that, and I made it one place. I got rid of Current River, got rid of Intercity, and everything went to Westfort. I remember I used to have my supervisors, you know, saying, “Well, why would you do that? We’re in Current River. Let’s just hand the cars off to CNR in Current River.” I said, “Okay, but all the cars taken into Current River are going where? Westfort. So let’s just do it over there. Everything we take out of Intercity, all the grain empties, where do they go? Westfort. So let’s move everything over there.” It’s hard when you--. See because I was gone for six years when I was the division trainer. I was just training and doing rules and special projects and stuff like that, and then I came back in 1993, and I got promoted to be everybody’s boss sort of. And a lot of guys who worked those years that I hadn’t been around, they kind of thought, “Here comes Rod. He’s going to change the world.” So yeah, things like that were tough. But we changed a lot of things.

NP: And that was satisfying, I would think.

RM: Satisfying, yeah. I think, actually, working for Canado is more satisfying.

NP: And why is that?

RM: Because of the various projects. Canado is just an industrial railway switching operation.

NP: Let’s go back a little bit to--. Canado’s relatively new in the grain business, or in the railway business.

RM: Canado has actually been in business since 1978, believe it or not. I didn’t know that until I looked them up on the internet.

NP: Why did they come about?

RM: They came about picking up rail lines, abandoned rail lines in the Prairies. Two brothers from Brandon put an ad in the paper saying, “We’ll pick up rail track.” They had a front-end loader or something. Next thing they know, somebody called them, and they got, I guess, their first order was to pick up 100 miles of track, and that’s where they started. They started picking up track, and they started laying track, and in the early ‘90s, they went into industrial switching.

In other words, going to an industry and doing their switching on the property and handing the cars off to the railways. So right now they do the Toyota plants down in southern Ontario. They do a lot of the GM plants where they build the truck frames and that. They

build all the trains that originated in Toronto for CP Rail. All the trains that go through from coast to coast, Canado builds those trains for CP in Vaughn, which is a major intermodal facility. So Canado builds those trains for CP, and CP just picks them up and goes. They do a little switching in Alberta for the major oil companies in Alberta, and they've got a little line in downtown Winnipeg where they run in downtown Winnipeg on some old CN trackage and service some grain elevators. This was their first move into Northern Ontario. They put a bid in for Resolute Forest Products because CP Rail was doing the switching there. So they put a bid in, and they gave me a call and asked me if I'd manage it for them and grow their business. And that's what I've been doing.

NP: And how has the business grown since then?

**[1:30:03]**

RM: We start servicing Terrace Bay on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April, and I've got three other proposals in for three other jobs that are very hush-hush.

NP: Hm. So really nice at this time in your career to--.

RM: Yeah, yeah. It is. It actually is.

NP: To starting out. And a Brandon company.

RM: Yeah, a Brandon company. Head office is in Brandon.

NP: Hm.

RM: Yeah.

NP: Now, you mentioned downsizing while taking lines out of operation. That was part of the rail-line justification or whatever they called it. Did that have any impact on Thunder Bay when they were getting rid of lines out west?

RM: The biggest impact it had on Thunder Bay is when they built the huge elevators in Prince Rupert. That's when things started to change in the '80s.

NP: Tell me about that.

RM: There was a lot of politics involved in that. The Liberal Government back then never had any control in the west, so in order to get some votes in the west, they figured they would build a grain terminal in Prince Rupert. Once they built that grain terminal in Prince Rupert, the shift was made from Thunder Bay to predominantly the West Coast. That probably happened, what, about 1986-'87. I don't know. That's when things started to change.

NP: And markets opened up.

RM: I really don't believe that about the markets. I mean, it depends where a boat is. If a boat's on the West Coast, it'll pick up grain on the West Coast. It'll go through the Panama Canal and go to Europe.

NP: From the standpoint of actual efficiency of delivering by train east or west--.

RM: East.

NP: Does it make much difference whether--. Like operational costs?

RM: Operational costs are a lot more in the west to get them through the mountains, but over the years, CN and CP have--. CN predominantly runs down along the riverbeds in British Columbia. So they're on the lower land where CP went through the mountains. So they've got what they call directional running there. So they run the heavy traffic, the loaded cars, on the CN line, and they bring the empty traffic back on the CP line through the mountains.

NP: Hm. So much for competition.

RM: Pardon? So much for competition, was it? I mean, there is competition, but CN is huge compared to CP. They're five times the size, you know.

