

Narrator: James MacDonald (JM)

Company Affiliations: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool

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Summary: Former general manager of terminal operations for Saskatchewan Wheat Pool James MacDonald discusses his career in management for the Wheat Pool. He begins by sharing early connections to the grain trade through his father's work, working at a pulp and paper mill in Terrace Bay, and moving to Thunder Bay as SWP's first personnel manager. He describes the immediate challenges of juggling seniority lists for multiple elevators, improving foremen appointments, and dealing with alcohol and drug use. He recalls his interactions with the union during negotiations, strikes, and the grievance process. He discusses improvement to elevators through dust control and automation, as well as elevator closures. MacDonald then describes his move to Winnipeg first as assistant general manager and then general manager dealing with terminals in Thunder Bay and British Columbia. He discusses his continued work in labour relations, working with the specialty crops division, and sitting as chair of the Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association. He recalls his interactions with other organizations, like the Canadian Grain Commission, the railway companies, Lake Shippers Clearance Association, and the other Wheat Pools. Other topics discussed include computerization and the downsizing of Pool staff, his desire to improve the Pool's operations for the benefit of farmers, his work with colleagues who experienced the Pool 4B explosion, and his sadness at the demise of the Pools and Canadian Wheat Board.

Keywords: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; Personnel management; Labour relations; Management; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Terminal grain elevators—British Columbia; Labour unions; Industrial relations; Labour strikes; Contract negotiations; Alcohol and drug use; Grievances; Dust control; Automation; Computerization; Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association; Grain varieties; Specialty crops; Downsizing; Grain transportation—ships; Grain transportation—rail; Lake Shippers Clearance Association; Canadian Wheat Board; Canadian Grain Commission; Pool 4B explosion; SWP Pool 7A & B; SWP Pool 4A & B; SWP Pool 10; SWP Pool 8; Great Depression; Country grain elevators

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NP: This is the second interview for November 25, 2013, and, again, I'm in Winnipeg, and in the Fort Richmond area I guess I've passed across--.

JM: Richmond West.

NP: Right, and I'm going to have the person telling his story today introduce himself and his connection to the grain trade, just in general, because we're going to go very specific.

JM: Well, my connection to the grain trade started at a very tender age. Actually, when I was about five years old my father was a grain buyer in Wordsworth, Saskatchewan, near Carlyle. And it's the only elevator I know of where the living quarters were attached right to the elevator. My father could have his breakfast in the kitchen and just walk through the door to the office in the elevator that the kitchen, dining room, and living room were on the main floor, and there was a couple of bedrooms down below for my sister and myself, where I slept soundly to the music of the old engine going *boom, boom, boom, boom*.

One night my mother and father were over at the skating rink and the babysitter rushed over to tell them that there was blood all over Jimmy's pillow, and they rushed home and ascertained that a rat had been chewing on my ear. The other problem with that house is that the wind was in the wrong direction and the smoke would blow up against the elevator and back down the chimney, and we got out in just of the nick of time one night before we succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning. But that episode didn't last very long because in the Dirty Thirties they shut the elevator down, and we had to move out.

NP: Now that's a great story to start our interview with, but I still need you to say who you are.

JM: Oh, I thought you were going to announce that before I started.

NP: No, no. That's for you.

JM: I'm Jim MacDonald, James, known as Jim. Where I was born?

NP: Sure.

JM: Born in Ceylon, Saskatchewan, in a house and got all my education in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, and started working in a bank there after high school and ended up in Thunder Bay.

NP: Now I'm interested in even going back further and that's to how your dad got to run an elevator. What was your dad's history?

JM: Well, there's a story there. My dad was a veteran of the First World War. He was at Vimy and Passchendaele, and when he came back, he came to Ceylon, where he had two brothers. One owned the general store in Ceylon, and that's where he met my mother who was a clerk in the bank, Bank of Montreal, I believe. It was in Ceylon, which was robbed while she was there.

After they got married, he went into partnership in a general store in Harptree, Saskatchewan, where my sister was born. But they were robbed, presumed by the same type of people that robbed the bank. It was very close to the American border, and these Americans would come up and rob these places and then head back across the border. So, he was out of business, and that's when he got the job in a grain elevator.

After the Dirty Thirties shut the elevator down, he moved back to Ceylon where he worked part-time with his brother, and he was a chauffeur for the local doctor who happened to be a MacDonald—not related—but he couldn't drive, and any odd jobs he could do. My mother used to make ten loaves of bread a day, and my sister and I would deliver them around town for ten cents a loaf. Then he got a job in Weyburn in the mental hospital where he worked 12 hours a day, six days a week for \$50 a month. And that's where I got all my schooling.

NP: Now am I correct in assuming it would be a Saskatchewan Wheat Pool elevator that your father worked for?

JM: No. I think it was P&H, I think it was Parrish & Heimbecker. I'm not sure of that. Now the other thing I remember there was a warehouse attached to it and he sold flour, bags of flour, and I think it was Red Roses flour, but then I'm not sure of that either. You're going back a long time.

NP: So you were there when you were five, and so how long before he left?

JM: We moved to Weyburn when I was in Grade 2, so I'd be about 7 when we moved.

NP: So a couple of years.

JM: Yeah. My father, he left the mental hospital, he got a job as a janitor in a school, and then he got a job as a clerk in a liquor store—a good job—and we were finally getting our Dirty Thirty debt paid off to the doctor, the dentist, and the coal man, and et cetera, et cetera, and he died at age 46. I had been accepted into the Guelph veterinary college, but I had to cancel that.

NP: Oh my. So he died in what year then?

JM: In 1945.

NP: When were you born?

JM: '27.

NP: '27, okay. So you said that your career started working with the bank.

JM: Yeah.

NP: And was that in--.

JM: Weyburn.

NP: Weyburn.

JM: And they transferred me to Fort William.

NP: Ah, so which bank were you working for?

JM: It was the Bank of Commerce at the time.

NP: Okay. Now, were you married at the time you took the transfer?

JM: No, I only stayed in the bank in Fort William for I guess about eight months. They were paying me \$100 a month, and I was starving to death, so one of my banking friends and I, we took off to the pulp mills on the north shore of Lake Superior. And that's where I married and raised my family in Terrace Bay. I stayed there for 20 years, and then I went to Sask Pool in '68.

NP: What year did you move to Fort William for the banking job?

JM: It'd be 1948, I think. Yeah, 1948. I remember that was in February, and I got off the train and walked to the YMCA, which was quite a hike, and it was bloody cold. I spent one night in the YMCA and then went over to the bank and said, "Here I am." [Laughs] Went to work and they found a place, an upstairs room to rent someplace. It was an interesting time.

NP: You said you weren't there very long because they weren't paying very good wages. Were the elevators pretty apparent then even though you weren't in the elevator business? Did you notice them or were they sort of a backdrop?

JM: They were a backdrop. I really had no interest. I was only there eight months, and I only had an interest in girls, really. [Laughing] I was 20 years old.

NP: And was Fort William a good place for girls?

JM: Yeah. [Laughs]

NP: Well, you moved there the same time as my mother moved from Prince Edward Island to Fort William. She was married in, well, 1946 on December 25th.

JM: What was your father's name? I knew some of the inspectors.

NP: George Marks.

JM: George Marks.

NP: Jack Lourie, there was sort of a whole group of them Second World War vets who got that job after they were finished. Now, how did you make the transition then from Terrace Bay back to Thunder Bay?

