**Narrator:** Antonio Menei (AM)

**Company Affiliations:** Manitoba Pool Elevators

**Interview Date:** N/D

**Interviewer:** Ernie Epp (EE)

**Recorder:** Owen Marks (OM)

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**Summary:** Retired foreman of Manitoba Pool Elevators Antonio Menei discusses his career in the Thunder Bay grain elevators. He begins by telling the story of his immigration to Canada and getting a job in the Manitoba Pool car shed shovelling boxcars and later operating the boxcar dumper. He describes joining the millwrights due to his construction work skills, and he explains some of the common maintenance issues and work during the summer and winter months. Menei then discusses becoming a foreman in the car shed and becoming responsible for coordinating the railcar unloading operation. He describes the close-knit nature of the workers, their social gatherings outside of work, and being part of the union. Other topics discussed include changes to railcar unloading technology, improved dust control, shipping grain by rail in the winter, and the story of other family members from Italy coming to Canada.

**Keywords:** Manitoba Pool Elevators; Grain handlers; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Grain elevators—Equipment and supplies; Car shed; Railcar unloading; Boxcar shovelling; Boxcar dumpers; Hopper cars; Millwrights; Labour unions; Labour strikes; United Steelworkers Union (USW); Duct control; Immigrant workers; Immigrant experience; MPE Pool 1; MPE Pool 3; MPE Pool 2; AWP Pool 9

| Time, Speaker, Narrative |
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| EE: Well, I'm so pleased to be here this afternoon to do this interview with you and to have your narration. Perhaps we could start by your giving your name.<br><br>AM: My name? Antonio Menei.<br><br>EE: And your place and date of birth? Which you gave it before but put it on the tape. |

AM: I was born in Italy. Teramo, Italy.

EE: In the Abruzzi--.

AM: Abruzzi, yeah.

EE: Province. And when?

AM: 1923. 3-1933. Yeah.

EE: In March of 1933. And then we can get to the interesting stuff. How was it that you came to work in the elevators?

AM: How old I was?

EE: Well, yes. How old you were. Did you migrate to Canada first?

AM: Yes. I came in Canada in 1959.

EE: 1959, so you would have been 26 or so.

AM: In February. I came in February of 1959, and then I worked in car wash for a while, Supersonic car wash for a while. Then there was some opening with Manitoba Pool, and then I went to work with a friend at Manitoba Pool, in there. We worked two months, just about a day before two months, we laid off, and then I started again in 1963.

EE: So you were there briefly in 1959, was it as early as that?

AM: Yeah, that's the earlier one.

EE: And then four years later?

AM: Yeah.

EE: And from that time onwards?

AM: From then, I work with Barnett-McQueen on the construction.

EE: Oh, yes. Sure.

AM: And we had a good time. We had good--. All the way. Whatever we worked--. I've never been unemployed once. [Laughs] I don't even know what employment insurance looked like.

EE: Well, that's splendid.

AM: Sure, because you work and everybody--. They don't let you do. They need you. We manage so far.

EE: Were there a lot of Italian men working at Manitoba Pool?

AM: Oh, lots of Italian, yes.

EE: And so, I suppose you became a member of the Italian Mutual Benefit Society, did you?

AM: Oh, of course. Yeah.

EE: On the north side.

AM: On the north side.

EE: You were on Cumberland, or Algoma, rather.

AM: On Algoma, yeah.

EE: So I guess did the Society serve as a kind of recruiting hall for Manitoba Pool? You know, guys who were there.

AM: No, no. They have nothing to do with the Italian Society.

EE: But the people who were there, if you were looking for work, they'd say that Manitoba Pool would be a good place to work?

AM: Well, oh, yes. That time, there was. Yes.

EE: And so, you worked there for how many years?

AM: For 35 years.

EE: 35 years. From ’63 to--.

AM: ’63 to ’98.

EE: ’98. Wow.

AM: We started with the shovel, you know. [Laughs]

EE: Okay. Yes, how did--? And you worked for Manitoba Pool. That’s the next question. What kind of work did you do? So you started with a shovel.

AM: We started shovelling boxcars for--.

EE: Emptying the boxcars.

AM: Emptying the boxcars. Then they put me in with the millwrights because I was a handyman a little bit. Cement worker, bricklayer thing, you know? I went with them. I done all the maintenance in there most of the time. After, when I started to get a hold a little better, then I went up to foreman.

EE: I see.

AM: **[0:03:49 At the end, then sent to retire].**

EE: So just to review that, then, you did the hard work in the boxcars for a little while.

AM: Well, you have to learn, to start at the beginning, you know? [Laughs]

EE: And then you were, because of the construction and millwright-type skills you were saying, you got into maintenance, and you worked--.

AM: The company sent us for a thing. I forget how many weeks. And you have Confederation College to finish a maintenance course for millwrights for a while.

EE: I see.

AM: We pass the course and that, and we got on the job.

EE: Sure. Being a millwright was a pretty good position to have.

AM: Very good position, yeah.

EE: As against the fellows who were sweating in the cars, eh?

AM: Well, but after then the dumper come. When the company put the dumper in, so you don't have to shovel no more. They dump. Then they automatically used to open them up, and they attach the car. Easy.

EE: Once these hopper cars came along, made it even simpler.

AM: Yeah.

EE: You don't remember, I suppose, when the unloading, the mechanical unloading of the boxcars started? Or do you remember when that was?

**[0:05:07]**

AM: No, I don't remember exactly when they put it in, the dumper, no.

EE: Did it happen in those first years already, in the 1960s?

AM: But the Manitoba Pool, Pool 1, they put it in brand new when they build the elevator. The same year when they build the elevator. They build the elevator and put the dumper.

EE: Sure.

AM: But then a few years later, they done Pool 3 too. They built another piece of building up, [inaudible], and make it suitable for the dumper. They dump the car in that too.

