Narrator: Gino Perri (GP)

Company Affiliations: Manitoba Pool Elevators

Interview Date: N/D

Interviewer: Ernie Epp (EE)

Other Speakers: Matilda Perri (MP)

Recorder: Owen Marks (OM)

Transcriber: Sarah Lorenowich (SL)

Summary: Retired grain handler Gino Perri describes his career with Manitoba Pool Elevators as an Italian immigrant in Thunder Bay. He details the jobs he first worked upon arriving before starting at Pool 3 in the car shed unloading boxcars. He details the unloading operation, winter railcar loading, his eventual move to Pool 1, and his different jobs as tunnel man for outward lake shipping, head cleaner man, and annex man. Perri tells the story of his decision to move to Canada and his first impressions, as well as his family's story of immigration and war experiences in Italy. Other topics discussed include a nine-week-long, grain handlers strike, drug and alcohol abuse in the elevators, management structures, company-arranged social activities, reasons for the industry's downturn and elevator closures (high property taxes, automation, etc.), the ethnic diversity of elevator workers, his involvement in the community through the Gran Sasso Club, and his pride in his work.

Keywords: Manitoba Pool Elevators; Manitoba Pool 1; Manitoba Pool 3; Thunder Bay terminal grain elevators; Grain handlers; Grain elevator labourers; Immigrant workers; Italian immigrants; Italian-Canadian community; Boxcar unloading; Boxcar shovelling; Elevator car shed operations; Boxcar dumpers; Grain transportation—rail; Grain transportation—ships; Grain cleaning; Cleaner deck; Grain elevator tunnels; Grain storage; Grain elevator annex; Labour unions; Labour organization; Labour strike; Grain handlers strike; Drug and alcohol abuse; World War One; World War Two; Balkan War; Gran Sasso Club; Dust control; Automation; Workplace accidents; Richardson Main Elevator; United Grain Growers; Agricore United; Viterra

Time, Speaker, Narrative
EE: Well, its' a great pleasure to be here this afternoon for this interview. To start it off, could I ask you to give your name again? GP: Gino, G-I-N-O, Perri, P-E-R-R-I.

EE: Good. And where you were born?

GP: I was born in Aiello Calabro, province of Cozensa, Italy.

EE: On what day?

GP: Oh, November 21, 1939.

EE: 1939.

GP: Yes.

EE: Right. And then we want to get to work in terms of how you came to work in the elevators?

GP: Well, when I come to Canada--.

EE: When was that?

GP: End of July 19—July 26, 1956.

EE: Ok, so you were 20--.

GP No. I was only 17.

EE: 17, yes. A young man.

GP: Yeah. My first job was with a railroad, with CN [Canadian National Railway].

EE: Was this with the Welch Company then?

GP: Yeah. Yeah. Through Welch. He was contracting that.

EE: Yes. R. F. Welch & Company.

GP: Yes. And then after I start, I work there for almost a year and a half. Then I come in what used to be Port Arthur, the city of Port Arthur.

EE: Yes. Yes, it was.

GP: I work in construction, and then I end up working at the Camp 24 on a bush camp then.

EE: Cutting?

GP: Cutting, yeah.

EE: Cutting trees.

GP: Yeah.

EE: For what company were you working?

GP: It was Marathon Corporation.

EE: Maritime.

GP: Corporation.

EE: Mmhmm. Okay.

GP: Yeah.

EE: And how long did you do that?

GP: Was there for almost seven months. Then the union, they start--. It was piecework, you know? You know the meaning of piecework?

EE: Sure. Yes, yes. Yes. So much a cord.

GP: Yes. You cut, you get paid. You don't cut, you don't get. Then the union wanted to go on daywork, and the majority they voted for daywork, but it didn't last long because the company, four people, come from Montreal. Is it ok if I continue to explain to you what happened?

OM: Mmhmm.

EE: Yes, certainly.

GP: Four people from the company come from Montreal, and they started with Camp 51, Camp 12, Camp 8, and Camp 24. And they shut them down. And everybody went out of a job because once we went to daywork—I'd been a working man all my life—there was no production there. I said to a friend of mine, I says, "The way things are going," I said, "in my opinion, it's not going to last long." And in fact, it didn't last long at all.

EE: Yeah. The guys just didn't work as hard when they were being paid anyway.

GP: No, no. I mean, the company give you $120,000 vehicle or a truck machine, and if you start to play cowboy and no production, it's, you know--.

EE: It was already mechanized to that extent then?

GP: Well, a little bit. Not as it is now, no.

EE: No, no, of course not. But you weren't working with horses and with Swede saws any longer.

GP: No, we had the chainsaws then. Yeah.

EE: Chainsaws and so on.

GP: Heavy duty Pioneer. Super heavy at that time. Now, those made in Germany, they're Stihl most of all. It's beautiful.

EE: I daresay. Do you have one?

GP: Stihl? Yeah, yeah.

EE: Yeah. I see.

GP: Yeah.

EE: Old times come back when you rev it up, eh?

GP: No, no. I still got a fireplace downstairs, and I used to use this on wood, eh?

EE: Yes, yes.

GP: Last year, my back and my knee they start bothering me a little bit, so I--.

EE: That's a shame.

GP: It's okay.

EE: So you were out of work in the woods.

GP: Yes. I come to town, and I started working construction again. Actually, it was for the Zanette brothers there. Jimmy used to own Nor-Shore Ready Mix, and his brother was pouring concrete walls. We used to do basements, you know, in schools, whatever. It was all concrete work. Yeah, I worked for them for almost two, close to three years.

EE: So by this time you're into your 20s, I guess, are you?

GP: Yeah. And then, I said in '65 I got married, and then I wanted to get a job in town. So the only place--. Even with construction, we used to go from Geraldton to Kapuskasing and Timmins. You know I worked at the mine at Shebandowan for cementation of there, but then a friend of mine says they're hiring at the elevators. You know, in those days you could get a job actually at any time. So in September '65, I started working for used to be Manitoba Pool Elevator there, you know? It was the best company in the waterfront there.

[0:05:01]

EE: Great. We'll have you tell us about that in a few moments. How long did you work there?

GP: 36 years.

EE: 36. So that's from '65 to--.

GP: Well, when they sell out to Agricore there.

EE: 2001, I guess it would be, 36. '65 and 36.

GP: No, the--. I retired--.

MP: '98.

GP: '98. I had to retire.

EE: Ok. So that's--.

GP: Because the union didn't protect us as employees, and we had no rights in the seniority list with United Grain Growers [UGG] and Agricore. So I was number six with Manitoba Pool, and I had to go at the bottom. I would be closer to 280 with Agricore, United Grain Growers.

EE: Yeah. Which means in the wintertime you'd be one of the first to be laid off.

GP: No, even through the summer, I would have no--.

EE: Really?

GP: And I had no intention to go back to construction again, you know? When I worked construction, I was 180 pounds and in good shape, excellent shape because I used to press weights and everything. And I says, "No, I'm not going to go back in construction." So I took early retirement.

EE: Sure. Well, we can talk about your retirement later on, maybe work our way through.

GP: Yeah, yeah. And my kids, there was only one left to go to university, and we managed.

EE: You managed that.

GP: Yeah.

EE: Ok. So during this whole time you were working for Manitoba Pool Elevators, as you were saying.

GP: Yes.

EE: And did you do the same work all the way through?

GP: Well, I started--. In the old days, most of the elevators except maybe Saskatchewan Pool 6, I think, and--. Pool 1 was built in 1961, 1962 or so, and they had dumpers, what they called dumpers that they tilted the boxcars. You've probably got an idea.

EE: Or the tank--. What did they call them, the other cars?

GP: The gondolas?

EE: Yeah, the gondola cars.

GP: No. You had a gadget there, but still it was electrical there with a fitting that went into the slide of the gondola car, and you opened it with a--. And some, they were even manual that you had to use a bar, the older ones.

EE: I guess you're right. Whereas the boxcars--.

GP: You just tilt it three times and it was done. But when I started at Pool 3 there, Manitoba Pool used to run four elevators in the waterfront. It was Pool 1, the new house with the dumpers. Pool 3 was a manual. You had a piece of plywood with a plate of oak.

EE: Yeah. Sort of four or five feet wide, this--?

GP: No. Well, it was about, yeah, just about three and a half or so.

EE: Because you were--.

GP: And they used to call it wood shovel, you know? And there was an attachment with a gadget that when you pulled the cable, it would come easy, you know? And once it dropped the counterweight, it started pulling on the pulley there, and that's the way you shovel the grain or oats or barley or whatever.

EE: Yes. And that's what you started with in Pool 3?

GP: Yeah. I did that for six and a half years. I did that.

EE: Keeps you in good shape.