JM: It was difficult. But we had five kids, and I thought that they would have a better chance at a good education in Thunder Bay rather than small town Terrace Bay. So that pushed me a little bit to move when the job was advertised. I just answered an ad in the paper. None of the grain companies in Thunder Bay at that time had ever had a personnel man of any kind, so it was a whole new experience for them and for me. So really, I was employment supervisor, industrial relations man, safety man, the whole kit and kaboodle.

NP: Was that quite different from the Terrace Bay working in the mill? Did they have--.

JM: Oh yeah, in the mill there was five people in the industrial relations department! Everybody had a little niche that they--. So I had good training, good experience in the pulp paper mill. So, it was a bit of a shock to move to some place where we had to start over.

NP: Well, how did that work? What challenges did you face with that? I would think substantial ones if they're used to-- What was the way they were doing business?

JM: Well, the manager did everything, and he wasn't necessarily a good personnel-type guy. And he had very little experience in labour relations, negotiating with the union, that kind of stuff. So, when I reported to him--. He had to kick the head clerk out of an office to give me an office. And I don't think he was very happy, although he ended up curling together. So I guess we got by that alright.

And in those days Sask Pool had, I don't know, half a dozen different elevators, some of them like Ogilvie's and Western Grain were taken over by Sask Pool. And they each had their own seniority list and we had to deal with that when we had layoffs. People were laid off in order of seniority, so then you would have to juggle people from one terminal to the other to keep things operating. And their wages were different. The person in the old Western Elevator might be doing the same work as somebody in Pool 4, but their wages were different and that caused problems. Eventually one of those things I helped do for all the elevators in Thunder Bay was to amalgamate the jobs. If your job was a grain cleaner here, you'd get the same wage no matter where you work. It cost the company some money because they had to increase quite a bit of wages because the union wasn't going to decrease anybody's wages.

NP: Was that the start of the union or had the union been around for a while?

JM: They were there when I got there.

NP: So how would this discrepancy even have occurred? Wouldn't the other companies have been paying the same or--.

JM: Yeah, but they didn't have a personnel man. They didn't want to get involved in it, so I ended up doing it for all kit and kaboodle sort of thing.

NP: Were there people like you with Manitoba Pool, so the managers continued to do that work there? But Saskatchewan Wheat Pool was so big.

JM: That's right. We had about 50 percent of the throughput.

NP: Other than remembering that they didn't have a desk for you which really made you feel welcome, right? [Laughs] And booting another guy out just to make you--. What's your impressions of working in a grain elevator? I mean you're used to big buildings because the mill's not a tiny place.

JM: I enjoyed--. I would tour the terminals—not necessarily tour them—I toured some to try to get a feel for it, and enjoyed meeting with the guys in the different terminals, but my impression was that boy this is a wide-open deal. This place is run by the union. Actually, it was run by the union. The foreman had to be a senior union man to become a foreman. It didn't matter whether he could do the job or not. Lots of guys got the foreman job, which is a non-union job. We changed that.

NP: How did you change that?

JM: We just told them that it's a management job. We'll decide who goes into a management job. You know my experience in industrial relations in a pulp mill helped me. You know there's a limit to how much power a union has. You can't--. I think I helped change the attitude there because I said, "We're managing this place. The union is not managing this place." And that was one example where we would appoint our own foreman.

NP: Now in actual operational senses, what resulted from that change, a change from the strong union bent of a foreman versus company appointing? Operationally, did it make a difference?

JM: I think it made a difference. We have better control. An example, when you pick a foreman or a superintendent for that matter, you're going to pick the best you can. So that's going to improve the whole operation. I thought of myself as a kind of manager that didn't look over anybody's shoulder. I just said, "You know what you have to do here. Go ahead and do it. You don't have to talk to me." That was a big change that happened when I moved into Sask Pool. Prior to that, they didn't do anything without checking with Winnipeg. [Laughs] Even if they were going to promote a union guy, they have to check with Winnipeg. I said to the manager in Thunder Bay, "We don't have to do that. We can do that," And we gradually took more of the responsibility from Winnipeg and ran the operation in Thunder Bay the way that we thought it should be run.

Once I got the accountant in there, one of the things we did, we devised a system whereby we could determine how many tonnes per man-hour were handled in each month—that was the hourly man-hours. And when we started doing it, we were handling maybe three tonnes per man-hour. When we finished, we were handling eight, or nine, ten tonnes per man hour because we were

better organized. We didn't have a bunch of people on the payroll that we didn't need. We tried to have just the number of people that we needed and not because we laid off a bunch of people in the fall every year, and then in the spring we would call them back.

I think as soon as the ice broke up, they'd call everybody back and they didn't need everybody right at the start! So, we were able to convince them to schedule their callback so they just got the number of men that they needed. And of course, one of the reasons tonnes handled by man hour were improved was because there was a large volume of grain going through in the 1980s, '70s and '80s. That was when Thunder Bay was really pushing grain through. And of course that helps tonne handling per man-hour.

NP: Sounds like it was a challenging time. Anything else that--.

JM: I'll show you one of the things that I thought was amusing. And I say the union was running the place. At Pool 7, which was the biggest elevator, they had a snack bar there—pop, and chocolate bars, and chips, and stuff like that. One of the union guys was running it. That was his job to run a little snack bar. That's all he did, and I think he was just about ready to retire. We didn't disrupt things that were traditional. But drinking was a problem. A lot of drinking.

NP: Yes, and you certainly are not the first person who's talked about drinking, but you're probably one of the first that's had to deal with it.

JM: I'm not saying--. We certainly didn't clear it up. But we had one superintendent, who was one of our best superintendents, who was a heavy drinker, and you couldn't always rely on him. We warned him a number of times and finally we brought him into the office, and we said, "You're fired. As of today, you're finished. But if you go into the Ontario Hospital, spend about a month there until the doctor says you're okay, we'll hire you back. That's your last chance." He turned out to be just fine.

NP: You did him a favour.

JM: Yup.

NP: Do you have any idea--. Was drinking a problem at the mills as well?

JM: No, not really.

NP: No? So what do you think was different?

JM: They had tighter control. Elevators, they were cold and dusty places. The foreman or the superintendent would hardly have any contact with them. They work on the screen department. They had a little heated cubbyhole there. They ate their lunch there, did their drinking if they wanted to have a drink. Nobody bothered them. Something I should tell you, but I think you should take it off--. [Audio pauses] How bad drink could be is we had one employee who had too much to drink on the job and when he was heading home, he fell into the slip, and he drowned. I think we were very fortunate we weren't sued!

NP: Was that a wakeup call then for--.

JM: Well, yeah, it stirred things up. We transferred the superintendent out of there, told a new superintendent, "Cut down on the drinking." So, you know, I think it probably helped a little bit. But it's very hard to control. Guys carry a bucket into--. The superintendent I told you about he wasn't the only superintendent that was a heavy drinker.

NP: No, I mentioned to you earlier on how many interviews we have done, and a substantial number of them are with people from Thunder Bay, and in all instances, they talk about—well I shouldn't say all instances but the vast majority of instances—they talk about the difficulty with drinking. And I always ask the question, "Well what changed?" Because the ethic did change and what you've said, sort of the start of a change I would imagine--

JM: Well, I hope it had an influence. But I certainly can't take credit for any significant--.

NP: And it wasn't just a Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. It was across the waterfront.