EE: When they went to the dumpers, I suppose they didn't need as many workers, or was it just that the work became easier? Did it reduce the workforce?

AM: Oh, it become easier. Of course, with the dumper. I had been a dumper man too for a while. Oh, yeah. Time before I become the millwright, I went out, used to be dumper man and everything. Yeah, yeah.

EE: But I guess I'm wondering whether it saved labour, whether it took fewer workers, or were there still as many workers there, they just didn't have to sweat quite as much? [Laughs]

AM: But still the company, they expanded. They would grow, and then they would get a job for everybody. We was working over 300 people in there with Manitoba Pool at that time.

EE: And so, this would increase the throughput of wheat or of grain. They could handle more grain with the equipment.

AM: Handle more grain, yeah.

EE: 300 workers, eh?

AM: Oh, yeah. We had a lot of people in there.

EE: And it was in the two different elevators that you were mentioning?

AM: Well, we had the Pool 1, Pool 3, and we had Pool 9, and we used to go Pool 2. They open here and there, and then when they open it, we get the gang in there, and we have to go there and operate the same thing.

EE: These were all Manitoba Pool elevators?

AM: All Manitoba Pool elevators, yes. They was good at the time, yeah.

EE: Yeah. I guess, well, I grew up in Manitoba on a farm—although my father sold grain primarily to Paterson's, so he didn't flow through the Pool—but, well, those were good years of production too.

AM: Well, all would depend from the farmer. The farmer produce the grain, and we manage here.

EE: And you put it through.

AM: We ship it. We feed a lot of people. [Laughs]

EE: You do, indeed. Yes, yes, indeed. Could you describe a typical day? From morning to end, what sort of day it would be? You'd get to work at--.

AM: Well, when we started from the shovel, and then we have to work a lot of overtime. We shovelled three nights a week, eight hours on days, and then we come back for another three hours after supper and continue until 9:30. Then we're done. But then, after a while, they put two shifts on. Later on, you see, they get the [inaudible], then they put three shifts on.

EE: Three eight-hour shifts?

AM: Three eight-hour shifts, yeah.

EE: So it's around the clock?

AM: Then around the clock, yeah.

EE: And I guess within the day, is there--. What kinds of breaks did you have during the day?

AM: Well, because in the work all the way, you get a little break. You eat whenever you get the chance, or you get 20 minutes for lunch and coffee and so on. You take whatever. But everybody can take on the job anyway because the job was easy. You watch the machine--.

EE: You're not--.

AM: Or stop the machine because you cannot take a coffee. [Laughs] You continue. You keep it going.

EE: Yes. Surely, I wouldn't think of the elevators as being a sort of a process industry like an oil refinery or something or a chemical plant, but in its way, it is. Or a paper machine, which, you know, just keeps running. But the elevator is somewhat like that.

AM: Well, the machine, they operate. You don't do nothing. You just operate the machine and maintain. You clean around or whatever he has to do. The ship come, and then you load the boat. Assemble--. You need the guys on the scale floor. The guys in the office give the order of what bin you've got to open. We had the sheet, the same thing. You take the sheet to see what it is, and then when you get the light, open the bin, make sure the belt go, it don't spill. If you spill, you've got to clean it, eh? [Laughs]

EE: Keep it as tidy as possible.

AM: That's it. The guys on the shipping gallery, they watch the grain over there to go in the boat. You know, all kinds of things.

EE: And when you went on--. After the millwright course on maintenance, that would change the day somewhat. It would be sort of unpredictable, I guess, depending what needed to be done?

AM: Well, yeah. But then you start the little problem a little bit. You start to feel--. See, it's okay in the summertime. But when in the wintertime at 20 below zero, and the boss says, "Well, tomorrow we're going to take apart the machine," it was a little bit--. Then my arms started to bother me a little bit because you can't work with the gloves because you've got to manage the small bolts and parts you can't with thing. Not too many clothes, and then you start to feel there might be better than out here, take another course. [Laughing]

**[0:10:37]**

EE: To do something else. Yeah. Oh, yes. We interviewed someone who worked removing equipment on the elevators in the depth of winter when they were out there on the outside cutting--.

**[*…audio skips*]**

AM: I feel that maybe. At Pool 3? Pool 3?

EE: This was Maurice Grinstead, who used to work--. A sheet metal worker, so it was a company that would be hired to do this work. He describes winter conditions as well, so I--.

AM: So it was good. I'd been all over the places just about in the elevator.

EE: Yeah.

AM: Could be working. Good job. You do your job, and nobody bother you. All good people to work in there, all friends. At the time, it go nice, you know?

EE: What kinds of maintenance problems did you face in the elevators?

AM: Well, we sometime get the machine on for so many hours in a day over several years, so we have to overhaul that. You have to take all the machine apart. We would take them all apart and put totally new parts in, yeah, from the bottom to the top because you used to [inaudible] and everything, but now they clean them up. Then they started ordering new parts and--.

**[…*audio skips*]**

EE: Condition one of the machines.

AM: Well, most of the time in the summertime, three weeks, two guys—one in the back, one in the front of the machine—we take it apart, we put it back together, with three weeks.

EE: That's the time to do it in the summertime when it's warm.

AM: But in the wintertime when it's cold, it take a little bit longer because you--. And then sometimes, you not have no parts, and then you have to wait for it. You do something else, you see?

EE: Sure. Well, because you'd have to pull it apart to know what needed replacing.

AM: Well, you make sure you put it back where it belongs after. [Laughing] Otherwise, it wasn't working.

EE: Yes, indeed.

AM: When you touch the button--. [Laughs] Maybe the grain is supposed to go one way, it goes the other way.

EE: Yeah, you don't want any parts leftover when you're finished the work. It should all be in there. So you don't want any extra parts, and then you want to be sure--.