GP: Well, grain, if it was grain in itself, [No.] 1 Northern or durum—the best wheat—it was a pleasure to do it. But I didn't like much the [No.] 1 Feed oats and the barley for the dust that was there.

EE: I was a farm boy in Manitoba.

GP: Yeah?

EE: And one of the reasons I'm not a farmer is barley, too. [Laughing] Nothing like the barley dropping into the bin, and you have to go up there and spread it out. You're on top of these barley seeds and--.

GP: And it's not to brag, like, or anything, but even if you're going to interview the other friend of mine, it happens that his name is Gino too there. And if it was like [No.] 1 Northern or [No.] 2 Northern grain or durum wheat, it only took me eight, seven minutes to finish the boxcar.

EE: Right. I see. Well, you're a fast worker.

GP: Fast, yeah. [Laughing]

EE: That would be appreciated. How many of you were working in the elevator at the time roughly?

GP: Sask Pool--. Oh, Manitoba Pool, sorry. Manitoba Pool at one time when they were running—I didn't finish telling you that—Pool 1, Pool 3. Pool 9 was an Alberta Pool, but Manitoba was running it. And Pool 2, the oldest elevator in the waterfront is still standing there now. Somebody had plans for there, whatever, restaurant and stuff, but it didn't--.

[0:10:04]

EE: Hasn't panned out.

GP: Yeah. But that's as far as I know.

EE: Do you have an idea of how many there were in your elevator? Or in the whole--. Well, both.

GP: In the whole company?

EE: The whole company and then--.

GP: In the summertime it was pretty close to 280 people working.

EE: 280.

GP: Yeah. In the summertime. Actually, they used to hire even students there. The company was hiring students.

EE: Was that the height? The summertime was the highest?

GP: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Okay. Summer would run into September, October though, I would think, with the crop coming in or not? Well, what was the--. Through the year, did you work year-round?

GP: Not at the beginning, you know.

EE: No.

GP: August, there was kind of slack. Maybe sometimes for four or five weeks I would get laid off. I would get a job again back in construction.

EE: In construction, sure. And then it really picks up in, did you say August?

GP: Yeah.

EE: So it's into September.

GP: Oh, yeah.

EE: September is the busiest time.

GP: Right up to Christmas.

EE: Right up to Christmas.

GP: And the New Year. Actually, once we were laid off, but we used to have--. At that time, the federal government--. I don't want to get mixed with politics, but it's okay?

EE: No, no. That's fine. I'm at home in politics.

GP: I know.

EE: Carry on.

GP: We used to have Lester B. Pearson. The federal government was a majority Liberal there, and it happens that for Port Arthur and Fort William at that time we had Bob Andras and old man Badanai there. So once they found out that there was a mass lay off there at the elevators, within two weeks, they come with a plan there for loading clean grain, and we all got called back, and we worked through the winter there.

EE: Which winter would that have been? Was it just the one time?

GP: No, it was--. It started in ’68/’69, but the ’70 was the boom. 1970 to ’71, ’72 up to the ‘80s there, they were really booming years right through the winter there. They were shipping grain all the way to Montreal, I guess, and Quebec City there.

EE: Yeah, because there was that winter grain movement program. When the lake froze up, you were still working in the elevators moving grain.

GP: Yeah, yeah. But the last Paterson boat one year was the big Paterson boat. They had their own fleet, the family, the Patersons.

EE: Yes.

GP: The last one was January 22nd that it left.

OM: Huh!

EE: Wow!

GP: Yeah.

EE: So you worked through--. Now, you’d have Christmas Day off, I presume.

GP: Oh, yeah. Yeah. They were paid holidays. We had ten or 11 paid holidays, and Christmas and Boxing Day was one or two days that we were off there.

EE: Sure. Were days fairly similar? Could you talk about a typical day on the job?

GP: Like--.

EE: The day would start at--.

GP: The superintendent at Pool 3 and the general foreman, they were good people–most of all the general foreman. His name was Major Campbell. Super nice guy, super gentleman, but you had to do your job, you know?

EE: Of course. Earn your money.

GP: Like being a good shoveler--. You know, the ones that we were using the shovel? They call you a shoveller. If you were a good shoveller, most of all Major Campbell, he wanted you to stay there because he depended on you. It was myself and other guys, "We're shovelling cars tonight. You coming in?" "Oh, yeah. I'm coming in." "We're shovelling cars Saturday. You coming in?" "Yes, I'm coming in." "We're shovelling cars on Sunday." And a lot of many times, we were working seven days a week and three nights a week. And too many people, you know, they were kind of tired or even a little bit fed up, let's be honest about it.

EE: But you worked?

GP: I never refuse overtime.

EE: So you worked through a whole--?

GP: Oh, yeah. Three nights a week, Saturday, Sundays. It didn't matter.

EE: Was there overtime pay?

GP: Oh, yeah. Time and a half and double time on Sundays. So that's why.

EE: Yeah. Well, if you've got the strength to do it!

GP: Yeah, so.

EE: So how--.

GP: And he wanted to keep us. If he had a good crew, he wanted to keep it. He was a general foreman at Pool 3. It's not--. He wanted to keep you on at Pool 3, the good gang, the good workers. But then there was a president of the union, his name was Anderson. I forget his first name. He was a nice guy and a gentleman too, but he was not too much to push power, in a sense, with the company.

[0:15:02]

EE: Or to challenge power?

GP: Yeah. Then we elected a guy by the name of Frank Mazur.

EE: Good old Frank.

GP: He was a big guy, about 6'3", and 300 pounds easy. You know, he was a giant of a man. And Frank, I talked to him once, I said, "Frank," I said, "I got this much seniority. There is about 30 junior men to me working at Pool 1. What's the chance," I said, "for me to--." I says, "Major Campbell, he don't want to hear about--. He wants to keep us there for the production."

EE: Working hard!

GP: Working. "Oh, you want to go to Pool 1?" He says, "No problem," he says. "I went through that." Because he was from Ukrainian descent, and it's not for discrimination or anything, but if you were Scottish or Anglo-Saxon, you know what I mean, you had a little bit more pull, eh?

EE: At Pool 3? Or at what?

GP: No, with the company.

EE: Oh, with the company generally.

GP: You know, you had more of a--. And a lot of things now, you come from the old country better with the English language and all that. But Frank, he helped me. He says, "I'm going to come there." He says, "If you guys got more seniority--." Then there was about six of us, not just me, that we left Pool 3, and we went to Pool 1. It was an easier house to work there.

EE: Yes, yeah. Well, it makes sense in any case with the seniority. The seniority involves your getting older, and younger guys should do the job, and you move to somewhat lighter work.

GP: Well, Major Campbell, his idea was, no--.

EE: Keep you working.

GP: He was a super gentleman, you know what I mean? Fair. But he wanted to keep the employees that he had, that he knows, that he'd get the production out of them.

EE: Well, the most efficient workers, of course he'd want to keep you. Yes.

GP: But then I end up working at Pool 1 there. I got through the winter. Twice I got sent once to Pool 9 because they were an older--. Pool 9 was flaxseeds. You know the flaxseeds.

EE: Oh, I dp.

GP: Pool 9 was always handling a lot of flaxseeds there. There was a huge order for--.

EE: Slippery stuff, the flaxseed.

GP: Oh, it goes all over.

EE: Yeah, yeah. **[Telephone rings]** Break it off for a moment, or?

GP: Yeah. Oh it's--.

EE: How long a day were you working? Was it the same, what, eight-hour, ten-hour, twelve-hour?

GP: Well, you work your eight hours. Actually, even at Pool 3, Major Campbell, if you were--. They had three set of tracks, Ernie. One, two, and three. If today you started at one track, tomorrow you had to go on two, and then the next day the day after on three. If he said, "Finish and go home," and you were on one track—and most of all if it was wheat—I was done by 1:30, 2:00. I had finished my ten cars, you know?

EE: And that was the expectation for every day, to clean ten cars? To unload ten?

GP: Yeah, yeah. Ten cars.

EE: I see.

GP: Then when you went to nights there for the three hours of overtime, you had to about six cars there. But nothing to it.

EE: That could be done.

GP: Oh, yeah.

EE: Was there any reason why you were going from one track to the--?

GP: They had two sets of hoppers they call where the grain went into the conveyor belt to get elevated to the--. And, "Today, you get a break," you know? "You finish at 1:30 or 2:00 today." And then the crew that was on Three track the day before, they go, and they get a break there. That was the reason. It was no particular thing, that.

EE: No. I'm guessing then that the three tracks didn't start at the same time or--?

GP: No, we started all at the same time, but the guy that was in control there for the receivers--. The leg with the belting and the buckets that carried the grain to the top of the elevator they called receivers. The ones that were loading for the boats they call shippers. You know?