NP: Now, you've worked for both organizations, but at different levels. So you were working at the clerk level mostly for CN, and then moved into more managerial positions in--. Anything to distinguish the different managerial operations would you say between one versus the other, other than size?

RM: Well, I think when I left CN and went to CP, I was actually shocked at the difference. CN had nice, big, new locomotives. CP had old locomotives. CN yard engine had water coolers in it. A CP engine had a can with an ice bucket with canned water in it. They

were older locomotives. You know, CN was owned by the government and the taxpayers, so they had all the good equipment. So they had a leg over CP. And probably in the early 1990s, late '80s, CP invested a lot of money in track and in locomotives to try to catch up to CN. I mean, they're nowhere near the amount of money that CN makes.

NP: Who owns CP?

RM: Shareholders.

NP: Major shareholders--?

RM: Major shareholders, what is it, Pershing Square down in New York bought a whole bunch of shares last year.

NP: And CN went public too, right? Or is it still--?

RM: CN went public back in the early '80s, maybe mid '80s. CP went public-- Well, actually, spun off the railway. It used to be five companies. It used to be rail, shipping, hotels, oil, and I can't remember what the fifth one was. Yeah. But they spun it off into just one, and it was probably around 1999.

NP: Changes in ownership make any difference on the ground here in Thunder Bay, or just--?

RM: Change in ownership of--?

NP: Well, I shouldn't say ownership. Management, senior management at head office make any difference here on the ground?

RM: With the new manager that's in charge of CP right now, yeah, they made a huge change.

NP: What was that?

RM: Just eliminated a lot of yard assignments. I believe they're down to, like, nine yard assignments working in Thunder Bay for CP. He was the same fellow who was the head of CN years ago, Hunter Harrison. He's American. He's ruthless--doesn't care about people. If you don't do what you're told, you're fired. All the local agreements have been ripped up. You know, he doesn't abide by the collective agreement. He just does what he wants. He manages by fear, and it's-- Yeah. I get phone calls all the time, people coming and wanting to work for Canado. They can't take it.



[1:35:34]

NP: Sort of interesting because--. And maybe dealing with changes here, in interviewing people who were involved with the grain elevators and handling and inspection and so on, a major change that has taken place is just the philosophy of cooperation across the various companies. And the reason I am saying this right now is, from what you said about the management's heartlessness, that it seems to me the waterfront used to be a friendlier place, more cooperative. Working relationships were good. Now that doesn't seem to be the case. It's sort of every person for themselves.

RM: You're saying with the terminals themselves or just generally?

NP: The whole. Just generally.

RM: It's hard to say. I know that when the GTA was still around, we used to meet every Thursday—CN and CP, every manager from every grain elevator, and the two fellows from the GTA. We used to lay out--. Actually, even the Lake Shippers were there too. Lay out what kind of shipping was coming in, what kind of cars were coming in, what railway owed the other railway cars that they didn't spot. It was quite fair. And then, you know, that disappeared, and everything changed. The GTA disappeared, and then the poolable grain disappeared, so it didn't really matter anymore. It was house specific, right? Then in 2000, when I worked on that project for direct access—that's when I was a road manager because I had nothing to do—it doesn't really matter anymore. I mean, CN brings their cars in for any elevator and so does CP, and we just have windows. Certain times of the day, CN goes in, CP goes in.

NP: So a more efficient operation?

RM: It's a much more efficient operation. Yeah, much better. Yeah, it's a much better operation. It was a little tough on CN.

NP: In what way?

RM: Well, you know, the flagship back then of Thunder Bay was Pool 7. That was a flagship elevator. There was always a CN locomotive going in there, and the next thing you know, here comes the big red CP locomotive going in there. So it was really tough on them, especially when they own everything, that CP was going in and servicing.

NP: So it was just paying leasing to use the track?

RM: Per diem per car.

NP: Yeah.

RM: Per diem per car.

NP: That leads me into questions about your connections with, over your career, with other segments of the grain industry. So if I put out the word producers, the farmers, did you ever feel any connection to them?

RM: No.

NP: Was there any actual connections?

RM: No, nothing whatsoever.

NP: No?

RM: No.

NP: The grain just came in and--.

RM: Well, no, it's not just that the grain came in. It would be what we allocated to the producers for loading in the country, just to give us an idea of what would be coming down the pipe the following week because we have to staff crews, manpower, to make sure we had the capability of moving the railcars when they showed up.

NP: So would that mostly be with the Canadian Wheat Board then?

RM: No, it would just be our own grain group.

NP: Oh, okay.

RM: Yeah, strictly our own.