AM: Oh, yeah. Take a little common sense. You watch when you take apart. We never went in school for this. We learned together--. **[…*audio skips*]** Little three-cylinder. One of the big one outside, the one small inside, and then inside the screw on there. You've got to put them on the right way. [Laughs]

EE: So that would mean stacking them aside carefully, or you put labels on things sometimes I suppose.

AM: No, no. No put labels. We used to mark here and there. We used to mark everything.

EE: There were manuals for these machines as well. Had the manufacturer had provided books to--?

AM: No, they no give you nothing. The machine is there for a decade. We just go. Whatever it is, you take them apart, and then you put it back together. You started from the bottom on one side. I go three, and then you come back on the other three. Three, three, and three. Then we make them a little bit bigger. We put four. But four to one on the top, it was high. It was more difficult to do it up there.

EE: Yeah, I can imagine.

AM: But we managed.

EE: How high would the machine be? **[…*audio skips*]**

AM: Maybe more, yeah.

EE: So you'd need scaffolding or--.

AM: More.

EE: Scaffolding around it to work on it, I suppose?

AM: No, just two sides—on the front and the back.

EE: And the person who took it apart put it back together again?

AM: Well, yeah. Oh, yeah. Most of the time.

EE: You didn't exchange ends! [Laughs]

AM: The company, they put us--. They says, "Okay, you and you two tomorrow. You work on this, you work on there." You don't go work--. Then the rest of the millwrights, they go. If you have any blockage, something blocked or broken, then you've got to replace.

EE: How many millwrights were there in the elevator, in any one of the elevators?

AM: Well, it would maybe be 10, 12.

EE: Per elevator?

AM: Yeah, each elevator. Yeah.

EE: Of course, there were three shifts at this point, were there, then? So you'd--.

AM: Yeah. One or two shifts, especially at night. In the daytime, we work the most overhaul.

EE: The most millwright work?

AM: But we don't overhaul on night. They can't overhaul. Just on days.

**[0:15:08]**

EE: Sure. Okay.

AM: The night is just to maintain the rest, then they get another four or five sheet metal man to do the job they've got to do. Sheet metal, yeah.

EE: And those would be hired from outside?

AM: No, no, those--.

EE: Or were the sheet metal--?

AM: No, we work.

EE: You had those as well as part of the workforce?

AM: Yeah. We got those as well. Yes.

EE: How many men were there doing this kind of work? Not the grain unloading and putting it through, but this kind of support work in maintenance. How large a crew would that be? More than the 10 or 12 that you were saying?

AM: No, no.

EE: No, that would be the support staff.

AM: Oh, yeah.

EE: When did you become a foreman?

AM: I don't remember the years that I worked there.

EE: Did you do it for quite a long time or--?

AM: No, I think I worked for 4, 5, 6 years, maybe more.

EE: Early ‘90s then maybe?

AM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Okay. And when you were a foreman, were you a foreman in the maintenance or for the--?

AM: No, became foreman in the car shed. Just operated in the car shed, organizing. You look after your men and that. They give you the gang. The give you dumper men, the--. **[*…audio skips*]** Ride, somebody go put the hook, the winchman, three, and three, six, four, eight. Eight to ten people. Then you look after the cleaning. The people have got to clean the mess in some places. You have to clean it because it was the grain, it started to explode after. You’ve got to keep it spic and span all the time.

EE: Sure. And Manitoba Pool made sure that the elevators were clean.

AM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

EE: I think I’ve heard of dirty elevators, but that is dangerous.

AM: Yeah. We’ve got a couple of men, today maybe sometimes you get told--. You get some spare people in there. You say, “Okay, you go clean this area here. Go clean.” We got the big one, maybe more people will go there to clean it up. [Laughs] Yeah.

EE: When you became the foreman, how many foremen would there have been in that whole elevator?

AM: Well, just the foreman in the car shed, and then the rest of the foremen was inside. The rest, the best men, they don’t need a foreman. Just one guy depend--. One guy, two guys. Just everybody take care of themselves. The rest of the foremen, they just go looking for everybody. There was, I think, one on days, one or two on days. One each shift, anyway. One take each shift, yeah.

EE: So having--. You were making sure that you were responsible to keep the grain coming out of the car shed properly?

AM: Yeah. Go there, they give you a light, you make sure you send the grain up. No matter if you have a problem or not, you have to send the grain up here. [Laughs] Well the grain, if you don’t give them enough, you’ll hear them say, “Some more!”

EE: I see. Good. And you enjoyed being a foreman, I imagine?

AM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It's easy. If you're a good man, you get along easy with the people in there. They work with you.

EE: Would the gang that you were working with, were they all Italians or--?

AM: No. No, no. All kind.

EE: A good mix of people, eh?

AM: Whatever they come in there. Italian or whatever. We had just--.

EE: Who was the superintendent of the elevator when you were a foreman?

AM: Superintendent? There was--. Wait a minute. Steve Humeniuk. What did they call the other one? Cooper. George Cooper. There was Gary. I forget the last name now. Posen. Gary Posen, yeah.

EE: There were the Mallons were--.

AM: The Mallons, yeah.

EE: Were also involved with--. Worked for Manitoba Pool as well, did they?

AM: Yes, yes.

EE: Now, were they superintendents, or were they managers?

AM: No, they was superintendent, yeah. Mr. Mallon, the father, he was a good superintendent that guy. He was nice. He was acting like a superintendent. "I tell you." A respectable man, and he respect the people and everything. Then his kids became superintendents too.

EE: We've interviewed them, so that's why I was wondering whether we'd get to them.

AM: Day before yesterday, I see Brian, and we talked. [Laughs] Very nice people, yeah.

EE: Yeah. They impressed us as that. They certainly--. What they described as the style of operation of Manitoba Pool is the style you're describing as well that people worked well together.