EE: Yes.

GP: And the guy that was in control there with the receivers, he used to, "One track first, second track after, third track."

EE: Because it was just the one elevating facility?

GP: Elevator, yeah.

EE: I see. Ok.

GP: They had just two legs, One and Two receiver. One and two receiver just for elevating the grain.

[0:20:08]

EE: So the ones that were on track three, what did they do in the earlier part of the day then?

GP: Well, at that time, you had to open--. There was a gadget. CPR cars, boxcars, they had wooden doors, and so did CN. Then CN went to cardboard box with straps, steel straps, and you had to chop them with almost like a fireman axe. And if the hopper is full by the time—because don't forget, they used to put 130 tonnes in those CP cars—by the time you opened the door, the hopper is full. So now you've got to wait until the receiver man he gets the light, the green light from the scale floor, to open the hopper there so you can keep shovelling and that.

EE: So there were times you were just, what, standing around waiting?

GP: Oh, you were sitting there. Yeah. You know, once the hopper is full, then for the ten, fifteen minutes, whatever, you went and did your--. Yeah, that was the operation.

EE: Did the day involve--. Was there coffee break, lunch break?

GP: Oh, yeah. Yeah. You had coffee break at 10:00, but ten minutes it was.

EE: Ten minutes, eh? Drink it fast! [Laughing]

GP: Yeah.

EE: And then, what, a half an hour for lunch?

GP: No, we had an hour for lunch in the old days. Yeah, with the ones we were shovelling, there were some guys they even used to go uptown, or most of the guys played cards there in the lunchroom there for an hour. Or in the summertime, you just laid down there and--.

EE: Take some sun?

GP: Take some sun. Yeah.

EE: Yeah. You were in a union, in Lodge 650, all the way through?

GP: 650, yeah, right through.

EE: Yeah, of the grain handlers.

GP: Grain handler union, yeah. Later--. I don't know now, but what is--.

EE: They're Steelworkers.

GP: Steelworkers, yeah.

EE: I know Herb Daniher as I knew Frank. Frank nominated me in 1984 for the NDP candidate, so I've known Frank for--.

GP: Frank, yeah. After Frank there was a guy, Rick McFarlane.

EE: Oh, ok. I didn't know Rick particularly.

GP: Yeah. But Frank, in my--. He was the best of them all.

EE: Yeah.

GP: In my book.

EE: Sure. Well, I quite agree. Frank moved up, of course, to the national and became president of the--.

GP: Yeah, he was a super guy there.

EE: TCU, was it? The Transportation and Communications Union and so on.

GP: Yeah.

EE: I remember running into Frank on the street in Ottawa once in the 1980s when they were in a struggle with the Canadian Auto Workers [CAW], and he had this button on his jacket that said "BRAC." You know, Brotherhood of Railway, Airline, et cetera, et cetera, and Clerks. "BRAC not White." You know Bob White, the president of CAW. Stick with the union, don't go with Bob White and the CAW. [Laughs]

GP: No, Frank, he was the best of them.

EE: I liked Frank a lot.

GP: He negotiated quite a few contracts for us.

EE: Were you ever in a strike?

GP: Yes. Once.

EE: There was one late '60s, am I right?

GP: Twice, but one was a--. I forget what year it was. It lasted almost eight, nine weeks. But I went to Frank there because if you found yourself a job, they would allow you to. But you have to have permission, written permission from the union. So cementation was opening the mine at Shebandowan there.

EE: At the time?

GP: At the time. The Zanette brothers, they were doing all the concrete there as the shaft was going down. All the concrete work was done by the Zanette there.

EE: And you know concrete work.

GP: Yeah, and I knew concrete, and I wanted to work. I work there, and I was making good money there. But no sooner the strike was over. You know, I didn't collect any strike pay whatsoever.

EE: No, no. Of course not, when you're earning money.

GP: Because I didn't go on the picket line, eh? But Frank--.

EE: Did the union ask any contribution from you for the--?

GP: No, no. You were free. If you find yourself a job, you were free to--. But you had to have the written from the--.

EE: Yeah. Well, it reduces the pressure on the union, on the strike fund, if you're employed.

GP: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, there were so many guys that attended the picket line. Actually, Frank said, "It's a good thing if you guys can find a job, find yourself a job." He says because things look kind of tough at that time, you know?

EE: Do you remember when that was?

GP: I don't know if it was around '69 or end of '68.

EE: Yeah, I have a memory from things I've seen that there was this strike at the end of the '60s.

GP: Yeah. And one strike lasted only three weeks. Yeah, it wasn't--. It was most of all about the pension.

[0:25:02]

EE: It was, eh?

GP: Yeah, it wasn't about wages or anything. We just wanted to have better pension there and the contributions that we were making.

EE: I've had some involvement with unions in the university, and I understand that one of the basic rules is never strike for money, for a better wage. You need to have better reasons, because you're going to lose some money that year.

GP: Oh, yeah.

EE: But pensions, that's a different matter.

GP: Yeah, some of the guys that did the strike that lasted nine weeks there. They felt it. Lots of family, they end up in trouble.

EE: Yeah. They would have that year.

GP: Most of all people, it doesn't matter what, you know? There is people that live from payday to payday, never thinking about the proverbial rain day, you know what I'm saying?

EE: No. I know what you're saying.

GP: And then they were in trouble, you know? Lots of them they--.

EE: You were more careful.

GP: Well, I'm old fashioned, you know.

EE: Be ready for the rainy day.

GP: For the rain day, yeah. But I never, like I said, I never had a problem to--. Even if I was laid off from the elevator, or when it happens that the strike there, I got myself a job.

EE: Sure.

GP: So it was--.

EE: Well, when you have other skills that you can use as in the case of working on concrete, that's a great thing.

GP: Well, you've got to be willing to work too, you know, in those days. Just because you got a union--. Union protected--. Even then in the late '70s, the elevators started having quite a bit of trouble, too, there. You know the drugs come in, people drinking, and some of the general foremans-. He was one of the best general foremans, too. He was from Ukrainian descent, too, at Pool 1

there, the last years that I worked at Pool 1 there. But he had no choice. You had a time clock in the morning, and you had to punch in. Some guys show up there at 9:00.

EE: You're supposed to start at 8:00, I suppose.

GP: Yeah. At 8:00 you had to be on your department. You had to be on the job at 8:00. Show up at 9:00, 9:30, 10:00, then he's making a schedule there for loading a boat. You know, if you require 12 guys on the job, and you promise him that he mark it down that you'll be there—whether it's Saturday or Sunday or whatever, at night—you've got an obligation to be there. And some of them, they wouldn't show up on the job. "Oh, I got an excuse for this, an excuse for that." But there was no excuse there to be late four or five days a week for an hour or two hours, you know? He had no choice, and he would say, "Okay, you've got no job. You're fired."

EE: He did fire them?

GP: Oh, yeah.

EE: Well, I would think so.

GP: And Frank, he couldn't do nothing because he would show them the timecard, you know, and say, "This is what's going on." The protection was out the window.

EE: Well, yes. The union really can't protect a person who isn't taking care of himself.

GP: That's true.

EE: Were these younger workers coming in who didn't have your kind of work ethic?

GP: And there were even some with families that they had trouble with alcohol, you know, and stuff. The younger guys, they had trouble with the drugs at that time. Drugs at that time.

EE: And was there liquor in the place, or was it kept--?

GP: There was always somebody sneaking something, most of all if they were on the--. When we had sometime had three shifts. Day shifts, dumping and cleaning; 4:00 to 12:00, dumping and cleaning; and 12:00 to 8:00, just cleaning, eh? or loading a boat if there was a boat there at the dock. It didn't matter that it's 4:00 to 12:00 or who had to--. You know, you mess up there with the grades of the grain that are supposed to go on the boat, and it could cost the company up to half a million dollars. So you had to be--. I was on the shipping. I started, even at Pool 1, I was in the car shed there with the dumper. I was dumping. Then there was opening for a tunnel man they used to call them for the shipping. And this Steve Humeniuk was his name, the general foreman, he asked me if I would like to go on the shipping crew. I says, "Ok. I'm going to try it." And I went there. You have to be really responsible there.

EE: I daresay.

GP: Because all the silos or the bins—whatever you want to call them—they had numbers there in the basement that went on the conveyor belt. And if on the shipping order there, if it tells you that you have to put 427 or 412, or if you were another shipper there 522 or 519 or whatever, that's the bins that you're supposed to open, you know?

[0:30:23]

EE: Sure.

GP: And if there was some grain that was a little bit less with the inspection of it there, if he tells you to open three and a half inches, you open three and a half inches to blend it in with the--. And you had to be really on. It was a responsible job, but I was getting good money.