JM: Yeah, oh yeah. But an example of the attitude, you know, I'm sure you talked to people about the explosions at Pool 4 in the '50s, where people were killed.

NP: '40s and '50s.

JM: But the Thunder Bay manager when I went there—Harold Tamblin was his name—he told me that when they used to go down into the bins sometime to cleanup where the grain had congealed, and they had to break it up with jackhammers or whatever to get [inaudible]. He said they would light a match and watch the flame go up, the sparks. I mean that's the kind of guys--.

NP: Just for the fun of it.

JM: Yeah. I mean, they were rough and ready guys. And we had drug problems. Before we had a drug dealer, and the foreman fired him without dealing with the union. He just fired him. Of course that doesn't go over very big. The union raised hell and took up this guy's case and fought it and fought it and fought it. Finally, we had to--. We didn't want him back, so we had to pay him. I forget how much. "Get out of here."

NP: So in your position then were you involved in union negotiations?

JM: Oh yeah.

NP: So who were some of the actors there when you were--.

JM: [Laughs] That's a good term, actors. When I first started—I started in '68—they had a big, long strike just after I started. A three-week strike, I think it was. But all the top guys from Winnipeg would come down, and they would bring their negotiating crew. They brought a lawyer—I knew his name the other day when I was thinking about it. They brought a lawyer from Winnipeg, and he was the spokesman. But they brought a lawyer from Toronto. He was the brains. He was a character.

Anyway, we would all meet in a room, and the guy from Toronto would tell us what we should do and what we should say. He'd tell the spokesman, "If you meet with the union, this is what you say." So then, there was a meeting with the union, and the negotiating committee would come back into our conference room, and he'd tell the guy from Toronto what happened. And the guy from Toronto said, "That's not what I told you to say! This is what I told you to say!" [Laughing]

And the table, at least this big, loaded with liquor—part of the deal. But the negotiation went on, go on and on and on. But I was with them for 20 years and only one negotiation in all that time we didn't have to go through arbitration and that was the year that, I think it was the Liberals, froze wages and salaries. So, we had a real easy negotiation. "We can't do anything for you. Here's what you got." But every other year you had to bring in a negotiator would come in, a negotiator. I think after that we had a lawyer from Winnipeg by the name of Stuart Martin. He was a negotiator for many years. He was pretty good. We didn't have the guy from Toronto. I think that guy from Toronto was only there once when I was there but--.

NP: Frank Mazur was he--

JM: Yeah, yup. Frank was a good guy. Frank was all right.

NP: What made him a good guy?

JM: Well, he was a good negotiator. He was tough to deal with. But you know something? If a union member came to him complaining about something, Frank would say, “Well, put in a--.” What did they call it?

NP: Grievance?

JM: Grievance, thank you. “Put in a grievance.” So they’d fill out a grievance, Frank would sign it and send it up to us. They’d pile up on my desk. [Laughs] I’d tell the guys that were working with me, “Just leave them. If Frank gets serious about these grievances, we’ll deal with it,” But I think when I moved from Thunder Bay back to Winnipeg there was about 100 grievances on the table. [Laughs] But Frank knew what he could do and he couldn’t do. He was a good negotiator. He got things that the guys needed.

In that respect, I was at a board meeting of the Sask Pool, their annual meeting where they have all the representatives from all over the province. And one of the young guys--. I was actually bragging about the crew in Thunder Bay because they were a good crew. They knew how to handle grain. They knew how to blend grain. They knew how to make money. So I was bragging a little about this. This young guy stood up and he said, “Is this the same guys that went on strike for two weeks or whatever it was?” I said, “Yeah, they’re the same guys,” and I said, “but they deserve a fair share of the earnings of this company, and they have every right to strike.” And I never heard any more from him. But Frank was okay.

NP: There wasn’t a great understanding, but anyway, let’s go back on!

JM: I think at those meetings the farmers, generally, they used to think of the elevators in Thunder Bay just like they’re a country elevator. Well, they’re not. It was a whole different ball game.

NP: You know what amazes me when you talk about the drinking issue in particular, that there weren’t more accidents and more screw ups.

JM: No, that’s right. I’ve often thought of that. Actually, our accident rate wasn’t too bad. Now, before I got there, they were using those stupid plows to get the grain out of the boxcars. There were accidents then. But we made significant changes. Like in Pool 7 particularly the unloading operation was pretty much automated, and not nearly as many people working in that area. It’s one of the things I was able to do was--. Guys in the elevator, particularly in the engineering department and the superintendents, would come up with ideas of what they wanted to do. My job was to try and get the money for them, so they could do it. I didn’t always get everything they wanted, but I really tried to make sure that they had what they needed to do to get the job done. It worked. I

think we averaged in the terminal division, including Thunder Bay and Vancouver, in the 1980s we averaged about \$20 million a year in earnings. One year we had almost \$30 million, which is unheard of prior to that time.

NP: When you were there, how long was it again before you went to Manitoba?

JM: I was there five years in Thunder Bay.

NP: Okay, five years. Were you shutting down elevators at that time? And what lead to the--? What determined which elevators went and which stayed?

JM: Well, it depended on, to some extent, how much we were handling. Some of the elevators were specifically adapted to take particular grains like flaxseed or canola, because we tried not to, as much as possible, have too many different varieties of grain in one elevator. So that kept some of them open because they could specialize. But then as the volume of grain was lowered and the elevators that were good, operating elevators could be adjusted to accommodate different varieties, we would do that and shut down the elevators that were old and needed work.

NP: And increased, if I've got my time periods right, increase in requirements for dust control, which would be a--.

JM: Oh yeah, oh yeah. We spent millions of dollars on dust control and on automatic controls. Like Pool 8 on the river, we spent a lot more money than we should have on that elevator. We put in dust control, automatic systems, and a few years after that they shut it down. So, our foresight wasn't very good in that respect.

NP: And did dredging have anything to do with those decisions because at some point the--?

JM: Well, we had to dredge every once in a while.

NP: On the river in particular I'm thinking.

JM: In the slips.

NP: Oh, in the slips, too.

JM: But I don't remember that being a problem. I remember we had to rebuild some of the slips. I remember they used interlocking, steel piling [inaudible]. It was steel--. Things about that wide and about that thick and they interlocked, tongue and groove sort of thing. They were hammered into the ground. I remember rebuilding some of the slips with that stuff.

NP: And why did they need to rebuild?

JM: Because the old were probably wooden piles and--.

NP: Piles, yeah. Any other remembrances from that time in Thunder Bay?

JM: Nothing comes to mind.

NP: What was the relationship like between, I guess, Alberta Pool probably had a presence there, Manitoba Pool, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, and the private companies? How would you describe the relationship?

JM: The relationship was pretty good. I spent some time as chairman of the Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association, which was located here. But one of the things we did in Thunder Bay was the railway coordinators in Thunder Bay tried to give each company the amount of grain they were supposed to get, based on their percentage of the handling. And one of the things we did was we didn't insist on getting our own grain, so that the grain that Sask Pool elevators and country shipped might get unloaded by Cargill or Richardson or whatever. But then we would get some of theirs. And that saved a lot of shifting of cars and helped to improve throughput. So in that regard we got along pretty good.