**[0:20:04]**

AM: For me, I tell you, all good. All the superintendents that I remember, even the ones before when I was shovelling. All the way, the people respect. When we start, Scocchia and I, the shovel, the first time, you never know how it work and that.

EE: No.

AM: We shovelled ten cars, the same as the rest of the people. It was Bill Stewart, I think it was. That's the name of the guy, the superintendent at the time. It was a nice skinny guy that came in there. He came in to feel, and they're hard and says, "Oh, lot of muscles!" [Laughing]

EE: Understand how you guys did--.

**[…*audio skips*]**

AM: But if you not learn for one week, I tell you. For the first day, we shovelled ten cars, the same as everybody.

EE: Yeah. You met the standard.

AM: Oh, yeah.

EE: Yeah. You were a member of the union as well. Were you all members of ledge 650?

AM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Of the grain handlers?

AM: Well, you have to, yeah. See, over there, you don't have to join. As soon as you reach the seniority, automatically you start to pay.

EE: How long did it take to be on the seniority list? Was it--.

AM: It takes 60 days.

EE: After two months.

AM: After two months, yeah.

EE: Or is it 60 work days?

AM: Yeah, after two months, you get in on the seniority list at that time. Yeah.

EE: Right. And then you became a member of the union.

AM: And in 1959 for two days, we never get on the seniority list. That's why you have to wait because the elevator was not too much, not too busy for a while. We had a lot of slack, but I have no problem. **[*…audio skips*]** Yeah!

EE: Got to get the Liberals back in power, eh? [Laughing] Conservative Tory times are hard times. I remember some of the guys--. I was in parliament, of course, during the Mulroney Government, and there were people who were very happy to say those sorts of things when they were in government.

AM: Oh, they're for bigger--.

EE: [Laughing] Your first experience of a Canadian government.

AM: Well, they've got a job to do, so.

EE: Yeah. They've got jobs to do for sure. So when--. The elevators were on strike a couple of times during those years, I guess. There was a strike, what was it, in the late '60s was there?

AM: Yeah. Oh, no. It was around ’70, ’68 to ’70, because we had been quite a bit on strike at that time. But we was lucky because we not have enough seniority, we get laid off. So we go work in construction. [Laughs] If you’re not, you’ve got to stick it in. And that time, they give you $25 a week for--. Come on! You can’t support your family with--.

**[*…audio skips*]**

EE: Home or--?

AM: No, no.

EE: I see. So the family depended on your income.

AM: Depend on my income, yeah. I support my wife and three kids. Yeah.

EE: Sure. You had to, sure. Had you married before you came to Canada, or did you marry here?

AM: I was married before I came here.

EE: So your--.

AM: The wife had two kids in Italy. Two kids born in Italy, one born here.

EE: Sure.

AM: And then I bring the wife here. See that things go okay. Go pretty good. I start to build a little bit, make a little bit of money to support, and I bring the family here.

EE: Sure, as it should be. Family reunification another good government program. Who was leading the union in those days?

AM: Frank Mazur.

EE: Already in ’68, ’70?

AM: Frank Mazur, yeah.

EE: Good old Frank. What did you think of Frank?

AM: Oh, Frank, Frank. Frank for himself, Frank.

EE: He was for himself, did you say?

AM: For Mazur, yeah. **[…*audio skips*]** The union good, but sometimes the union no good for the people. Not because I won't say because of the union, but the union good for the lazy people. For you working people, you do your job, and nobody bother you.

EE: If it's a good workplace, that would certainly be true.

AM: Yeah. The second time they went on the strike, more or less, that was not right because we fight, fight, fight, and at the end of the fight, what did they get? What did the offer the company the first time we get at the end. So somebody told me when we to the meeting at the labour centre, "But we get--. What are we striking for? It's the same money the company offered." "Oh, [inaudible] penny here, penny there."

EE: How long were you on strike that time?

AM: That time I don't remember. I think around three weeks, I guess. Two, three weeks.

EE: And it gained you nothing?

AM: What they offered before, they accept whatever it was and back to work.

**[0:25:09]**

EE: Well, I've been told that you never want to strike for money because that's risky. When you're on strike, you don't get paid, so can you make it up afterwards? [Laughs] You need to be striking for something else, like a pension plan or something, you know?

AM: Well, the pension was enough. It was voluntary. Whatever you wanted, they come in. That was no big deal, yeah, because everybody want to join, everybody want the pension when they retire, you know?

EE: Yes. Did Manitoba Pool have a pension plan as well?

AM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: And so, you were receiving--?

AM: We had, yes.

EE: You're receiving money from the pension plan now, are you?

AM: Oh, yeah. Sure.

EE: Even though Manitoba Pool is gone, and Viterra has been sold out to--.

AM: No, no. You got the money.

EE: But the pension plan continues?

AM: Oh, yes.

EE: Good.

AM: The pension--. Oh, no. The pension plan, they don't own it no more, the money. The money after they transfer to the insurance, from the insurance they pay. Now, if you pay, you can take for five years, for ten years, or for 15 years, but still, you have how long you live, so.

EE: Sure.

AM: Yeah. Like me, I take for 15 years. I says, in case something happened to me, I can support the kids a little bit, the family. I take a little longer, but you get more if you get for five years.

EE: A higher amount?

AM: Higher, yeah.

EE: Or larger amount.

AM: Yeah. It depends which way you figure out is better for the person, anyways, so.

EE: Yes. Well, those are the decisions that you do want to make. When you became a foreman, I guess you weren't in the union any longer?

AM: No, no. No, you pay.

EE: You were still in lodge 650?

AM: Oh, yeah. Still you pay, yeah. Still you pay union dues.

EE: I see. Superintendents wouldn't be, but--.

AM: Maybe superintendent, yeah. Maybe.

EE: But foremen continued in?

AM: Yeah.

EE: I'm glad to hear that because you do want the protection of a union just in case. [Laughs]

AM: I don't know for the foremen, the foremen who work in the office. I think they still was paying anyway, I believe.