EE: Yes. And you were able to do it.

GP: Yes.

EE: Had you gone to school here in Canada?

GP: No, not whatsoever. I made a mistake because to be honest, I didn't listen to my father. I was the only son in the family, and I didn't have to come to Canada. But you went to a labour centre there in Italy or in Europe there, in Italy at the time was the lira there that was the monetary--.

EE: Yes.

GP: And you see, the Canadian dollar, it's worth so much lira there in Italy. Oh, my God! You make a fortune. But once you come here, it was not milk and honey the way they advertise it in Europe. And I'm telling you the truth. My grandfather, I was named after him, and he had experience that he had been in Africa. He had been in United States.

EE: Migrant workers.

GP: Him and his brother and my great grandfather.

EE: Sure. Italians have done a lot of that.

GP: You know. When the war started in Europe, you know, the First World War--.

EE: 19--. Oh, the First World War.

GP: Yeah. My grandfather and my uncle, they left the United States, and they went to join the army there in Europe. And once I asked my grandfather, you know, because he's talking about United States and Europe. I said to him, "Grandpa," I says, "how come did you and Uncle Carmen left United States to come back to Italy and join the army?" "Well," he says to me, he says, "at that time, that was the right thing to do."

EE: Patriotism?

GP: Well, yeah. I says--. And he didn't--. In the worst way, he tried to change my mind about leaving school.

EE: About going to Canada?

GP: And coming to Canada. He said, you know, compared to what my grandfather went through, I would put my hands in the fire now that he wasn't just to talk about it, the experience that they had in United States. We're talking my grandfather was born 1880. He was a young guy when his older brother and him they went with my great grandfather to Untied States in Pennsylvania close to Pittsburgh there.

EE: Sure. Well, this is like the Veltrys who became--.

GP: No, no, no, no. That had nothing to do with--.

EE: No, I know, but it's sort of they were also Italians who were working in the States, and they worked their way into Canada in BC, or so John told me.

GP: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

EE: John Potestio.

GP: John, yeah.

EE: But these were in Pennsylvania.

GP: In Pennsylvania.

EE: Were they working in industry there?

GP: No, no. Mines.

EE: In the mines?

GP: Oh, yeah.

EE: Coal mining?

GP: I don't know if it was coal mine, but my grandpa, he worked in the mine. And he said the experience that he had through--. I know a lot of things because when I grew up, it's not that we were poor. We weren't really rich, but we weren't poor. In the house, we had an old Marconi Radio with wooden cabinet with a screen in the front. Probably You never seen here one in Canada.

EE: I may have seen a big radio of that sort, but this is--.

GP: But it was about this high.

EE: About two feet high maybe?

GP: I can close my eyes and see it now there in my grandfather's. It was an old Marconi Radio there.

EE: Mr. Marconi was Italian, of course.

GP: Yeah. But that's the--. No TV, video games like the young people today. I think that—it's my opinion and I should keep my mouth shut—but--.

EE: [Laughs] Too many distractions!

GP: No. When it was older people most of all in the summertime, like the houses in Italy where we grew up or even maybe John there, I don't know--. But we were living out in the country, you know, country. And the houses in the country in Italy—you know, my grandfather and my father farmed—you had three steps and there was no basement. That was the first floor, and the second floor you had the bedrooms and stuff like that. Our house, we had three bedrooms on top.

[0:35:06]

EE: You lived on the main floor and then slept upstairs.

GP: Yeah. Kitchen and dining room was on the main floor, and then the bedrooms upstairs with a balcony. We had a balcony on two side of the house. Southside and the westside there was a balcony with European--. You don't see those houses here.

EE: Catch the evening sun, was it?

GP: Oh, yeah. I used to listen to--. Because eight cousins or relatives or brother-in-law, you know, neighbours--. At where my grandfather was on one house there, it wasn't a house. It was a big storage tank there like, and on top there was a concrete slab like a terrace, you know, with a picnic table and few wooden chairs, and even blocks of wood about maybe 18, 20 inches high. And even I used to sit on one of them. I'm telling you the true story there of what it was there. And if they were talking about agriculture, you know, "How is it going to be for wheat this year or potatoes?" They were talking about the weather or the olive trees because they had olive trees. And for the wine, "What's it going to be for the wine?" And sometime they were even talking about the First World War, and sometime my grandfather and one of his brothers-in-law, they were talking about the experiences

that they had while they were in Unite States. And my grandfather when I said, “Grandpa,” I said, “I’m going to go to Canada,” he didn’t like it at all. And he said not only that Canada is a cold country--. Because in Italy today, the old people they were cursing somebody, they say, “I hope they send you to Siberia.” You know? Because we knew that was--.

EE: That was bad.

GP: One of the coldest places. Not like Antarctica, but for us Siberia, it was cold. My grandfather said, “You know, Canada is a northern country. It’s cold.” And he says, “Another thing too,” he says, “It’s English and Anglo-Saxon the language.” I said, “Ah! We’ll see.” But he didn’t like--. He tried to convince me to stay home.

EE: But you went and--.

GP: I come here.

EE: A question, Owen?

OM: Yes. Ernie lets me ask a question once in a while. So what did you think of Canada when you first came here, having been given this lecture by your dad and your grandfather?

GP: Well, my father was here, eh?

OM: Oh, okay.

GP: He was working.

OM: Oh, so he came over.

GP: No, my grandfather was here. He come for Mr. Ralph Welch. He was from the hometown of John there, you know? And my father was already here, and he didn’t want me to come here.

EE: He discouraged you too?

GP: Yeah, yeah. My father said, “Do whatever. Take a trade. If you don’t want to go to school, you don’t want to be a schoolteacher, be whatever—a blacksmith or a carpenter or electrician or whatever.” He says, “But don’t come here.” I said, “Okay.” But what I said, “I’ll see here what’s going on most of all about the money.” You know, for the other stuff I couldn’t--.

EE: You expected to do better in Canada in terms of money?

GP: Yeah. For moneywise. And I come here with the idea, you know, to work maybe two or three years and go back there. When I come here, the airport, the present-day airport there in Fort William--.

EE: Yes, the Fort William airport.

GP: There was—this is the honest truth—there was a little wooden shed there, and the sidewalk was made of one-by-six lumber. I’m talking 1956 now.

EE: Yes, as late as ’56.

GP: Yeah. Happens there was--. He’s from the hometown of John, his name was Tony [Stale]. You probably heard that name. He had a travel agency.

EE: Yeah. I think I’ve met him along the way.

GP: Yeah. Tony passed away. He used to be a schoolteacher in the hometown of Grimaldi there, where John comes from. Well, we were me and my uncle, but he was supposed to stop at Sault Ste. Marie because his sister was the sponsor for him to come to Canada. But just for company because I was a minor, he took me up here to Fort William, and then he’s supposed to Go back there to the Soo, and he did. We were stuck there--. Not stuck. We were at the airport, and my uncle he spoke French. And this security or guard, he start talking, and he said, “You speak French?” And he said, “Yeah.” So they start talking in French, and I wasn’t too good at French there. I says it’s not my cup of tea there at school. But anyway, he said, “Oh, you know--.” Right away, he called this Tony there. Within ten minutes he was at the airport, and he took us to his office there on Park Street between Court and Algoma.

[0:40:45]

EE: I know the place. I had an election campaign near his office once.

GP: Oh.

EE: Yeah.

GP: And he said—my dad's name is Bruno there—he says, "Airport? Yeah." He says, "I talked 15 minutes ago," he says, "with your father because he was going to the post office just across the street."

EE: Sure, yeah. Just down the street there.

GP: At that time the post office was right there.

EE: Yeah, yeah. The big building.

GP: He said, "And probably they were going for coffee," he says, "at the restaurant there." I said, "Okay." So within few minutes there, I meet my dad.

EE: And did he know you were coming?

GP: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, he knew.

EE: He knew by this time, eh?

GP: No because for--.

EE: So it wasn't a big surprise.

GP: Before we had to--. Me and a friend of mine—he's in Vancouver now—and even my uncle there, to immigrate into Canada we had to go to Rome, and there was four Canadian doctors. Yeah.

EE: Examining you?

GP: First they took, the lady there, they take x-ray of you.

EE: Of the chest?

GP: Yeah. And then the doctor, he check every--. One doctor, he check everything, you know? And they were all Canadians, Canadian doctor. So then they give you a passport that you are okay to immigrate, like, you know?

EE: Nobody with health problems was going to come to Canada?

GP: No. No, if you had health problems, that's it, you know? That's how I had a legal passport and a legal health permit from Canadian doctors. No Italian doctors were involved with it.