We got along pretty good in negotiations, although I think I had the reputation of being a stubborn Scotsman. I ran into a former Manitoba Pool director at a bonspiel someplace in southern Manitoba, introduced myself, and told him who I was, and then I remembered him. "Oh," he says, "I remember you. You're that stubborn bugger that caused a strike in Thunder Bay." [Laughs] Which I probably did sometimes. But that's the other thing I think I brought from the pulp and paper industry. You know you don't necessarily give the union everything they want. You try to be fair and reasonable, but there's limits. Whereas some of these other guys, they didn't care. "Just keeping going. Give them what they want. Keep it going." But that wasn't my attitude. I guess I was stubborn.

NP: Well, you also had the distinction, I would think, there that most of those fellows that--. First of all, if they didn't have a personnel person, their former coworkers were running the ship, and they were also the people they grew up with, where you had a

position that was specifically to deal with those workplace issues, including wages. And you were from out of town, so you didn't have necessarily the loyalties. Is that a fair statement?

JM: Well yeah, that was another thing, there was a lot of--. What do you call it when you hire all your relatives?

NP: Nepotism.

JM: Nepotism! There was a lot of nepotism and, you know, I didn't really disapprove of that as long as the men were good. Everything worked out fine.

NP: What was the ethnic mix in Saskatchewan Wheat Pool at the time you came in? Were the old timers pretty much gone—the guys that started out in the 1920's and--.

JM: Well, it was a real mixture. There was a lot of guys worked until they were 65. Of course, there was a lot of Finlanders and Italians and a lot of Scots. It was a real mixture. There was very few Native people, largely because they didn't apply for jobs in the elevator, and they had a reputation of not coming back after payday sort of thing. So I felt bad about that, that we weren't able to involve more Native people in the business. There were a few. But ethnicity wasn't a problem. We had everything.

NP: So how then did the move to Winnipeg come about?

JM: The operations manager in Winnipeg got transferred to Regina, so the position in Winnipeg opened up.

NP: And what was the responsibilities for the operations manager?

JM: Well--.

NP: That you slipped into.

JM: Actually, it was almost a misnomer. Really, I was assistant to the general manager.

NP: And who was that at the time?

JM: That was Ron Sproul. I worked with the people at the grain sales area as far as handling specialty crops like peas and beans and mustard and stuff like that, so Ron Sproul didn't have to worry about that. So, basically that's what I did. And I attended the meetings with the Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association and helped out there. I always went to Thunder Bay with him in negotiating time because of my background in industrial relations.

NP: Who took over for you in Thunder Bay?

JM: A young fellow. He was a mechanical engineering technician and a bright, young guy.

NP: Was he working at the elevator or was he--.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Wait a minute, that's not true. We had a safety man working with us, and he was somebody I knew from the mill, and I hired him to work on safety area things. Actually, it was a temporary job for a while, but when he finished his course at Con College, he took over when I left. But he didn't stay very long. And that's when the engineering technician--. We promoted him into that job.

NP: Did he stay?

JM: He didn't stay very long either. Well, I shouldn't say that. Actually, he took over my job for a while when I retired. He was the second guy, I think. When I retired, the guy from Regina came in for a short period of time and then he left and this guy from Thunder Bay came in.

NP: So, I'm just thinking of your moving into Winnipeg and seeing things from a different perspective, I would think, than seeing the operation from Thunder Bay looking at Winnipeg. Any eye openers there?

JM: Well, you know, Winnipeg was a big city for me—born and raised in a small town in Saskatchewan. It was a congenial group. The grain people in Winnipeg weren't all that comfortable with the co-op's, but it didn't bother me. I was pretty happy doing what I was doing, and they made me chairman of the Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association for a period of time.

NP: Maybe that was your punishment?

JM: [Laughs] That could be. "We'll get rid of him!" No, but we got along, we got along fine. There was competition. I was involved in Vancouver to some extent, too.

NP: What was happening? You left Thunder Bay in '68, and so we're now starting to see the downturn of the shift of shipments out of the West Coast ratcheting up the port facilities there.

JM: That really didn't happen until after I started. But Prince Rupert was just coming on stream, I think, when I retired. I guess it had just been going for a short period of time.

NP: Who owned Prince Rupert? I'm trying to remember. Was it a conglomerate?

JM: It was a conglomerate of some kind. I lost track of who owns what in BC. I know Sask Pool traded or sold or something their elevator in Vancouver sometime after I retired. Now I don't know who owns it.

NP: It's hard to keep track of who owns what these days. You said as operations manager you were dealing with specialty crops. So what did you know about specialty crops?

JM: Nothing. [Laughs] It was only with regards to storing. Sometimes I had to convince an elevator in Thunder Bay to take this guy's mustard. "He's a good man. Help him move his mustard and get it through the system," as an example. That's a good point to bring up. I didn't know anything about the grain industry when I moved to Thunder Bay, except for the fact that I spent quite a bit of time on my relatives' farms around Weyburn. I loved to farm, and so I knew enough.

NP: You knew a mustard seed from a canola seed.

JM: Yeah, that's right. Yeah. But it was certainly an education. I really liked it, except for the problems. There were pressures like that one I mentioned about the drug dealer. That put a lot of pressure on me because the foreman that fired him, a young foreman with a wife and two or three kids, and the manager was a young guy with a wife and two or three kids, and this guy had already been accused of setting a fire to one of their vehicles. And here I've got these young families more or less at the mercy of this drug dealer. So that's why we settled with cash to get him out. But that went on for months before we finally settled. They had an arbitration, so they have our lawyer and union's lawyer, and arbitrator to try to settle this thing. We agreed to pay a certain amount of cash and get him out of there.

NP: You said you were chair of the Lakehead Terminal--?

JM: Just for a year or two.

NP: What does that association--. Take me through a meeting through a Terminal Association. What does the agenda look like?

JM: They have a secretary manager, and there are always things coming up like union matters was a key one. We would talk about what we should try to do in negotiations. There was matters of distribution of grain in Thunder Bay and everybody wanted to make sure they got their fair share. There was one point in time where we would--. It was a situation where the grain elevators were audited—as you would know from your father maybe—about every two years an elevator had a government audit. If you had a surplus of grain, the Grain Commission would confiscate it or take the money for it. So, we would talk about things like that. Who was it? Field, did you talk to--

NP: It's a new name.

JM: He was in charge of Parrish & Heimbecker's. He had my job in Winnipeg, same as my job. They had one elevator in Thunder Bay, and he went after the Wheat Board, the Grain Commission, to say that we shouldn't have to confiscate certain grades of grain. We should be able to sell those on the open market. He went to bat for us on that, and he got that. That helped us add quite a bit to our bottom line. So stuff like that was...

NP: A lobby group of sorts for dealing with the railways, did you ever have to--?

JM: Oh yeah, that's another thing. We didn't always have good relations with the railways. I can remember one meeting we had, and I said to the CPR guys, "Thunder Bay is just like a pail of water. Cars come in, cars come out." I said, "We can ship it out as fast as they come in." But it didn't work that way. Quite often they would be complaining because we weren't unloading it fast enough, and we would be complaining because there wasn't enough there to keep our crews busy. We'd have a full crew on and no grain. So, it was problems like that to be discussed.

NP: And, by the sounds of it, very little accomplished.

JM: Not really. I don't think they ever changed the system of grain in and grain out. The elevators, they would unload it as fast as they can because that's money in the bank. But the railways, they'd do it at their own time.

NP: Was there any difference in working with CN or CP or--?

JM: I don't think so.