NP: Tell me about your grain group.

RM: Well, we have a grain group that handles our fleet, allocates our cars to the producers.

NP: Out of Vancouver?

RM: Calgary.

NP: Out of Calgary?

RM: Yeah, out of Calgary. Yeah.

NP: So how do they decide which part of CP's management is in Calgary versus-- Or are they out of Vancouver now?

RM: No, they moved out of Vancouver in the mid '90s.

NP: Oh, okay.

RM: Yeah. The head office in west Vancouver went to Calgary, yeah.

NP: The grain group, anybody from Thunder Bay ever move into the Calgary grain group?

RM: No. No.

NP: Okay. Any connection with grain handlers? So what is the connection between you and the guys working in the elevators?

**[1:40:14]**

RM: The grain handlers themselves? No, nothing. The supervisors in the terminals, yes.

NP: So what were the connections there?

RM: The connections were what type of servicing they needed, lunchtime for the next day, those types of things.

NP: So who would you contact? Was the manager of the elevator, the superintendent? Who would you deal with?

RM: No, the second level. I think they would be called the assistant sups. We wouldn't be dealing with the Bill Greens and the Mike Cahills and the Gerry Heinrichs. It would be the next layer of management. Yeah.

NP: Okay, yeah. And were some companies easier to deal with than others? No names need to be mentioned.

RM: No. Actually, yeah, they were. It depended on the manager.

NP: So what would be ideal?

RM: Ideal?

NP: Yeah.

RM: I think probably the most progressive guy on the port right now is Gerry Heinrichs.

NP: And how does he operate that leads to you saying that?

RM: I think it's the way he treats his employees.

NP: For example?

RM: For example, god, he puts on a picnic for them every year and a barbeque. One year he flew them to, I believe, it was Toronto, them and their spouses, just for their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary or whatever. But yeah. Yeah, I've been there. I've done some consulting over there, done some training over there, and I mean, the staff is happy to be working there. Not like a lot of places I've been to.

NP: So the people who are unhappy, what makes them unhappy?

RM: I think the way they're managed. It all has to do with the way you're managed.

NP: Yeah. How much of that has to do with--?

RM: The changes?

NP: Yeah. Richardson's remained pretty solid, right?

RM: Pretty solid in getting a little more every year. You know, I guess if you work for Viterra, I couldn't see any complaints working for Viterra. If you work for P & H, I wouldn't be too happy working for an elevator that doesn't get a very good percentage of the grain. Cargill seems like a pretty good elevator to work for. Mission Terminal--. This is taped, eh?

NP: Mmhmm.

RM: You don't want to go around there. I mean, the employees are fine, but there's just no safety. They have no safety. They wear runners, running shoes. I mean, they're back in the--. They're pulling cars with cables and track mobiles and this, that. Pretty unsafe operation. Got to make it better. Yeah, there's really nobody else left.

NP: Pool 10?

RM: Pool 10, very small operation. I think it's probably more of a family, right? Yeah.

NP: Yeah.

RM: That's about it.

NP: Canadian Grain Commission [CGC], what interaction did you have with them?

RM: Virtually none.

NP: So problems with cars that were out of whatever, grain that came in that was missing, or--?

RM: We didn't deal with that in operating.

NP: You didn't?

RM: No.

NP: No? Who dealt with that?

RM: That would have been the claims group. Claims. It had nothing to do with us.

NP: Yeah. Was there a claims group person here?

RM: No.

NP: No. So that's out of Winnipeg essentially.

RM: Yeah, that would have been Winnipeg. Yeah.

NP: Yeah. Yeah.

RM: Out of Calgary now, I would assume.

NP: Any other people that I haven't mentioned that you had deal with on a regular basis [inaudible], or is it pretty much internal?

RM: For the grain business?

NP: Mmhmm.

RM: No. It just depended what part of my career I was dealing with. When I was a yard manager, I was dealing with the managers of the terminals. When I was the coordinator, supervisor, yardmaster, I was dealing with that layer's supervision.

NP: What about Ports Clearance, did you have any connection with them?

RM: No.

NP: No, okay. Good. When you look back at what you've said so far, are there any major changes in the railway here that you haven't dealt with?

RM: No.

NP: When you, again, look over your career, what was the most challenging things that you did, both positive and negative?

**[1:45:05]**

RM: Most challenging?

NP: Mmhmm.

RM: Most challenging was being on top of a railcar in the middle of December, November. You're moving at 25 miles an hour, and it's 35 below, and you have to put your face to the wind. [Laughs]

NP: Most challenging non-physically?