EE: And so you were working quite soon and--.

GP: No sooner I come to Canada, my dad happened so that I was on the north CN line that goes from Nakina through Armstrong West. I end up there, me and this friend of mine, 17 years old. You know, coming from the West Coast was an old Italian guy that his name was Delvecchio there. He was a timekeeper with CN. We had those hiking boots, Italian hiking boots. They were excellent most of all in the West Coast, not in the Alps or whatever. But insulated hiking boots, they were excellent for the winter. My grandfather and my uncle, that's all we were using. Come to that, we were not 24 miles west of Armstrong, and the air is changing. You can feel it, you know.

EE: When in the year was this?

GP: 19--. It's the fall of 1956.

EE: Right. September, October.

GP: September, October. But September was okau, the flies, yeah, but even into October. But it was the beginning of November, and the leave already they had changed. We had frost. I says, "My God." Actually, this friend of mine he said one night, he said, "Gino?" I said, "Yeah?" "You think you that we landed in Canada?" [Laughs] I said, "Why?" "Because it's cold." I said, "We were told that it was cold here." And this Tony Delvecchio there, he was a timekeeper. He said, "You guys got to prepare yourself." You know? And even my dad said--.

EE: Get some clothing.

GP: No, because we need a parka, you know, insulated mitts, and better boots with the liner. “Oh, my God,” I says, “what did we get into?” If I could have gone back at that time, I would’ve went back before December. But then we stick it out.

EE: And you got the clothing. Did Delvecchio help you get the clothing?

GP: No, we got a bunch of us. There was all Mediterraneans there. Well, some from former Yugoslavia, today Slovenia, that they were on the Italian border.

EE: Yes. Just across the sea.

GP: Yeah. They were speaking Italian and Slavic there, Slovenian. Portuguese, Spanish, you know, Mediterranean. That cold was too much for us. A bunch of us and a foreman again--. Welch had a foreman of his own, you know, for the work, but for the--. What would call them? You know, for CN there to get a dispatcher for the trains, he was from CN. He was an employee from CN. And Mika, his last name was Chika. I don’t know how to spell it, but he was a good guy. And he was taking a train order, and he said his son was in Winnipeg there. So one Saturday night, we jump on the passenger train. Almost half--. It was almost 40 people there, you know?

[0:45:46]

EE: Wow.

GP: But 35 of us got onto, we went to Winnipeg there, and we did the shopping. And my father said, “Buy these boots and buy this parka and buy the gloves with the liner, heavy, thick socks.” Anyway, but still, in those days, it’s not like now that you can buy boots for 80 below zero, 70 below zero. You got all this Gore-Tex.

EE: Yes. Textiles and so on.

GP: It’s super, you know? But in those days even if you want to spend money, you can only spend so much on a pair of boots.

EE: Wool helps a bit, but not enough. [Laughs]

GP: Oh, yeah. Long johns and all that. But it was cold.

EE: When you were working on the line, were you sleeping in boxcars?

GP: Yeah. Actually, for the time that I was there--.

EE: I guess there'd be sleeping cars.

GP: They used to haul one of those potbelly stoves there, cast iron, and in the wintertime, they were using coal, eh? No oil at that time. There was a guy there that through the night he was coming as the coal was burning, he'd a little more to the--.

EE: So someone through the night kept the stoves all fired up?

GP: That was his job there, yeah. This is not a word of a lie.

EE: No, I don't doubt it. [Laughs]

GP: Those boxcars, they were insulated. Some you had double box there. Sometime, like, would be on the corner far from the stove was a bolt there, you would get a chunk of ice like, you know, a small pumpkin there. They would form there. It was that cold there on that. We had ten days off for Christmas holidays, and on January the 5th or 6th, we would go back to work there.

EE: In those days, there wasn't a highway up to Armstrong, I don't think, was there?

GP: No, no. No.

EE: So what did you do, take the railway to Nakina?

GP: We had to go--. They used to call the south line from Port Arthur through here. Superior Junction they used to call it.

EE: Okay. The Superior Junction. Sioux Lookout.

GP: East of us. Exactly. And then go back down on the line the way you know. Most of the time for the holidays, there is a community of Natives there west of Armstrong. It's called Collins.

EE: Yeah. Well, I was going to say the railway running past--. I was in Collins once.

GP: Oh, yeah?

EE: Yes.

GP: Anyway.

EE: I flew in! [Laughs]

GP: They had so called sidings, long sidings there.

EE: I think I've seen them.

GP: And when they used to close them down for the ten days of holidays, the outfit or the gang or whatever, that's where they used to put it on the sidings in Collins. And they used to live, you know, find somebody that volunteer as a watchman there for the ten days that was the holidays. So this is--.

EE: So the first holiday in Port Arthur that winter--.

GP: Oh, it was cold. It was cold for us. Super cold. I even told my wife it was the last winter got really cold here in Thunder Bay.

EE: Yes, it did.

GP: You know, we had 40 or 50 below zero windchill. I said to my wife, "For my time, we went back home was 38 to 40 years that winters you get two weeks or so cold in January there, but then, you know--."

EE: The rest isn't so bad.

GP: Yeah. But Armstrong wasn't the only place that was cold. I worked for, again, for the mine there west of Atikokan, Caland when they were clearing there.

EE: Oh, yeah. The iron mine.

GP: The iron mines, yeah. Oh, my God. Armstrong is a cold place. Ontario. Nakina's a cold place.

EE: You've told us all of this, and all I wanted to do was ask you whether you got any education in English because you learned to read, I suppose.

[0:50:02]

GP: Yeah, but was it through--. It was a company in New York, an Italian library there. You could order a grammar in English and Italian there and do your practicing. That's my English. If it's crippled a little bit--.

EE: You're doing well. No problem. But because you needed to be able to read as well as work with numbers when you were the shipper. I mean, you had to know those things.

GP: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

EE: That's why I was really thinking of it.

GP: Yeah, yeah.

EE: My father, who came from Ukraine—German-speaking Mennonites—but he came from Ukraine in 1926. He said he learned to read English in the funny papers, you know, the comic strips. [Laughs]

GP: Oh, yeah. No, I did okay there. My job was a responsible job, but I got paid good money there too.

OM: So you stuck it out. What did you--?

GP: The only--.

OM: Oh, sorry.

GP: No, no. The only reason I stuck it out because no sooner I turned 19, the army there in Italy, they start looking for me. You ask John. He was two years. And with my grandfather been in the First World War, and he's lucky he survived because he was

wounded. My grandfather being 6’2”, 240 pounds. In the trenches, the story was a horror, and it’s true. Even here the other night, that I was watching some episode of that First World War, it’s terrible. That never should have happened, you know?

EE: No. It should have been ended long before it ended.

GP: And even this part of the Second World War, they were on the History Channel. But I learned a lot before the History Channel when the survivors of the First World War in the trenches and the corps my grandfather was in. It’s an Italian word, it’s *Arditi* there, you know, the corps that he was in. And they give you like a dagger or bayonet or whatever.

EE: A bayonet.

GP: But it actually wasn’t a bayonet. A bayonet they used to attach it to the rifle there. This was a dagger maybe like the Roman soldier had.

EE: Well--.

GP: And the thing that he had to do was you put it in your mouth, you know, and you go like a snake at nighttime under the barbed wire and whatever, and you tried to get into the enemy lines. And it’s not like you shoot somebody with a rifle like now or even before out 2-300 yards. The corps was done at night, and you were face to face with the enemy.

EE: And you were supposed to kill them with that knife?

GP: Either you kill him or he’s going to kill you.

EE: Or he’s going to kill you.

GP: There is no other way.

EE: This was in Northern Italy?

GP: Oh, yeah.

EE: On the--.

GP: Right up into the Alps, at the Alps near the border there. Because Austria and Hungary there was--.

EE: The Hapsburg domains.

GP: When Ferdinand got killed in Sarajevo there, that's what started the first--.

EE: Because Italy was an Ally, came into the war with France and--.

GP: Of the First World War?

EE: Yeah.

GP: Oh, yeah.

EE: They joined France and England and so on.

GP: Yeah, because half of the eastern side, even up to Venice there, and there is another huge town—today they've got the shipyards there—it's called Trieste. Now since Yugoslavia collapsed, it's Croatia there. It's right on the Croatian, on the gulf of Venice there, you know.

EE: Yeah. Adriatic Sea.

GP: And the Austrians and the Hungarians, they were controlling all the way to the French border there in Northern Italy. Present-day Lombardi there. They were under--. Everything was under the, you know, Austrian Empire. And my grandfather, that's why him and my brother left the United States.

EE: Yeah. Went back for that. As far as you were concerned, you didn't need any army service.