EE: Yeah. How many people were there in the office in the elevators in Manitoba Pool?

AM: I don't remember exactly. I mean, there was more or less, anyway. But only there was maybe three, four foremen, the superintendent, and the rest of all the grain inspector kind of stuff. Yeah.

EE: Sure. And the Manitoba Pool would have its own inspectors, and then the Grain Commission people were there?

AM: Yeah, they had their own inspector, yeah.

EE: Yeah, sure. What would you like people to know about the work you did through these years? We're doing a recording here, which is supposed to last forever, so what would you like people to know about the work that you did? [Laughs]

AM: They can know everything I done. It don't make no difference for me. [Laughing] It was good because I did nothing wrong. You do everything to help the people to keep it going. Especially for me, everything came. As a matter of fact, even when I retire, wherever I go, "Oh, there's old Tony! Hey! Hi, Tony!" You know? If he was a better guy, I says, "Who wants--." [Laughing]

EE: There are a lot of retired elevator employees in Thunder Bay, I'm sure.

AM: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

EE: You belong to the Cultural Centre, I suppose, as it is called now?

AM: No, no. No more now, no.

EE: Oh, you don't?

AM: Not with that, no.

EE: Because I was wondering how many of the people who go to meetings there would be grain handlers. Do you have any idea? Were you a large number of the people who were active in the earlier days?

AM: You mean at the--?

EE: At the Italian Hall.

AM: Oh, the Italian Hall. That's where we used to go for a drink. [Laughs]

EE: Sure.

AM: Used for recreation. You go in there, and best time. We don't belong to there. We don't do anything in there with them.

EE: No.

AM: No.

EE: But were a lot of grain handlers enjoying a little relaxation in there?

AM: Oh, of course. Sure. We used to go there. We used to go in the Slovak in Fort William and that. Oh, yeah.

EE: The Slovak Legion?

AM: Sometimes we went out for lunch. You finish a little bit early, have your lunch, and then we go in there and have a couple of beer. Not one, a couple of beer. Go back to work. [Laughing] It was good time, I tell you!

EE: Sure. You wouldn't drink in the elevator.

AM: Well, no. [Laughs]

EE: Did it happen?

AM: Well, no, no.

EE: Okay. We've heard stories. [Laughs] What might interest or surprise people about what you did? I guess to go back to the question I was just asking, you were playing a part in moving what the farmers in Manitoba were growing, moving that grain to markets, international markets.

**[0:30:22]**

AM: Yeah, of course. Yeah.

EE: You were playing an important part in that. Were there parts of the job, as you think back about it now, that might surprise people to know?

AM: I have no idea what can surprise because everything they do there, all the group that work for Manitoba Pool, and the group--. The grain all the way--. They get the grain in, they clean it, and then ship them out, and let it go. A producer, some kind of--. You are in a producer line, eh?

EE: Yes.

AM: The rest--.

EE: Did you have farmers visiting from Manitoba at all? Did you ever meet farmers who grew the stuff?

AM: No.

EE: Did they come here to see?

AM: Oh, yeah. They used to come there, but we don't--. When we just mind our own business. They just come around, all the shareholders come around and inspect the thing, look, see how they're going, the things, and then go. That's all.

EE: They're with the superintendent or with someone from the office, I suppose, anyway? They'd be watching you at work, but--.

AM: No, no. They didn't. When you've got a job to do, you don't care if the superintendent or the boss come. If anybody come, you continue doing your job, what you do, eh?

EE: Sure, sure. What are you most proud of in the work that you did?

AM: Oh, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it very much, whether it was with the millwright, even up to foreman. A foreman is more headache than that because you've got to deal with the people that work with you or whatever. But no, that was good. All the rest was good.

EE: Sure, yeah. And you're proud of the fact that when you're on the street and someone sees you, they're greeting you. They have happy memories of working with you.

AM: [Laughs] Yeah. But if you've been a good guy--.

EE: Yes. But you have been. You were a good guy.

AM: When you were there, you work, but you work as a family in there because sometimes they can help you, you can help him, eh? You work together.

EE: Sure.

AM: But today, no. The people, they've been good. They've been better. When you go outside, you don't want to see them. Get out of their way.

EE: No, yeah. Yeah. Well, I hardly have to ask whether you were contributing to Canada' success in international trade. You were keeping the grain moving! [Laughing]

AM: That's it!

EE: That was a contribution for sure.

AM: Yeah.

EE: And obviously--. These questions were put together by some of our lady friends in Winnipeg, and so the next question is describe any connections you see between your work and the work of farmers growing the grain handled in the grain trade? Well, you were handling it. [Laughs]

AM: Yeah. We handled it, oh yes.

EE: That's right. And these questions about changes. Over the years, there were changes that took place in the way in which it was done. When you were mentioning, for example, the boxcars were emptied by the shakers that were put in. And then, of course, the hopper cars came along. Were there other changes that were made in the elevator over the years that you remember?

AM: No, they can't do any other changes. That's where they come from. The boxcar became the tanker, and the tanker--. After the boxcar, they got the dumper to dump it. Before, we used to by the shovel. That's where they change it. Then when we get the

dumper. It was much better because we get the machine in there to dump the cars. Excuse me. Then when we get the tanker, they go easy too because you just open the hatch at the bottom. Before, we used to open it with the bar, big bar. [Laughs] Something that was hard. But after, we get the little machine, the little thing you insert the machine in there, touch the button, and you open it up. It was easy.

EE: So it became really easy?

AM: It become easy, yeah.

EE: Yeah. And what would have happened in the elevators? I suppose there was pollution control, dust control machinery, equipment was put in so that the elevators didn't produce so much dust. Did you notice that?