RM: Non-physically? That's a tough question. Dealing with people. Yeah.

NP: I'm not surprised to hear you say that.

RM: Yeah, dealing with people, babysitting people. Babysitting adults, probably the most challenging thing. Yeah. Yeah. Disciplining people.

NP: You've told some interesting stories as we've talked. Are there other stories or incidents that you would like to record for posterity? [Laughing]

RM: We could talk for days, but no, I think I'm good.

NP: Okay. Good. Well, I think if you can talk for days, I think maybe you should jot down some stories, and we should do just a stories-story.

RM: Well, it wouldn't be about the railway though.

NP: No? [Laughing]

RM: Some may be railway stories, but--. [Laughs]

NP: Okay. Now we're wrapping it up. We're getting close, close here. Most significant event that happened?

RM: I just thought of something.

NP: Yeah?

RM: Yeah, I just thought of something that reminded me--. I don't know what year that would have been. Maybe 1972-'73. I was thinking about grain doors. That just came through my head. In Intercity, they had a couple grain door shacks there because the CN track was on one side and the CP track was on the other, and the grain door guys went to either side depending on which railway was pulling the cars in. I don't know if I should tell this. But anyway, I remember going in there one night when I was a car checker, and I went into this old shack. I was just kind of looking around with my flashlight. I seen this mirror, and it was nice mirror. I don't know if you remember Roxatone [*Note: type of flecked paint. Editor*], right? He had this old thing. It was just kind of sitting in there on this old pile of lumber, and there was this old Roxatone mirror, eh? I said, "That's a pretty nice mirror." So I took the mirror, and I went and brought it in, and I got it finished. Because I'm looking at your pictures, and it's just a beautiful maple, and it still hangs in my hallway to this day. [Laughs] Anyway.

NP: What was it doing in the grain shed?

RM: It was just sitting there. It was just, like, sitting there in this old shed down on the ground. I figure, "Well, I'll take this. It looks pretty good." It was just a beautiful mirror. It's got all the carving around it and--. Yeah.

NP: Yeah. That leads into my question about memorabilia and our project, our project besides this Voices project. I think I've mentioned to you that we're hoping to get a National Historic activity centre set up.

RM: Yeah. And you're looking for pictures?

NP: And we're looking for pictures. Have you been a collector?

RM: No.



NP: No?

RM: No, really. No.

NP: So you don't have pictures of the old--.

RM: I don't have any pictures.

NP: The old trains and the old boxcars and--.

RM: No. I've seen many of them in my career.

NP: Who are the grain historians, or the train historians, in town?

RM: God, you know--. You know what you should actually do is you should put an ad in the paper looking because I ran into an individual one day when I was at the depot. He was on the other side of the tracks down by the Kam River, and he was taking pictures of some locomotives or whatever. I kind of walked across and talked to the individual, and this fellow probably knew more about railway tracks and where they used to run than anybody I had ever seen. He actually gave me an old timetable. I don't know if you know what a timetable is. A timetable is how trains used to run, you know, at a certain place at a certain time. We still have timetables to this day, but he gave me an old timetable. I think it was 1915 or something when Union Pacific used to run into the depot on Syndicate Avenue, and it was called Union Station. He had pictures from the early 1900s of trains and elevators, and it was absolutely amazing. You know, you should put an ad in the paper, and this guy will come out of the woodwork because he was telling me about a set of tracks that used to run down where Mapleward Road is, you know?

NP: Hm. And that sort of goes back to the beginning of our interview where you said there used to be several different--.

**[1:50:01]**

RM: Yeah. The reason why I knew that there was several railways was because when I was working on the project for direct access, I actually went to the Lands and Titles office and searched out all the land because, believe it or not, we didn't know what we owned, CP. Okay? We had no idea what we owned. So when I went back there and started researching to see who owned what, I found out what CN owned and what CP owned and--.

NP: Did you ever do a report on that, on who owned what?

RM: No.

NP: No?

RM: No.

NP: How do you search that? Do you just go for CP and look, or do you have to start from scratch and--?

RM: You start from scratch. You just go and take a look at the piece of land, and you start looking back to see who owns them. Then you get the names of all the different railways that owned the piece of track. Like, all the land where Current River is built, like just outside of Richardson's, was owned by the Port Arthur Wagon Company, and that's where that elevator was built. Half of the yard is sitting on City of Thunder Bay property, and that lease comes up pretty soon. 2015 it comes up. It was a 100-year lease.

NP: For half of Richardson's?