GP: No. When they started looking for me, and my mother sent me the letters and everything, and she told them, "He's in Canada." On Machar Avenue, his name was name was Frank Arabia. He was a consulate for Italy.

EE: An Italian consulate.

GP: Yeah. I went to see him, and he said to me this Italian expression. “Son,” he said. “Sonny,” or whatever. He said, “You were okay to come to Canada for medical and stuff.” He says, “No sooner you go there, they’re going to draft you.” I says, “No.” I says, “Grandpa suffered enough, and he did enough.” And my grandfather was six and a half years in Africa to start with in the colonies. Libya, Somalia, whatever, the Northern Eritrea, and then the war started. Italy joined the war in 1940. He was six and a half years before.

[0:55:37]

EE: Oh, really? In the Second World War?

GP: Yeah. In the Second--. I’m talking about my dad now.

EE: Your dad now. Yeah.

GP: I said, “My grandfather did enough. My uncle did enough, and my father did enough.”

EE: The family has done its--.

GP: I said, “Forget it. I’m not going there.”

OM: In the Second World War, did the Allied troops come up through your town?

GP: Yeah.

OM: Americans, Canadians?

GP: No, most of them were Americans and India. When they landed, there first that they landed in Sicily.

EE: In Sicily.

GP: The American side—what was it—Catania. And the English, they were more on the southwest side, but between them, for what I know, the English--. Montgomery?

EE: Yeah, General Montgomery.

GP: General Montgomery.

EE: Monty Montgomery.

GP: And Patton.

EE: George Patton?

GP: I pronounce right? Patton?

OM: Yes.

GP: He had no use for the English, let's put it that way. He said--. He had an expression that if he had his way, he'd fight English as he was fighting the Germans. Patton. Even on a movie there—I don't know if it's true or not—but he was believed that he had been a General in the Roman army. They made a movie about him, and he said, "You know, I can give you the details minute-by-minute," he says, "when I was with the Romans." I don't know if it was crap.

EE: Reincarnation, eh?

GP: Reincarnation.

EE: He came back.

GP: No, serious. He was serious right to the end, General Patton. And the British--. Palermo is the capital city of Sicily, but it's on the northwest side of the island. The English, they didn't want Patton to go there, but he broke the rules, and he got there before the English did. Then they started for the mainland there.

OM: Angio and--.

GP: And the Canadian division or some even from India, as far as I know, they were going close to Naples there, you know? Cassino That's where the Canadian--. The Americans and the British, they were smart in a sense because they sent the Canadian to get--. No, no. That's the truth. Documented history, if I'm wrong, it's--. But as far as I know, it's documented history that they sent the Canadians to Ortona, Cassino there. They got slaughtered because they were the first one to--. Like they did in Omaha Beach there and everything.

EE: Yeah. And in the First World War, the Canadians were real shock troops, so let them show their stuff, right?

GP: Yeah, yeah. But it was sad.

EE: You've gone back to visit Italy?

GP: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

EE: When did you first go back?

GP: First time I took my wife and kids there because my wife, she come small here. And my mom and dad, my sisters, cousins, they didn't know my wife or the kids. Matty? I don't know where she is. But I think it was--. Matty?

MT: Yes?

GP: The first time we went to Italy was in '78?

MT: '78.

GP: '78. Yeah.

EE: '78. So you'd been in Canada, what, 22 years by then?

GP: Yeah.

EE: '56 to '72.

GP: And then I went was 13 years ago. My father was getting up there, was 90 years old.

EE: Sure. Time to visit again.

GP: I had to go visit. And we started making plans to go next summer maybe. I've got cousins and sister.

EE: Sure. It's nice to see them.

GP: The last time I was there was the war in the Balkans there.

EE: Oh, yes.

GP: Serbia.

EE: Yes.

GP: But the Americans, the base that they got in Italy, it was 24-hours a day. And when I lived there, there is a river that splits the two provinces there in Southern Italy there. They were coming up this big river there 24-hours a day. You couldn't even sleep there.

[1:00:09]

EE: Airplanes?

GP: Yeah, Americans. They were going into the Balkans.

EE: Yeah. Flying into the--?

GP: Yeah.

EE: I see.

GP: I got relatives in Germany, and I could go see them.

EE: This was when they were bombing of Kosovo, was it?

GP: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Against Serbia.

GP: Yeah, Serbia. Yeah.

EE: Because they launched that incredible bombing campaign against--.

GP: Oh!

EE: Yeah.

GP: They didn't show much, but on the Italian TV there in Europe, every day--.

EE: You'd see a lot more.

GP: Oh! Kids getting--. Yeah.

EE: Yeah. Well, should we go back to the elevators?

GP: Sure. Go back to the elevators. Sure. [Laughing]

EE: You worked then in Pool 1 until you retired?

GP: Yeah. That was my last.

EE: And you were at Pool 3. Do you remember when you moved over to Pool 1?

GP: I think it was--.

EE: Early in the ‘70s? In the ‘70s sometime.

GP: ’71/’72.

EE: Right. That early then?

GP: Yeah.

EE: And what was the work structure in terms of foremen and crews and so on. Can you describe that for us, say, at Pool 1?

GP: Well, you had the cleaning departments, you know. Cleaners where you were cleaning the grain. There was a guy in charge for that department.

EE: So this is after it’s been unloaded from the cars, the boxcars.

GP: Yeah, yeah. He used to go up they call the distributing floor there. And it was the same grade, they would put into this silo there that was in the house. Because there was far--. They called annex, you know, where the clean grain went—and even some dirty grain went to there—but then you had to bring it back into the house to clean it or whatever.

EE: Sure. Prepare it for selling.

GP: If you were working on the cleaners there, you were--. Like if I was a head cleaner man, I worked there as a cleaner man too.

EE: You have?

GP: Yeah. Because once the shipping season was over and you had the seniority, they would switch you from one department to the other.

EE: Right.

GP: When I was a head cleaner man, I was in charge of another three guys there and different machines. You had different kinds of machines to clean the grain. On one set of machines, you had durum, that durum wheat. The best wheat in the world that, the Canadian [No.] 1 and [No.] 2 durum.

EE: Good pasta wheat, eh?

GP: Oh, the best semolina. Then if you were cleaning whatever other products like [No.] 1 Northern or [No.] 2 Northern, or if you were cleaning barley, they had different machines there. **[Coughs]** Excuse me. You had three guys working with me there. We were working together, just on setting the reformer there or making the sets.

EE: Because it's all machinery that's doing it. You're supervising, running the grain in, and so on.

GP: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. But you had to know this, you know, what they call Superior that they had 18 cylinders turning the grain. You had to know all the settings, how much to feed in the top, and then through the top cylinder, the medium cylinders, and to the bottom cylinders. You had to know the setting there.

EE: It's like kind of separators.

GP: But they give you a booklet, you know? They give you a good idea what--.

EE: Well, this is the sort of thing I'm thinking. I had in my mind before you had to be able to read the English in order to understand the booklet.

GP: Oh, yeah, yeah. No problem at all there. And if you were on the shipping, same thing. You were what they call basement there, you know, because you were at the bottom of the elevator where the valves come into the conveyor belt. And you were responsible. That was a responsible job too, more than to be head cleaner man there. And if you worked on the annex, right at the top of the annex there, that was a responsible job too because if the head cleaner man knows the offsets at the end, they tell you, "You're going to get grain, and it's got to go to 500." They used to go up to 700, the numbers of silos so they don't--.

EE: On these different bins or silos.

GP: Yeah, on different bins> and they had to be the same quality. Clean grain, the same quality.

EE: Yes.

GP: They had one guy in charge on the annex too, they had annex men, and three belts. Each guy had his own belt, and you had a book there that you had to—when you made a set—you had to put your initials on. So if there was any confusion or mix--. If I was responsible, you know, I'm working on Four Belt. I made a mistake, I put my initials there. If you were on Four Belt or Five Belt, you had to put your initials there. There was no getting away with, you know. But if you worked together with the guys—you're having coffee, or you went to the washroom or whatever—I covered for you. I take a set. I'm marking down, but then you have to put your initials on there. I would put my initials if, you know. That was the operation of the elevator.

[1:05:38]

The scale floor was a responsible job. Each job was responsible. They also give you--. On the distributing floor what they mean is they tell you, "One Cleaner goes here on this belt, Six Cleaner go here, Seven go there." You know? The shippers or the receivers, and you had to be careful on all the jobs.

EE: And this is where--. How many managers, foremen, would there be? Because You might be in charge of this operation, but there's someone who is directing you to what you're supposed--.

GP: No. Each house had one superintendent and the general foreman. Then if there were shifts on, they would promote a guy, like, with seniority and knowledge of the elevator. For a 4:00 to 12:00 shift, they will promote him as a general foreman.