AM: They was good. They was good. We--. As a matter of fact, when I was with maintenance in there, we used to go change the filter. Once in a while, the filter would get dirty, then we would go clean them. Yeah. They was very good, yeah. They're a big change.

**[0:35:05]**

EE: Yes, I'm sure it was because the elevators used to produce a lot of dust for the city, didn't they?

AM: Whew! It was going all over the place, yeah. But they were--.

EE: You'd go over to a car and see the grain dust on the car. [Laughs]

AM: Well, that's the thing. The filter, they help quite a bit for the big stuff, but the small one still go out, you see.

EE: Okay.

AM: The filter there, you can see a little better. But other than that, a good job. It was good.

EE: Did you ever experience any explosions in the elevators?

AM: No, no.

EE: No, because the big ones, of course, are disasters on the waterfront, but--.

AM: No, in my time I work in there, we don't have no--. Of course, we check all the bins. Every bin has to be checked once in a while. I guess if you keep some stuff too long, you've got to go take it out.

EE: To make sure it's clean.

AM: Take it out and head them out and put it back. Yeah.

EE: Yes, yes. And I guess in maintenance, that would be part of the job to be looking things over carefully.

AM: No, the maintenance, we just--. Oh, something we go repair this. When you work in the elevator, the working foreman, they go around and check this thing. Like if you work in the annex, you know more or less, then in the office, they know how many days it's sitting in the bin, and you go change them. The guys that work in the annex, if you feel something, you report in the office. "Something's wrong here."

EE: Yes, yes. Sure. Were there any other changes that you noticed over the years taking place?

AM: No. Not so far I know there, anyways, so far as the time I've been in there.

EE: Would you--. The other question with that is what impact did these changes have on your job in the industry? I am guessing that some of the changes made the work a lot easier, in the unloading particularly.

AM: Well, sure. Sure, it was easier. For a while, we do it by the hand only with the muscle. [Laughs] But after when they changed this thing, very, very rarely people use the muscle, eh? Yeah.

EE: Do you have any physical--?

AM: No.

EE: Nothing that--. Your lungs are fine and so on and so forth?

AM: No. Lungs fine. My daughter always asking me if I can walk one mile an hour without stop, but that's 83 years old. [Laughs] They look okay!

EE: Sure. You came out of it healthy, that's great.

AM: Oh, no.

EE: Then there are questions about challenges. Besides dealing with these changes, which involved improvements, were there other challenges that you faced on the job?

AM: Well, you just work. You do all the time the same stuff tomorrow. It wasn't a challenge because you do today, and then the next time when they were unloading, you've got to do it again, or another one the same thing.

EE: An awful lot of routine.

AM: An awful lot of routine, yeah.

EE: And you fortunately, you could live with routine.

AM: Yeah, you change it a bit because when you change the job, but like from the shovel, then you go on the dumper, and then you change it. The challenge is now it got better. When they come with the hopper car, you change again because they go with the--. They operate the machine. You used to open with the bar or whatever, eh? Yeah.

EE: Yeah. Was there automation in the elevators as well? More and more equipment? Were there reductions in the workforce, people let go because they weren't needed any longer? Or did that happen?

AM: No, no. So far, they not need it that much, but then they went when the people retire, then if they no need, they don't hire another one. They just--. If you foremen retire, maybe they put another guy on foreman. The guy come in behind. There was more. It was good that way.

EE: And if there was a reduction, they could use retirements. People would leave, and they wouldn't be replaced, I suppose.

AM: No, no. Nobody, I know. I don't think any elevator they retired because they had no job. If the time come, they want to retire, they want to fill it too.

EE: Sure. So over those 35 years then, the workforce at Manitoba Pool Elevators remained pretty steady, constant? About the same size workforce?

**[0:40:04]**

AM: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

EE: Through all those years. Did Manitoba Pool, then, survive the changes that took place--. **[*…audio skips*]** Came into effect and so on. Was there still as much grain moving through the Manitoba Pool elevators?

AM: We used to move a lot. Sure, steady. We used to move the grain in there. So of course, the busy time in the summertime, and the wintertime, you just maintain and repair the machine, keep it going. Ship some—[coughs] excuse me—by the boxcar. Ship them by the tanker or whatever there was in there.

EE: This was to the St. Lawrence by railway?

AM: Yeah. Yeah, by the rail.

EE: So Manitoba Pool did some of that as well?

AM: Of course, but everybody, they have the share, the elevators.

EE: Sure. I wonder--. I'm thinking about the situation. I suppose Manitoba is closer to the St. Lawrence Seaway system. So for Manitoba farmers, it probably continued to make sense to ship this way. Saskatchewan and Alberta, it would be more tempting to go to the Pacific. Do you have any--. Did you feel that at all that there was--?

AM: I don't know. Now, today, I can tell you what they do because before there was grain--.

**[*…audio skips*]**

EE: About what's happening these days. Who knows? [Laughs]

AM: Who knows? Now, we don't know now what they're going to do there.

EE: Well, I won't get into the history of the grain trade, but I do worry about it on behalf of the farmers.

AM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: They built these Pool elevator companies in the 1920s, and they lasted about, what, about 75 years or a little bit more, and then things began to go awry. Really, after your retirement in the last 10 or 15 years, there have been great changes in the organization of the industry. But that really all happened after 1998.

AM: Yes. Especially, Thunder Bay. They shut all the elevators for some reason. I don't know. The way they went down after I retired, anyways.

EE: But through the period that you worked there, you didn't have a--. That wasn't happening?

AM: No. No, no.

EE: Manitoba Pool continued.

AM: No, it was going just normal. Everybody--. Like every year.

EE: Quite stable in employment.

AM: Stable, yes.

EE: Sure. **[…*audio skips*]** Did the union organize any—or did the company, for that matter—did you have a Christmas dinner or--?

AM: Oh, yeah. We had.

EE: This would be the company, though, I suppose?

AM: The company, yeah.