RM: Yeah, for some of the support trackage on this side of Richardson's.

NP: And that's with CP?

RM: And CN's trackage.

NP: And the city owns the land?

RM: That's right.

NP: Oh. That's interesting to know. [Laughs]

RM: I was mentioning--.

NP: Very interesting. 2015?

RM: 2015. Yeah. Hopefully somebody in the city knows that.

NP: Maybe not. [Laughing] But they will! Since I talked to you last before this time, I had mentioned to you that we had secured Western 10 as our elevator for our project.

RM: Okay.

NP: Maurice is still operating it, and we've just put in a Historic Site application. And the application is for designation of the elevator as a historic place and the designation of an event, which we are calling the nexus, N-E-X-U-S. And the nexus is the development of the railways, the shipping fleet, and the elevators as a nationally significant event in Thunder Bay, that putting all those three elements together eventually led to Canada becoming a major grain exporter and Thunder Bay becoming the world's largest grain port. Okay. So we actually would like to do some discussing with both CN and CP at a fairly senior level about land ownership, about the possibility of interpretive plaques, creating a sort of a let's-go-back tour along the waterfront.

RM: Along the Kam River?

NP: Along the Kam River and, as much as possible, right though to Current River.

RM: Like you mean different plaques at different locations?

NP: Yeah.

RM: Okay. Have you seen the plaque that's over on Brown Street?

NP: Yes. The one at the base of the bridge?

RM: Yeah, the one that's across from Maier Hardware there.

NP: The first--. Right across from Maier Hardware?

RM: Yeah.

NP: No. What's that one.

RM: There's a plaque there. I remember reading it when I went to Maier Hardware. It had something to do with the first spike, where the railway was first--.

NP: Okay. No, I haven't seen that one. I saw the first spike for CP across the Brown Street Bridge.

RM: Okay. I haven't seen that one. There's one right on Brown Street itself.

NP: Okay. No, I have not seen that one.

RM: Yeah, there's a plaque right there.

NP: All right.

RM: The Beer Store's here, and then Maier Hardware's on the other side, and there's a plaque there. So that's the idea, you're having plaques? That's kind of in the right area to do it.

NP: Well--. And making it more of a journey than sort of just coming and reading the plaque. So the city would like to have a trail as much as possible, but getting access rights along property that isn't necessarily--. That's why I was interested in the item coming up.

RM: Yeah, I mean, wherever you want to put the plaques, it's not owned by the railway. I mean, along there you have Pool 10 right now, and they're tearing down Pool 11, I believe. It's being--.

NP: That's in limbo.

RM: Yeah, but I think it's being demolished. I mean, that's owned by the Ontario government right now. Right, it's owned by the government? It's not owned by the railway.

NP: Yeah. No, it's in limbo according to the Ontario government. But anyway.

RM: Oh. But there--. And also, I mean, Paterson, that's not owned by anybody over there. They still have their property there at Paterson.

NP: Well, it's owned by TBT Engineering now.

RM: Okay.

NP: Yeah.

RM: The guys that do the tunnelling.

NP: But they're very cooperative, very good corporate citizens.

RM: Okay, yeah. They own some property there. And as you go further down the river--.

NP: Elevator D.

RM: Elevator D. That's--.

NP: Would that be CP?

**[1:55:01]**

RM: It was a CP elevator, eh?

NP: Yeah.

RM: Yeah. So it might be their property there. Where Pool 8 is, that's nobody's property. That's just a--.

NP: Yeah. Well, that is the province's.

RM: That's the province's? Okay. Yeah, I remember that fire. We went to that when that burnt down.

NP: Not that long ago.

RM: Yeah.

NP: That was in my having been back here.

RM: That must have been maybe '99.

NP: Yeah.

RM: Or in around there.

NP: In around that area, yeah.

RM: Yeah. Yeah. It was September the 30<sup>th</sup> of that year.

NP: So when they were taking down an elevator, what--. They would contact CP or CN and say, "We're taking down this elevator, come and take your tracks away."

RM: The tracks would have gone first.

NP: Oh, they would have?

RM: And it wouldn't have been CN or CP that would have--. Again, the ownership would have been--. How do I explain it to you? If the railway comes into your facility, that switch that comes in, the first rail length past the switch is where ownership ends. Okay, so if the railway owns the switch, one rail length past the switch, then it would be your property.

NP: So if it was CP property, they'd still own it.

RM: Yeah. No, CP wouldn't own it. The only thing they would own would be east of D, that elevator that was east of D.

NP: Okay.