NP: Same issues. Was there a typical day as operations manager, other than the days that you had to go and be with the Terminal Association? Was there a typical day? Like you went into the office and--.

JM: Actually, it was a pretty soft job—almost a training job. When I took over as general manager, I abolished the position.

NP: Do you think it was just a way of you learning the business a bit better?

JM: Yeah.

NP: Yeah. So that position you stayed in for how long? So you went there '68.

JM: I came to Winnipeg in '73, and I took over as general manager in '79, yeah.

NP: What does a general manager do? Or what did he do then?

JM: General manager is responsible for the terminals in Thunder Bay and Vancouver.

NP: Okay. Any comments on similarities and differences about the operations in Thunder Bay versus the operations in Vancouver? Or Western?

JM: Well, in Thunder Bay you can do a little bit of negotiation with the union, but in Vancouver you couldn't even negotiate. They would just say, "No. No. No. No," until they got a government arbitrator in, and he would settle it. So there was really no point in negotiating with the union in Vancouver. They were stupid, terrible.

NP: Were there the same issues, like was drinking an issue?

JM: Well, no, I don't think so. Well, there was. There's always some drinking problems. But our engineer from Thunder Bay, we moved him from Thunder Bay to Vancouver as superintendent in the terminal. We also had a manager downtown. But he was superintendent in the terminal. He would put up with it. It's small. It's one terminal. You got a 150-200 people. That's easier to handle than if you got 800 or 900 in Thunder Bay. At one point in time, we had 1200 employees in Thunder Bay.

NP: And when you retired, do you recall how many were left?

JM: When I retired there was probably maybe 700, and I think now there's probably maybe 300.

NP: Probably less than, getting close to just 200 on the whole waterfront.

JM: I suppose.

NP: With the elevators closing down. So were there more closures? Any buildings, any disasters? Any things such as that that occurred in your time as general manager in charge of those terminals both in Thunder Bay and in Vancouver?

JM: No, no, no. I can't think of any really serious problems in that regard. I remember we had one boat, punched a hole in its bottom at Pool 4, and they blamed us for it. This was a frustrating thing for me. Blamed us for it. We knew it wasn't us. It was in Alberta Pool's slip but they were loading at our terminal, but they got too far over the other way. We knew how deep our slip was, so we knew it wasn't our slip. So the lawyer for the shipping company and somebody representing Sask Pool met in my office and the insurance guy met in my office, and I said, "Well I'm not going to pay to get that ship fixed." I said, "We can show that the slip was proper depth and that he must've punched his thing in somebody else's slip." Our lawyer says, "Pay it. It's cheaper to pay it than to go to court." Not my kind of business. [Laughs] Frustrating.

NP: Other challenges in that position?

JM: There's always a challenge trying to figure out the pay scales and that kind of stuff. We had an industrial relations manager in Regina, so we would deal with him. We didn't always see eye to eye on that kind of stuff, so that was a challenge. But things like that you could work out. It was a very good experience, the whole thing. When I go back to Thunder Bay, I still have to drive by the elevators. About I guess three or four years ago I stopped into Sask Pool and had a visit with the manager.

NP: Mr. Bushby. Pat Bushby?

JM: Yeah, yeah. He was hired as the engineering technician, ended up as the superintendent at Pool 4, I think, and then took over as a manager. Nice guy.

NP: Now when you left, 1998, have I got that right?

JM: Well, December '98.

NP: So did you have 20 years in that position as general manager?

JM: I had 21 years total with Sask Pool.

NP: Okay.

JM: I had 20 years in the pulp mill, so I get \$85 a month from their pension. [Laughing]

NP: Needed a better union. [Laughing] Now, in the time you were there, and it's not a long time, but I think it seems to me a time of change in the industry, how would you describe the difference in Saskatchewan Wheat Pool as an organization from the time you started to the time you left? Was there a change or was it pretty stable?

JM: Well, I hope there was a change for the better in the areas of drinking, and manpower usage, and areas of modernization, in the areas of earnings. But I can't take the credit for those changes. I may have pushed a little bit.

NP: How many CEOs did you go through in that period?

JM: Just two.

NP: Just two?

JM: Ira Mumford and Milt Fair.

NP: And were they pretty similar in their styles and goals?

JM: Yeah, they are very easy to work with. One of the things I really liked about my job is I was living 7 or 800 kilometres away from that head office. They never bothered me. I think Milt Fair took over from Ira Mumford shortly after I came to Winnipeg I guess, and I might see Milt Fair in my office once or twice a year. Mind you I was in Regina quite often, nearly every month. They didn't bother me as long as things were going okay and there were no serious problems. They just let me do it my way, which is kind of a nice job.

NP: How big was the office here?

JM: Here?

NP: In Winnipeg, yeah.

JM: When I first came here there was 100 people and at 220 Portage, at the corner of Portage and Main, Royal Bank building. And when I left, maybe 25.

NP: And what was the downsizing? What positions weren't there anymore?

JM: Well, the computer systems made a big difference. Quite a bit of the stuff was moved to Regina because computers could handle it out of Regina. Part of that crew was an inspection department. There was six or eight or more people in the inspection department, worked with people like your dad. Basically, it was just moving stuff to Regina. I think prior to the time that Viterra took over, I think they just had one representative here and they must've still had the inspection people, I don't know. But that was 25 years ago. I don't know.

NP: I know when I first visited the office, I don't know, I don't think I even went in, but knowing how big the operation was in Thunder Bay and how big Saskatchewan Wheat Pool was, I think it looked like a one or two-person office, and it just seemed strange, but just not thinking, "Well, the head office actually is somewhere else." What other positions were there when you, like the senior positions were there when you moved to Winnipeg office?

JM: There was general manager, an accountant, and a manager of the grain buying end of it.

NP: Who was that? Do you recall?

JM: Harold Harri. Did you not talk to him?

NP: Oh right, yes, I did.

JM: Yeah. Harold was a great help to me. He really knew his business. He had been in the business his whole life, so he knew a lot more about the grain business actually than I did, as far as selling and dealing with if we had overages in the elevator and he had to [inaudible] or do something with it. So he looked after all that sort of stuff. He and I are still very good friends. We get to play

bridge every once and a while. But that was all. That was the four salaried jobs, I guess—Harold, the accountant, Ron Sproul, and myself.

NP: That is nice.

JM: Oh, and there was a chief grain inspector.

NP: Who was?

JM: His name was Barber, so he really didn't report to me. If he had personnel problems, they would discuss it with me, but he actually reported to Regina.

NP: In any of your positions, did you have any interaction with the Canadian Grain Commission?

JM: Oh yeah.

NP: Where was your interface with them?

JM: Well, the Grain Commission was set.

NP: Other than the audits. [Laughs]

JM: Yeah, but they would set the limits on how much you could charge for cleaning and drying et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So, we could charge up to the limit. They controlled that aspect of it. One of the interesting episodes I had with the Grain Commission, a Cargill boat took on a load of wheat out of our terminal No. 7. And as you may know, they joined terminal No.7 to the old Federal Elevator with a conveyer, so one was 7A and the other was 7B. A ship loaded wheat. It was supposed to be Red Spring Wheat 13.5 percent protein. So, when we loaded it, it came out to 13.2 or .3 percent protein. So, Cargill wouldn't accept that. We had to pay them something like--. They were demanding \$160,000.