EE: So the foremen could be sort of like lead workers in fact.

GP: They were not lead workers, but they were making the schedule for the cleaning or shipping or dumping. They were not really worker--.

EE: What I'm thinking of is they really came out of the workforce rather than being imposed.

GP: No, no. Yeah. Yeah.

EE: Whereas the superintendent would be.

GP: But they were in charge.

EE: Whereas the superintendent would be someone who was hired. Well, you all were hired, but they're the bosses.

GP: Actually, if the superintendent, he had a good general foreman like it was the case at all four elevators. If the case wasn't that--. Like, at Pool 9, MacMillan, a gentleman by the name MacMillan, he was the superintendent there, but Major Campbell was there, and he knew the superintendent he had--. He was responsible for, but most of all the general foreman was. And then the inspectors were there.

EE: Yeah, well, I was going to ask about--. Because Manitoba Pool would have its own inspectors or graders or whatever, but then the Grain Commission people were there.

GP: Manitoba Pool had two grain inspector, the Grain Commission had two grain inspector. Sometimes even three. Sometime they had a couple of them they used to come from Syndicate Avenue.

EE: Syndicate Avenue? From their head office.

GP: Yeah, but just to do tests, eh? Sometimes they used to get bugs on the grain from the Prairies. And the farmers they do their own fumigating out west, but then when they come to the elevators, two inspectors they used to check the grain, and if they're containing bugs or whatever, they would fumigate them. And either they let it rest for a week right on the railroad tracks at the end of the elevator, or if they had dumped it, they would put a seal. They would put it into a special silo there or bin, and they used to put a seal at the bottom—at the bottom of the bin where the valve was—and one on top of the lid there of the annex. They had to come there when the seven days or ten days were up., They would come there and break the seal, and you were okay to clean it or ship it or--.

EE: The poison sort of breaks down or whatever, they hope.

GP: Yeah, that's true. Yes.

EE: Okay. Is there anything else in the service of a typical day that--.

GP: Well, the typical day was, like I said, for each department. You know, if I was dumping, my typical day was there and was many--. When I left, I had a record there even for dumping cars.

EE: You'd set a record?

GP: Yeah.

EE: I see. [Laughs] That feels good. Were there company events? Did you have award days, picnics?

GP: The company, like, for Christmas?

EE: Well, Christmas would be a good time.

GP: No, just before Christmas, they start giving us, you know, you have a jacket with an emblem of Manitoba Pool there. I got some carving from the Eskimos' carving. I got two or three carvings there.

[1:10:09]

EE: These were awards given to you?

GP: Yeah. Plaque there for 25 years, 30 years, 35 years. At the Da Vinci centre there, they used to put, like, a supper for the employees.

EE: Sure. For all of you. A banquet, Christmas banquet for you?

GP: A banquet, yeah. Christmas banquet. And you were allowed to take an escort, like, you know, wife or girlfriend or whatever.

EE: Bring your wife or whatever.

GP: But every year at the Da Vinci centre, they used to put a supper for us, like, you know?

EE: Were there any summer activities? There weren't any hockey teams or anything of that sort?

GP: No. For a while, Pool 1, they were sponsoring like a slow-ball tournament there, and it's not--. I was born to Italy's soccer, and I never got involved with--.

EE: Anything of that sort.

GP: I had a strong arm. Actually, one of the assistant general foremen there, super nice guy, his name is Gordy Parson. He says, "Gino." He says, "Come." He says. "No," I says, "it's not my cup of tea." I said. You know, but that's all they had there. Then toward the end, had a golf--. They come up with an idea, all through the summer, like, if you--. But it was voluntary. They used to sponsor fishing tournament.

EE: Oh, yes. You weren't into fishing?

GP: I went too.

EE: Oh, you went fishing?

GP: Yeah, for fishing. Yeah.

EE: Did you have people from the Prairies, from Manitoba, Manitoba Pool employees, farmers? Did farmers come visiting?

GP: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Actually, Manitoba Pool, they were hiring six students, you know, from farmers that were in the co-op. I had these six kids that were coming working with me there, that they were from Manitoba Pool.

EE: I see. This was one time, or did it happen often?

GP: No, no. Every summer.

EE: Every summer?

GP: Yeah. Some different kids, though. Yeah, for three years I had on, my department where I was, three kids that they come. Good kids.

EE: Yeah. What kind of work did they do?

GP: Well, you know, what I teach them on the shipping?

EE: Yes.

GP: But they had helped to clean up if there was clean up to do.

EE: Sure. And there always is.

GP: No boats there or whatever, you have to--. Each guy that had a belt, you were responsible to keep it clean. If the general foreman comes around, they had to be clean. If there was a little bit of spill--. Because we used to push heavy loads and that went on for the shipping.

EE: you'd move as much grain as you could, and some of it would spill over, I'm sure.

GP: There was a guy, he was a head scale man there. His last name was Chisamore. I think--. **[Coughs]** Excuse me. The record's still standing today.

EE: Is it really?

GP: Yeah. 400 and some thousand bushels in less than four hours at Pool 1.

EE: Wow.

GP: Yeah. If it was the same grade, you didn't have to change nothing.

EE: Just keep it flowing.

GP: You know, just keep pushing it.

EE: Yeah.

GP: And he's still got the record there to the day that they shut it down.

EE: Sure.

GP: I felt sorry that they shut down, but--.

EE: The latter days of the company--.

GP: Can I throw something in?

EE: You certainly can.

GP: We used to have a mayor by the name of Hamilton here in Thunder Bay.

EE: Yeah, I know Hamilton.

GP: David Hamilton?

EE: Yes.

GP: The companies--. I'm retired now. I made my living there. I worked like if it was my own, but I made a good living. I sent my kids to university. The companies was P & H, Parrish & Heimbecker.

EE: Heimbecker.

GP: Yeah, Heimbecker. Manitoba Pool, Sask Pool–and used to be Federal Grain, but then Sask Pool they took it over–and United Grain Growers. They went to the city because the taxes were so high, eh? I said to myself, "I'm not an economist or anything." I said sometime, "How can the company make money?" You know, we were making good money. Manitoba Pool was making good money here in town, but believe it or not, the city of Thunder Bay was charging an elevator like Pool 1 and an elevator in Duluth with the same capacity of storage, they were paying $350,000 and $360,000 US in Duluth. And the city of Thunder Bay was charging an elevator house like Pool 1 or Pool 3 $1.5 million in taxes. It's something around--.

Well, it's all over for me, but in my view, there was something wrong with the system because the company had to pay the employees, they had to maintain the plant, you know? cleaners most of all. There is all kinds of expenses, machinery and all that. Electrical bills you have to pay. And the city was so greedy. What are they getting now? It's like for me renting you a house for three months for $2,000, but then six months empty, and I'm getting nothing. You know what I'm saying? In my view.

[1:15:45]

EE: Sure. I sympathize with what you're saying. The only question I would ask, do you know if the Duluth elevator would be putting through as much grain as, say, as Pool--.

GP: No, I'm talking--. They weren't putting this out, but that didn't matter at all in my view. If the capacity of the elevator is for 11 million bushels, eh, and the same elevator in Duluth is 11 million bushels, and they pay $600,000 or whatever more--.

EE: It seems very high here, I quite agree with you.

GP: A million and a half.

EE: Yeah. I'm just wondering though in terms of--. Because it would be a charge. The elevator's making money in terms of the amount of grain they put through.

GP: No, no.

EE: Or you wouldn't agree with that?

GP: No. I wouldn't agree with that at all.

EE: No, okay.

GP: That's my opinion.

EE: Sure. Well, it's your opinion that counts here, not mine.

GP: No, no, no. I see what you're saying.

EE: Absolutely. Because it's--.

GP: Dusty Miller was there, the lady that was there.

EE: Yeah. In the '70s.

GP: Forget it. Nobody wants to listen to that. Oh, the farmers--.

EE: You mentioned Hamilton, did he listen?

GP: No.

EE: Oh, he didn't listen either?

GP: No, no.

EE: So there are no heroes here as far as you're concerned.

GP: No, no. There's no--. Probably if they had gone and went way back when old Walter Assef was the mayor, probably he would listen because I talked to him many times for lots of things. And he was for the--. He would listen to the idea. It doesn't matter if you were working man or a professional or whatever, you know? But Hamilton, the first one that they went to, he wouldn't listen. And to me, that didn't make any sense because Saskatchewan Pool alone, well, they had four elevators at the river they were using it for storage. But 7A, the capacity of Pool 7A, you can make a loaf of bread from Mexico to the United States and Canada, a loaf of bread.

EE: Out of the amount of grain that's in there?