EE: And were there picnics in the summertime?

AM: No, no. In the summertime, we used to hold a picnic where we play the game, pull the rope between the two elevators, two companies, whatever it was. [Laughing]

EE: So you'd have a tug of war?

AM: Yeah. Pull that--.

EE: This would be at a picnic, was it, then?

AM: Yeah. We used to go in the big park and there, but in the wintertime, Christmas only. Christmas dinner. Yeah.

EE: Sure. And the company would give you gifts as well or--?

AM: Yeah.

EE: I see.

AM: We go there. They always--. Most of the time—I forget now the name of the boss—they have supper with us, those people from Winnipeg.

EE: I see.

AM: Oh, yeah.

EE: From head office?

AM: Oh, yeah. Yeah, from head office. They came and have dinner with us.

**[*…audio skips*]**

EE: I guess we're thinking already about challenges. That you think the industry faced over those years. It sounds as if Manitoba Pool didn't really—from your experience—didn't find itself facing that much in the way of challenges. Or if they did, they overcame them.

AM: Well, at that time, since I've been in there, it was good. Manitoba Pool all the way, it was pretty good going. But after I retired, I don't know. You know, you don't know no more.

EE: So you retired at age 65. I'm just doing the arithmetic. 1933, 1998. So you were 65?

AM: Yeah. 65, yeah.

EE: Take up the government pension as well and so on that you were entitled to.

AM: Yeah, that's it. Yeah.

EE: Settle into a comfortable life having earned your retirement.

AM: Sure. But the people, they've got to pay for in the pension with the company because with the Canada pension, you not go too far.

EE: Sure. Not enough.

AM: Not enough, yeah.

EE: Absolutely not.

AM: But you--. **[*…audio skips*]** Earn everything. You've got to save for your own day.

EE: And so, you had savings in addition to your pension?

AM: Of course. Of course, I did.

EE: Can I ask what the Manitoba Pool pension how much it is or how much it was? Could I ask that?

AM: It depends how much you contribute.

EE: How much you got per month.

AM: Yeah, yeah. I think I get $1,110 a month one pension. Another pension I get $600 because we--. First, the company was matched 100 percent. They saw the money go up, but then we don't get much money. We don't pay much in the pension. But then the second pension, the money we contribute ourself, then they pay good that one.

**[0:45:35]**

EE: Sure. Well, that sounds pretty good.

AM: Yeah. Then you can--.

**[*…audio skips*]**

EE: Thank you for telling us.

AM: You reach around--.

EE: As you deserve.

AM: But you can't go on trips sometimes. [Laughs]

EE: Yeah, you have to be careful. [Laughing] Trip back home to Italy!

AM: Of course, you've got to save.

EE: Sure. Well, let me see. Your most vivid memories about the job. Do you have any particular memories that really stand out?

AM: No. [Laughs] I have nothing, no memory. Been good to everybody, everybody friends with everybody. Everybody's good, they don't go--.

EE: One good day after another.

AM: Oh, yeah. For me, it was good every day. [Laughs]

EE: Except maybe in that cold winter weather when you have to go--.

AM: Well, yeah. That's nobody's fault anyways, so.

EE: The work has to be done, I suppose.

AM: Has to be done, yes.

EE: I don't know, any thoughts about the most important events that happened in the workplace during your career?

AM: No, I don't have any.

EE: Much of a muchness, as one of those phrases. [Laughing] Sort of day-to-day is more or less the same. Do you think that it's a good idea for us to do this?

**[…*audio skips*]**

AM: And read the book. [inaudible] You've got to do something. I still remember these things. "Oh, look at these things."

EE: Yes. Well, we aren't writing a book yet, but I think you're all going to expect us to do that.

AM: Some of the younger generation, if they happen to read this book, some say, "Oh, that's my dad. Oh, that's a friend of mine." It's good.

OM: Perhaps next week, Ernie.

EE: To write the book? [Laughing] I do think about it. I think about the various stages in the history of the grain trade. This latest stage is quite different from the earlier ones. I am thinking about that, but not next week. A question, Owen?

OM: Just I ask this question of a lot of the people come into Thunder Bay and then find work and stay. When did you say you came to Thunder Bay? What year was it?

AM: 1959, February.

OM: February. So you came in by train or by plane?

**[*…audio skips*]**

AM: Montreal, and from Montreal here.

OM: What were your first impressions of Thunder Bay?

AM: Well, at the time--.

EE: Port Arthur.

OM: Port Arthur, right.

AM: Port Arthur. But here, it looked like nothing, just a little small shack, a little small house. I said, "What the heck? We've got to build something here!" [Laughing]

EE: Why did you come at the time? February in particular, a winter month, in 1959. Business was a bit slower those years, and I don't blame that on John Diefenbaker. [Laughs]

AM: Yes, but--.

EE: There were other things happening that made business slow in those years.

AM: Well, my brother was here, and he said because he worked with the Hacquoil, and of course--.

EE: Hacquoil Construction?

AM: Construction. He says, “If you came now, I may be able to sneak it in.”

EE: Get a position for the summer.

AM: “If you come here,” he says, “I am able to bring you in.”

EE: Sure.

AM: Then I get a job. But then when I came here, he changed it. He go work in Saskatoon with Barnett--. **[…*audio skips*]** Wash for a while, but it was good too.

EE: Well, it’s warm inside. Steam around and so on. [Laughs] Yeah.

AM: The first cheque I get, I think it was because it was 90 cents an hour, I made $90. Boy, oh boy. $90, it was money at that time!

EE: Yeah, it bought a lot more.

OM: Where did you live when you first came here?

AM: I live at 26 North Windemere with my brother in there, yeah.

OM: Yeah. So you had a house to go to.

AM: Yeah.

EE: And your brother was with Barnett McQueen, the engineering and construction company?

AM: No, he work--.

EE: It was engineering, am I right?