So, I argued with the Grain Commission that Pool 7A and 7B, when the grain came in, it was checked by grain inspectors. They would determine what the protein was. We didn't. So, they would tell us if it was 13.5, and we'd put it in a bin for 13.5. But if it was only 13.2, they might still label it as 13.5 because they know some 13.7 is going to come in and it will balance out. My point

was when you put all the 13.2 into 7B, and that's where the boat loaded from and all the 13.7 into 7A, how can that be our fault? We don't determine what the protein level is! But I was wasting my breath. You can't argue with the Grain Commission.

NP: Would they not have been testing as they loaded?

JM: Yeah, that's how they come up with 13.2 that the grain goes down to the boat was 13.2.

NP: And could they not have stopped it? Oh, then the ship would've had to move.

JM: The same aspect there, when you're loading the boat some of it might be 13.2, some of it might be 13.7, so they keep loading it in the hopes that it will average out at 13.5. I was tempted to take them to court on that, but I thought better of it. Paid the money.

NP: So, when did Cargill determine that? When it came off the ship?

JM: No.

NP: Before they left?

JM: No. The Grain Commission tested loading onto the boat, and they say to Cargill, "This boat's 13.2." That's the only one we ever had like that.

NP: I found it interesting myself that the companies would engage their own inspectors and then they had the Canadian Grain Commission. Was there ever much discrepancy between, say you're grading a car coming in? Was it rare?

JM: I wasn't real close to it, Nancy, but I don't remember any serious conflict there. We got on good with the Grain Commission and with the inspectors and the weigh crews. I understand that's all changed now. I don't know what the deal is there now. I don't think they have as many inspectors.

NP: Oh, it's major reduction this year.

JM: Yeah, yeah. They need to be careful there.

NP: Just for a bit of an update on what's happening.

JM: Did you have a meeting with Greg Arason?

NP: I'm in the midst of my interviews with Greg. He's a great supporter of our project or has been in the past. He's now chair of the port, right? I interviewed him, and we just talked about his family's history and the early farming and didn't get beyond that to talk about--. I don't think we got into his time as CEO of Manitoba Pool Elevator. So, he's on my list, but we've just been--. I've been here, he's been there, and we just haven't sat down.

JM: No, he'd be interesting. I'm sure you enjoyed his history.

NP: Yes, yeah. One of the things we talked about off-tape was the Canada Ports Clearance or Lakehead-- What was it called?

JM: Lake Shippers.

NP: Lake Shippers Port Clearance and then when they expanded to the West Coast, did you have any interaction with them at all?

JM: I used to go to meetings, but I don't think it was maybe one or two meetings a year. It was nothing. It was just a, as far as I was concerned, it was just a courtesy visit.

NP: Formality.

JM: Formality, maybe. If there were some problems with shipping and problems with slips or whatever, they would be discussed. But I don't remember what happened in any of those meetings, really.

NP: Did you have to do anything with ships that came into port or was that dealt with in Regina, booking ships and all of that?

JM: No, no. Well, as far as wheat was concerned, I guess the Wheat Board would look after that. We didn't have to book ships. We were just told when a ship was coming and what they wanted, and when they were going to arrive and how much they wanted. But we didn't have anything to do with arranging the ships as far as I know.

NP: Was it Winnipeg that dealt with keeping track of the inventory and what was where, because Saskatchewan Wheat Pool had a lot of elevators in Thunder Bay?

JM: Yeah, well, there was a Lake Shippers Clearance Association in Thunder Bay. They had the office there, and they determined where the boats were going, which we didn't always agree with because the more grain we could ship the more we could take in. So, we were always a little suspicious of who was doing what for whom. And we complained sometimes that such and such a company is getting more than their share of ships. We want ships in our place to get rid of some of this grain. But that was a Thunder Bay Lake Shippers Clearance Association, their office handled all that information, scheduling the ships, and such and such. But if we wanted to complain about it, we might go to the office here.

NP: That was sort of an eye opener for me, just how complex that was, just even to know who had what where and to make sure that they all didn't feel constantly put upon that they were at the bottom of the pile. [Laughs]

JM: I had forgotten about that aspect of it. I remember going to the office in Thunder Bay, talking to the gentleman in charge. He was a bit of a character, pretty fancy office.

NP: You would be very surprised to see what their office looked like--.

JM: Now?

NP: Now.

JM: Would be more, no?

NP: One sad, little desk in a corner.

JM: Oh, is that right? Somebody must still be organizing the arrival of the ships, no? Each company? Each company has to look after it.

NP: And through the--. I guess they probably make more use of their ship's agent. But it also doesn't make a very happy job for the ship's agents now because I have an apartment that overlooks the bay and there's constantly ships sitting in harbour that you never saw before because they were in and out pretty quickly. And now, for several reasons yet to be told because I interview mostly retired people as opposed to, "Okay people, what are things like now?"

JM: Holy smokes, I hope they don't screw up the system! We need the export dollars, I presume. You want to get that stuff moving.

NP: Well, I'm sure that's the interest of the companies that are operating now. Any rumblings of amalgamating of the co-operatives while you were--?

JM: Yeah, I was involved. I tried to stir up some interest in amalgamating our West Coast terminals. We had Sask Pool terminal. Alberta had a terminal there, and there was another terminal that we were part owners of, both companies. I thought it would be a good idea if we just put them together in one company. But it didn't go anywhere, two egos involved. Things like that don't happen unless they're forced.

NP: I have some sort of standard questions that I should check now to make sure that I asked them. You can pick any job that you had, in the grain industry. Is there anything that you think might surprise people from outside the industry about the job that you had? Just no understanding of what was involved?

JM: I don't think so. It was just a regular job. I'm a good example anyone can do it. [Laughing]

NP: I don't know about that, especially the personnel job. I don't think anybody can do it. And the rapid turnover of the two you said that replaced you is an indication of that. You said you were considered to be—and maybe I'm misinterpreting what you said—pretty hard-nosed?

JM: In some ways, yeah.

NP: Yeah. Was that essential, in retrospect?

JM: Example I gave you about the fellow that we sent to the hospital, a couple situations like that where you had to do something. Normally I'm a fairly easy-going guy but when something has to be done, I don't back away. If it has to be done, let's do it. I wouldn't consider myself generally as a hard-nosed guy. I think one of the reasons I was able to accept this job and do it is because I'm considered a kind of a people person, and I generally get along pretty good with everybody, unless they step on my toes.

NP: Firm but fair is always a really nice thing to say about somebody.

JM: Yeah, that's what I try, yeah.

NP: I want to come back to another question, but I'll do that later. Thinking back on your grain industry career, what are you most proud of?

JM: I guess the fact that I survived. [Laughs]

NP: Was it that hard?

JM: Well, for somebody that didn't know anything about it, it wasn't easy. No, it was probably the fact I was able to encourage people to modernize the terminals, and to improve production, and improve the bottom line. Generally, we didn't have a lot of turnover in the elevator system. A lot of people spent their whole life there. So, we must've been doing something right.

NP: You mentioned the modernization, the automation. Did all that go smoothly?

JM: Did what?

NP: Was the automation, all the automation that was done, I guess it would've been automation of weighing equipment, changes in the--.

JM: Oh yeah, they put automation in the control rooms in the terminals where you just touch the screen, sends the grain where it's supposed to go.

NP: Did it all go smoothly?

JM: Yes.

NP: No decisions made that you thought that wasn't so good?

JM: Well, except for the fact that we put stuff like that, grain dust cleaning, and automation in terminals that weren't going to be there for maybe more than four or five years.