RM: Yeah. Because the rest were all owned by Sask Wheat Pool, Manitoba Wheat Pool.

NP: By that time.

RM: Yeah. Yeah. It would still be their property, or they sold it to somebody. It wouldn't be the railways.

NP: Okay. Yeah. Because Maurice bought some CN. I think he said CN property that was for sale. Would that be CN property right there at the base of the Brown Street Walkover Bridge?

RM: Yeah, because CN had a lead going in to get to the other elevator behind him, Pool 11.

NP: That was interesting because I saw old pictures of those two elevators, and a railway track went right through. There's two workhouses on 10.

RM: Yeah. Went through. Right through.

NP: It went right through.

RM: Right in between the elevator.

NP: So was that operating right until Elevator E, I think it was, closed down? I think you called it 11.

RM: I call it 11, Pool 11.

NP: So as long as Elevator 11 was operating, that railway track went through there?

RM: Yeah. Yeah.

NP: Okay.

RM: Yeah. I'm trying to think what year that was. That was still operating in the early '80s.

NP: Yes, because I think Maurice's dad was operating it.

RM: Yeah. Because they took down Pool 5, probably went down late '70s, and Paterson, because, yeah, there was four elevators right there at one time.

NP: So even though that track went through to Consolidated, I know it as, but Elevator E or 11--.

RM: That would be the CN's right-of-way going through there. They owned that right-of-way.

NP: Yeah. And even though that track went through there, that was not the unloading track for 10.

RM: No, no.

NP: Their track shed was north of that.

RM: That's right. That was the access to get to the other elevator.

NP: Yeah. Speaking of access—and we are interested in elevators, even though we're backtracking here—did some elevators really annoy you by how they were built and how difficult they were to get cars in?

RM: Yeah. That group of elevators in Westfort where Paterson was. Yeah, that was a--. It wasn't there very long. It must have been maybe '76-'77 it was gone. I can't remember what year it was.

NP: '79 maybe.

RM: Yeah, it was because I remember--.

NP: For Paterson.

RM: Yeah, because we had to go around a big curve to get into--. Like, the elevator was actually built on a curve, but a small curve, not a big winding curve like some of these tracks. It was very hard—standing on top—to fill these because it was such a tight curve. That was just, yeah, I only did that a few times for a little bit. It was Paterson because the CNR ran through there, and then they went alongside, because they also came in there and serviced it too. So CP came in one way, and then CN came in other way. It was a strange elevator, Paterson's, yeah.



NP: Hm! Yeah. Okay. So if we are to ever get our activity centre going, what, from your time in the grain industry, do you think we should be sure to remind people of?

RM: Sorry, say that again?

NP: What should we remind people of? Like, if we're doing snapshots of the history of the railway in Thunder Bay, what's important for people to know, or what might be interesting for people to know that could be featured in an interpretive centre?

RM: How many elevators there were here at one time. You know, I don't--.

NP: How much trackage there was at one time!

RM: How much trackage there was, how many elevators there were. There's a really old—I don't know if CP still has it—but I remember in the board room there was an old map, probably drawn up in the early 1920s, of the entire terminal, where all these elevators were. Yeah. That might be around. I'll see if I can find it. See if they still have it, eh, and ask them for it because that would be good to have something like that.

**[2:00:16]**

NP: Yeah, because we could even get a scanned copy of it.

RM: Yeah.

NP: Speaking of that, what about CP archives? Do they have an archival department? I think they do.

RM: I don't know what they would have.

NP: No?

RM: They may. They may.

NP: Do you have connections with CP that we might be able to use to help further our project?

RM: Yeah, I can make some calls and get some, yeah, connections for you.

NP: Yeah?

RM: Yeah. Find out somebody locally that you can contact and take it from there.

NP: And then through there--.

RM: Okay.

NP: Yeah. Okay. Well, as I predicted, this was a very good interview. I appreciate your time. I appreciate you finding time, knowing that--.

RM: Yeah, I've been very busy.

NP: That you've been very busy.

RM: Very busy.

NP: I'm hoping that we can keep you on our list of advisors, which means we call you when we need advice, but we don't bring you into boring meetings.

RM: Okay.

NP: Because I get a sense you would be very reluctant to be part of that. [Laughing] So thanks so much for taking time.

RM: I have those same salt and pepper shakers just like that.

NP: Oh, do you? The ones that leak all over the table.

RM: Yes. The ones that you have to put on something. [Laughing]

NP: So I'll just say goodbye.

RM: Okay.

**End of interview.**