AM: Yeah, engineering company, but he was working the construction then. He was a--. He started from the small one, and then he started to be a machine operator. He no like the shovel too much. [Laughing]

EE: Not something with muscles, eh?

AM: No.

EE: Oh, he's got it up there, does he?

**[0:50:00]**

AM: More up here.

OM: Is there not a Menei Construction?

AM: Menei, yeah. Yeah.

OM: He decided to become his own boss.

EE: That was a significant glance. What was he doing in Saskatoon in 19--.

AM: He was building a bridge up there.

EE: Oh, building a bridge?

AM: Building a bridge thing, yeah.

EE: Nothing connected with the grain trade at all, then?

AM: No, no. Not with the grain trade, yeah.

EE: No, right. Well, I'm glad that it turned out well. Of course, this sort of linkage, how long had he been in Canada, your brother?

AM: Oh, my brother came in 1953, I think.

EE: So he'd been here about five or six years then.

AM: My brother, yeah, before. Yeah. Then I came in 1959.

EE: And did anyone else in your family come then, or was it just the two of you brothers?

AM: No. My brother come first, and then he--. Because we have to have a--. You have to have somebody--.

EE: Sponsor them?

AM: Sponsor you. So he sponsored me, and then he sponsored--.

EE: Did he sponsor someone else?

AM: My--. **[*…audio skips*]** Gone, and then my brother-in-law and my sister with two kids. That is Bruno Contracting.

EE: Oh, so you're related to the Bruno Construction?

AM: That's my nephew! [Laughing]

EE: Oh, your nephew! Thick as thieves as the old phrase has it.

AM: That's my nephew, Bruno.

EE: Right.

AM: Yeah.

EE: Okay.

OM: Weren't there hockey players from your family too or was that--?

AM: No.

OM: I saw a Menei. There was a Menei playing hockey, but it must be another part of the family.

AM: Oh, they coach. One of my brother's kids, he's a coach.

EE: Okay.

OM: You see, you've got a famous name!

EE: Construction and sports. The Menei name is out there.

AM: He's a coach, yeah.

OM: Did you play soccer when you came here at all?

AM: No with the soccer. We had it busy. We had to go make--.

**[…*audio skips*]**

OM: You were too busy keeping in shape at the elevators.

AM: To make for piece of bread to survive. You had to make it sport. [Laughing]

EE: I'm sure. Are there any things that you can tell us about? Are there questions that you would ask of yourself if--?

**[…*audio skips*]**

AM: To ask.

EE: A pretty good job of looking through your life, have we? [Laughing]

AM: Well, it's a life. So.

EE: It's been a pretty good life.

AM: That's what I say, yeah.

EE: Canada's been a good place for you?

AM: Beautiful, yes.

EE: Have you gone back to visit very often to Italy?

AM: Whew, I've been a few trips back.

EE: Yeah.

AM: Oh, yeah. Before you've got a relative in there all the way, you want something to go. Oh, I've been four or five times back in there.

EE: Over these, what is it now, 55 years or so, I guess.

AM: Yeah. But before this, I went back to take my family back, and then I went to take my wife back. Then the kids, one time three kids went three times. They don't want to go together. Okay, one at a time. So one time we go, we take one of the kids. Next time we go, take one of the kids. Take them all back and forth to see where we come from, eh?

EE: They wanted all of daddy's attention, eh? One on one, eh?

AM: Just to see. That's how far away we've been coming here. That's a little shack where we used to live, you know? Those things.

EE: Make them grateful they were living in Canada, eh? [Laughs]

AM: Right. If you see something, then when you hear, you'll be glad with what you have.

OM: Yeah.

EE: Yeah. A good idea.

AM: Then I bring them to Cuba on a holiday.

EE: Cuban holidays?

AM: Two kids. Yeah, bring all three. Two kids to Cuba there, and then my grandson too. My grandchildren to show the people how they're living there. When they come back here, you see what we've got here.

EE: Makes them grateful.

AM: But I don't know if I did good or not, but that's where--.

EE: It could work!

AM: It could work, yeah.

OM: They would appreciate it.

AM: Yeah.

EE: Yeah. Well, I guess the only question that I see here really is--. Well, there are a couple of questions. I don't suppose you have any memorabilia? You didn't smuggle anything out of the elevators--.

AM: No. **[*…audio skips*]** Where they pay you. When somebody--. "I work with you. You pay me." [inaudible]

OM: There are hockey rinks in Thunder Bay built with the grain doors and--. [Laughing]

EE: Well, I was--. Well, I'll say something after we finish the interview about this grain trade lumber, actually. Are there any other people we should interview? John nominated you, and Gino Perri.

AM: Giulio Scocchia

EE: And Giulio Scocchia as people we might interview. Are there any people that you would think of that we might interview?

**[0:55:06]**

AM: Maybe if you would get Mallon maybe because he was a superintendent. That's what I think.

EE: Well, we have interviewed—I'd have to go back and remind myself—we have interviewed two of the Mallons.

AM: Brian or Billy? Brian or Billy Mallon?

EE: Do you remember?

OM: Well, I was with one of the--. I think it was Brian.

EE: Certainly, I think, Brian we've interviewed. Yeah.

AM: Yeah. Well, the rest are--.

EE: He's the key one, eh?

AM: He's the key one, yeah.

EE: Sure. Okay. Well, that's great. Well, thank you very much for giving us this time this afternoon.

AM: You're welcome. Very welcome. I'm glad to do this. Nice.

EE: It's been a pleasure to meet you and get to know some--.

AM: Of course, I don't remember all the way exactly all the time I've been in there, but tried to do the best to remember.

EE: Well, you've done a good job. Yeah. No, it's been great. You're making notes on what's said when, are you?

OM: Yeah, that's right. I'm just catching up here.

EE: Are you going to shut the machine off now then since we're finished?

**End of interview.**