NP: You wouldn't have known that at the time.

JM: No, no we wouldn't have known that. No, our long-distance planning was not good, you know? We figured that Russians were our big customers. Once they became more self-sufficient where they can buy grain from France, not nearly as much grain is going

out of Thunder Bay to Russia as it used to. So we figured there would always be a big grain movement to Russia and that was the way to go, through Thunder Bay.

NP: Russia is now an exporter of many years. And, in fairness to you, there were a lot bigger mistakes made after you left by all companies. I shouldn't call them mistakes but wrong calls because so much of it is dependent upon who buys the grain.

JM: One thing I will say, we had good engineers in Thunder Bay and Vancouver.

NP: Do you remember any names?

JM: As far as I know, we didn't buy equipment or machinery that turned up to be garbage. Some companies did.

NP: So do you remember the names of the engineers? I like to give credit where credit is due.

JM: Oh, yeah, Doug Stone is still in Thunder Bay, I think.

NP: Oh, is he?

JM: And--. [Laughs] My memory is slipping, Nancy.

NP: I'm amazed at what you can remember. Mine's slipped far beyond yours already.

JM: Guy in Vancouver.

NP: Doesn't matter. One guy, that's good. I'll see if I can track him down.

JM: He won't be very happy with me because when I left Thunder Bay, it was between him and another guy who became manager, and I didn't pick him.

NP: I will say, "Do not mention Jim's name." [Laughs] But I could say, "He thought you were fantastic!"

JM: Well, he really was a good engineer, but engineers don't always make good managers. He was a very good and loyal, hard-working engineer.

NP: Who took the position? Do you remember? Not the engineering position which I can imagine--.

JM: Gorst

NP: Gorst, okay.

JM: I don't know where he is now. He jumped around. Like he ended up general manager here for a while, and then he went to--.

NP: Paterson?

JM: No, I think he spent time in Regina, and I think he spent time in Churchill, he was all over the place.

NP: Yeah. His name has come up and so somewhere in my records I have where he was. I'm going to ask you some pretty easy questions as far as--. I'm just interested in what your answer is. What connection did you see between the farmer and the products you handled?

JM: Between the farmer and the products we handled?

NP: Yeah, the jobs that you did.

JM: Actually, my whole philosophy working in a co-op was to benefit the farmer. That's why I was hard-nosed. That's why I didn't want us paying the union unreasonable wages. That's why my objective was to produce the best bottom line we could because I'm working for the farmers. I had my grandparents and two uncles were farmers. So that's what drove me, really, was to do the best I could for farmers. We wouldn't spend any money unless it would produce something, and when we went to meetings or whatnot, we were very frugal—not frugal but careful. We didn't waste money. If we were eating out, we had reasonable meals.

NP: So you saw just a straight line connection.

JM: Yeah.

NP: Did any of your farming family visit in Thunder Bay when you were running, when you were working there?

JM: Yeah, my brother-in-law, he's in Weyburn right now and my sister. I guess they visited us in Thunder Bay, but I don't remember going to an elevator with them. I'm not even sure they did visit us. It's a long way from Weyburn to Thunder Bay.

NP: Yeah. I was travelling along the railway tracks in behind Richardson's elevator about a year ago and somebody was coming towards me in a car with a Saskatchewan license plate. One of us had to stop to let the other by, so I stopped and talked to them, and I said, "Oh, you're from Saskatchewan. You must be farmers." They said, "Yes." and they said, "We want to get into that elevator. We'd like to--" I think they probably delivered to Richardson's, and so I said, "Well I know the manager. I'll give him a call, and just go to their sign-in kiosk, and I'm sure the guy will give you a--" But they were sort of just skulking around behind the elevators. So, I would've thought your relatives would've come because they would've had a grand tour of--. So you were able to dispel their misconceptions about Thunder Bay?

JM: They were only interested in farming and moving the grain. My nephew, a big farmer in Yellow Grass, he had no use for the Wheat Board. He wanted to run things himself. He wasn't a strong co-op-type guy. His dad was, but this guy is a real good farmer and doing very well.

NP: What was the general interaction between the Wheat Board and Saskatchewan Wheat Pool when you were-?

JM: It was good. It was good. No problem.

NP: Big changes there. [...*audio skips*]

JM: Oh yeah. Keith Broder. As far as I know he's still alive in Vancouver someplace. Speaking of people, Richardson's, is Jim Simpson still around? Yeah?

NP: I think he is, and I think I tried to get him to be interviewed. I can't recall now whether he's still alive because we've been working on this project a long time, but I think about the time I started it, he was. But I don't think he was interested in being interviewed. Well, I've talked about connections with producers, carriers, handlers, so we can check that one off my list. Did you have a favourite terminal elevator, either structurally or--?

JM: Pool 7. It was the newest and the best equipped. It was a good. It was well run.

NP: Did it make any difference whether it was A or B?

JM: Oh A. B was a former Federal elevator, and it was older than A. 7A was a good elevator, and that's the one they're still using.

NP: And that's what they're down to now because they just sold Richardson's, what was called Viterra C, which was what Viterra got when they bought out Agricore United. It was an Agricore United elevator, and it became a Viterra C. So that's in the Current River, far end.

JM: Who owns the Richardson's elevator?

NP: Well Richardson's owned Richardson's Elevator, but they also bought the one on the other side of Pool 4.

JM: Oh yeah, Alberta Pool.

NP: No. Alberta Pool was gone, and UGG owned it was called UGG A. It was always UGG. And then of course we had the amalgamations, takeovers, whatever. Viterra owned it up until this summer and closed it down, and Richardson's bought it.

JM: Oh.

NP: So quite a flurry of activity while we're trying to--.

JM: Are they going to paint it orange?

NP: No, they've now gone to very subtle colours. Do you have anything more about major changes that you saw over the time? Had canola started to really--?

JM: Oh yeah, I was on the Canola Council for a while just before they changed it from rapeseed to canola.

NP: And how was it dealing with canola versus wheat, or did it really make much difference?

JM: No, no, we would have certain elevators to handle canola, but we wouldn't just put all the canola in one elevator. It was too much, so it was in more than one elevator, I recall. But it was a big handling.

NP: You've talked about stories and incidents. Are there other major, vivid memories of your time in the grain trade, that you haven't already spoken of? Sometimes they're vivid. They don't have to be big and important.

JM: I guess things that would come in that category would be negotiations with the union. We would have some--. We didn't always agree as a group of six companies. We didn't always agree what we should do in our dealings with negotiations for the salary. Those meetings could get a little uncomfortable. So, we didn't always agree on that but--. And we would spend sometimes a week, two weeks, in a motel in Thunder Bay. It was one of the things that I remember as a highlight, not a particularly nice highlight, but something that you remember.

NP: Vivid memory.

JM: Yeah. I remember all expenses went to the Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association, and they were divided up on the basis of our handling percentage. So, [laughs] I saw the bill one day and somebody ordered a \$40 dollar bottle of wine, and I said, "Who the hell ordered that \$40 bottle of wine?" [inaudible] "I did." And I said, "I don't think we need--." A \$40 bottle of wine was an expensive bottle of wine in the 1980s. But things like that upset me because he was running one elevator and that \$40 would be spread across everybody. He thought it was a good argument. I did not like waste or excessive spending. I made it very clear to my subordinates, I guess you'd call them, when I first took on the job. There would be no kickbacks, no big gifts from suppliers, or they'd be in trouble. I know that went on in the grain industry, but I didn't want it going on in Sask Pool.

NP: How did it go on? Like where did the opportunities for kickback?

JM: You're always buying equipment. Always buying equipment, and that's why some of the equipment that was bought wasn't very good because he bought that equipment because you got the nicest kickback. I can't prove that, and it's probably not fair to say it, but I wanted to make sure it didn't happen in Sask Pool, and I don't think it did. It happened once I know that I one of our managers took a gift that he shouldn't have accepted, and I insisted that he settle it. So that's the kind of a manager that I was. In that kind of stuff, I was hard-nosed.

NP: I asked one of the people that I interviewed who was an inspector—not for Canadian Grain Commission but for Agriculture because they did the ships inspections—and I said, "What kind of reputation did Thunder Bay have as far as being able to have your palms greased or whatever to look aside if you found bugs in a corner of a ship?" And he said, "No." he said, "One of the ship owners said don't bother trying that in Thunder Bay." I don't know if he was protecting his own reputation, but I have a sense that it was a pretty ethical industry.

JM: Yeah, but I'll give you an example. One of the companies that did quite a bit of business with us, they wanted to know my birthday so they could give me a gift on my birthday. They asked my secretary. I said, "I don't want anybody knowing my birthday, and I don't want gifts from anybody." So, we refused to give it to them.

NP: I think there were turkeys and bottles going around at Christmastime. [Laughs]

JM: Well, I didn't mind that.

NP: As I recall now, I think maybe my father brought a turkey home or something.

JM: Yeah, I don't mind that, but some of them had condos in Florida, condos in Hawaii, and they would offer my managers—and me, offered me!—"You may as well take the week in Florida or week in Hawaii."

NP: You should've run for politics.

JM: [Laughs] Yeah, they could use a few like that, especially in the Senate.

NP: Those of you listening to this 100 years from now, you'd have to read the newspapers to know what we're talking about. [Laughs] Now, you've done a great job talking about working conditions, labour relations, was there ever—I've got disasters here—when you started it wasn't all that far away of the time of the 1952 explosion which was a Saskatchewan elevator, were there stories? Were there people working for you that had come through that?

JM: Yeah, oh yeah. For sure. It was Pool 4 and actually the manager at Pool 4 when I joined was Squires. I forget what his first name was, but he was acting kind of as personnel man. He was the guy who would sort out where all these people moved from place to place. He was a superintendent of Pool 4, but that job just kind of fell in his lap before I got there. But he showed me how to do it. A real nice guy. But he was working there in that explosion. That was a big push to get dust control in the elevators to prevent that from happening.

NP: Would you know where to point me? When incidents like that happen, where would the records be kept?

JM: Well, they would've been in Thunder Bay in that regard, I guess. I think I recall seeing pictures of that stuff. Whether or not that's still there, I have no idea.

NP: Actually, in the elevators themselves, they would have kept the records?

JM: Well maybe.

NP: Would head office in Regina have--?

JM: Well, I sometimes wonder now that Viterra has taken over, whether they would keep that kind of stuff. I don't know. I can remember seeing pictures of the results of the explosion.

NP: Any reasons why Pool 4 was the site of both explosions?

JM: No. My understanding is they were loading a ship with grain screenings, so it was very dusty. I'm sure they must have been loading grain screenings at the other terminals too, but I don't know.

NP: Yeah. I haven't found the- I've seen submissions to the inquiries but not the results of the inquiries, so hard to know. We did interview a fellow though who, from here, Mr. Timmerman, who did a lot of work with the Prairie elevators and he was in insurance, He's 100 years old, so he was way back when, and a simple thing, he managed to persuade the country elevators to install I think ball bearings instead of something else that they were using, and almost overnight they reduced the--.

JM: Reduced the fires.

NP: Fires, yeah. It was really quite amazing. So I think that's what he said he was most proud of. What is the sense that you have of your role in contributing to Canada's being known as a big player on the global grain market?

JM: Well, we always talk about Canada being the breadbasket of the world, but of course we aren't. But I know that a very large percentage of what we grow we ship out. So we're a major player, not the biggest. I guess the United States is probably the biggest. But we're a major player of exporting grains of all kinds.

NP: And so what do you think you contributed to that? The success of the Canadian international grain trade.

JM: Well, I think one of the things, the situation we had in Thunder Bay where we took everybody's grain in, and we didn't have to insist on putting it in an elevator that shipped it from the country, that helped to make for relatively smooth movement of grain

through the ports and overseas. If they've reverted back to some other system, it doesn't work very well, and I think they should go back to where we were. [Laughs]

NP: Lack of smoothness equates to higher cost, would you say?

JM: Yeah, yeah. Bottlenecks and holdups. You say you see a whole bunch of ships in the bay, that tells you something. You didn't see that very often unless it was a strike in our days.

NP: [Laughs] Are there any other questions I should've asked that I haven't?

JM: I think you've done very well.

NP: I think you've done very well, too. [Laughs]

JM: Thank you.

NP: Thank you so much for taking part in the project. I always enjoy talking to people who've spent time in Thunder Bay and mostly say nice things about it, and also to talk to people who started out on the Prairies and make the connection where often times they're operating the shipping is separate from the farming and yet if both of them weren't doing their jobs well, it's reflected in how successful the industry is. Thanks very much.

JM: Well, you're very good at what you do. I must say.

NP: Oh, there is one more question. This is sort of the self-serving question at the end and that is we talked before we went on tape about what our group, Friends of Grain Elevators, was hoping to do was establish a national interpretation centre that tells the story of Canada's international grain trade, particularly through Thunder Bay, but also not ignoring the West Coast. What do you think would be important to feature in that centre, in one way or another, related to Saskatchewan Wheat Pool?

JM: Well, I think the whole co-op movement story shouldn't be forgotten. You know the fact that really it was the railroads and the private grain companies that forced the Pools to become what they were. I think the Prairie Pools provided, together with the Wheat Board, very significant improvements in the lives of the Canadian farmers. So I don't think that should be lost, and the Prairie Pools are gone. But their period was a very important, from my point of view.

NP: Did you follow at all what happened when you left? Like the pools imploding and--.

JM: I certainly followed the fact that I was disappointed to see Sask Pool go the way they did. They made a couple of serious mistakes. When I retired, they had millions of dollars in the bank. Within a couple of years, it was gone. That was very disappointing. But, overall, my sympathy is with farmers. If they're happy, I'm happy. But I was concerned that with the Wheat Board gone that the farmers out in the country, the small farmers who only have a section of land for example, are going to have a long way to haul their grain.

I'm really going to be interested in hearing what my nephew has to say because he was very vocal about the holdups. He had a whole bunch of grain on his farm, and the Wheat Board wouldn't order it out. Now that all these farmers have grain piled in the field after a bumper crop, and I'm concerned that--. I haven't heard about any of this happening, but I would not be surprised if company A comes to you and says, "I'll give you \$200 a tonne for the wheat out in the field," and you said, "No. I want \$250." And they say, "Sorry!" and go to your neighbor and give them \$200 because they'd sell and he wants to get rid of it. That's what brought the Pools into being because the companies and the railways were playing off against each other. I hope that doesn't happen, but with the situation this year, it could happen.

NP: Yes. Last year was a very good year.

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

NP: Well thanks very much. I will now end the interview.

End of interview.