GP: Out of the amount of grain that they got there. United Grain Growers was running another elevator we used to call McCabe's there. It's between Pool 1 and 7A.

EE: Yes.

GP: It's been left.

EE: Removed since.

GP: Left there. Same thing with Pool 3 there. You know, a million and a half. And when they were running Pool 9, then Manitoba Pool gave up Pool 9 because--.

EE: The assessment was done in the city I suppose, was it? Because we now have this municipal, what's it called? There's an assessment authority now that the province has established. I think that may have been, was it, in the '90s? And so earlier, would the assessment have been done locally? Anyway, we can look into that sometime. We probably should get to some of these other particular questions now, Gino.

GP: Yes, go ahead.

OM: I was still in Italy, by the way.

EE: You're still in Italy? [Laughing] We'll drag you back!

GP: Go ahead, go ahead.

EE: What would you like people to know about the work that you did? You've been giving us a terrifically good account, but are there particular things you would like people to know that you'll put on this card?

GP: Like I said, when we were shovelling it wasn't the cleanest job in the world, you know, because you go up there--.

EE: Tough job.

GP: You know, barley and oats.

EE: Oh, I know barley.

GP: And like I said, it was not the cleanest job in the world. We were to wear a mask. Rye is another kind of dirty product.

EE: So you had masks at that time already?

GP: Oh, yeah. You had to wear a mask. Actually, I used to go on Squire Street there and buy my own there. After Frank got elected president, they had a pile of [inaudible] masks with the fill, the white fill. But before Frank got elected when Anderson was there, they only give you seven or eight of those filters there, and that was it. I used to go and buy my own. But jobwise, I did more heavy work in the bush camps and with construction. The work was, to me, if it was pure durum or wheat, it was play.

[1:20:16]

EE: Yeah. You enjoyed doing it?

GP: Workwise, you know.

EE: Yes.

GP: But, like I said, I was a family man, and I made a good living, and I sent my kids to school.

EE: How many children do you have, if I--?

GP: Four.

EE: Four children. And they all went to the university?

GP: Yeah.

EE: Yeah.

OM: What did they take?

GP: Well, one she's managing at the bank there. But one, she's a physiotherapist at the hospital there, and two of my daughters are in Ottawa there.

EE: So you had four daughters then?

GP: Yeah.

EE: Right.

GP: I wanted a boy, but it didn't--.

EE: Just didn't happen.

OM: What do your daughters do in Ottawa?

GP: One she's in charge of the Canadian—I should ask my wife—blood supply.

EE: Oh, yes. Yeah, that's an important position.

GP: Yeah. And one, she's with a special eye doctor there. He does all kinds of surgery there. She's his--.

EE: So she's working for an ophthalmologist then, surgical ophthalmologist.

GP: Yeah, yeah. Special.

EE: Well, you've produced splendid offspring!

GP: Yeah. That's the only granddaughter that we have. She's going to be home here in about half an hour.

EE: Well, let's press on! [Laughing]

GP: No, no. It's--.

EE: Yes.

GP: So this was okay.

EE: So, it was a good job.

OM: Worked out for you.

GP: For me? Yes.

EE: Yeah. Manitoba Pool worked out very well for you.

GP: And even the construction job that I worked with on and off with the Zanette brothers there, it was a little bit heavy work, but no complaints whatsoever.

EE: You mentioned buying your own filters. The lungs are in good shape? You haven't--.

GP: Thank God, yeah.

EE: Yeah. Well, thank God, thank your foresight too. You took care of what you took in.

GP: Oh, yeah. But a lot of people, good friends of mine, the grain industry wasn't one of the healthiest jobs to be honest. It wasn't.

EE: No, no. No, I'll ask about that in a few moments. Is there anything that you think would surprise people about what you were doing or interest them in particular?

GP: I don't know. It depends on people. At that time there, it's not that--. I'm telling you the truth, even when the Manitoba Pool had three houses shovelling, eh, you didn't find too many English Canadians, let's say, on that kind of a job.

EE: So Europeans did this work?

GP: Well, like I said, Italians, Polish, Ukrainians, Portuguese.

EE: Those were the guys in the--.

GP: The majority. The majority of the workers there in the beginning. Then later at Pool 3, the company come up, they put a dumper there. It was easier. No shovelling anymore. Pool 1 was a shovel house. On account of the taxes, the give up Pool 9 and Pool 2, and you know, it was a much easier operation, even if you work at it on the car shed like on the dumping.

EE: And you were all men, I guess? There weren't any women working there.

GP: No. The women that were there were just on the--.

EE: In the office?

GP: On the government staff there.

EE: On the government inspectors.

GP: Yeah. Well, the offices there.

EE: When they came along.

GP: The offices there, they had women employees for Manitoba Pool, but the majority of the worker in the plant were all men. And actually, if you would check the seniority for eight or nine years there, you would find all names there with different ethnic groups, you know? Italians, and Portuguese, and Polish the majority. Ukrainians, they were already in the second generation, you know?

EE: Sure.

GP: They were already somewhat in the capacity of assistant general foreman, or when the workload was slowing down, shipping was slowing down, they from assistant general foreman, you would go back, like I said, head cleaner man. But that's the way it works there.

EE: And Manitoba Pool was a good company to work for?

GP: It was. I think it was a--. Well, Richardson, I went to work for Richardson for about two months there.

EE: At the end of your service?

[1:25:02]

GP: No, no, no. I was laid off from Manitoba Pool, and it happens that this Hungarian guy, he's a friend of mine, he said--. I said, "I've been laid off." "Oh," he says, "If you come to Richardson, if you know how to shovel," he says, "guaranteed you will get a job." [Laughing]

EE: They'll want you, eh?

GP: I says, “Sure. I’ll give it a try.” So I went to there. It’s a family company, Richardson Elevator, but it was a good company. The general foreman was begging me to stay. That’s true. I’m telling you the truth.

EE: Yeah, good. Well, these are interesting things to know too.

GP: But like I said, to me, Manitoba Pool was one of the best companies in the waterfront.

EE: Yeah. What are you most proud of after your sort of 30--?

GP: Well, to be honest, I wanted to work for another two years, you know?

EE: Yeah. You mentioned that latter end.

GP: If the buyout didn’t happen, you know, that Manitoba Pool was selling--. Because I was healthy, thank God, I was healthy. The job that I had there I knew inside out, and I was number six on the seniority list. I had no worry about--. Well, unless they had shut the houses down, I only had to worry about getting laid off in the wintertime even. I was proud because I made a good living, and like I said, I sent my kids to the choice that they made with education. And I own—it’s not too much of a mention--.

EE: It’s a nice house.

GP: I own my little house here.

EE: Did you do any of the work in the house?

GP: I did the landing in the front. If you pay attention when you go out with my next-door neighbour here, the whole steps that they were, I wanted a big root cellar. There was one that it four-by-six under the original steps, eh? But I wanted a longer one, so I dig out the whole thing and made a longer storage space there. I put the landing the way I wanted. You know, the steps I made it instead of being ten or twelve inches high, I made it eight inches, and I put a better landing there the way it is now. I built my own garage. I got a nice--. I do quite a bit of gardening now.

EE: Well, I was going to say, without standing up to look at the backyard, there must be a good garden out there if you’ve got a--.

GP: Beautiful garden. I’ve been volunteer--. This past summer--. You’ve heard of Bruno Construction, eh, the contractor there?

EE: Yes.

GP: Through him, well, we've been good friends since day one. We got a club there. It's all voluntary work. Nobody gets paid a nickel or nothing, and he puts money up for projects sometime. It's called the Gran Sasso Club there.

EE: I've heard of it.

GP: And we raise money for local charities. And all the money that we raise, they stay here. And I'm not--.

EE: Because you served at the Blues Festival, right?

GP: I'm telling you the honest truth there. If you ask, what is it, Mr. Spears? The Jeffrey Children--.

EE: Oh, George Jeffrey Children's Centre?

GP: Yeah. We give them money. We give $25,000 when they built the new hospital. We support the United Way. We supported the St. Andrew Church there on Algoma Street.

EE: Which church?

GP: St. Andrew.

EE: Oh, St. Andrew's, yes, of course.

GP: There is a drop-in centre there.

EE: Right, the Dew Drop Inn.

GP: For those people that are less fortunate and that.

EE: Yes, and you're donating to that as well.

OM: Paul Dayton.

GP: I beg your pardon?

OM: Paul Dayton, I think, is involved with that.

EE: Yeah, I think he may be chair of the board.

GP: Well, the lady that was there was Nicky Burns.

EE: Oh, Nicky Burns is there too. Yeah.

GP: Anyway, I think she's--. Anyway, we support those local charities, and we support the Shelter House because a member that works with us at the club there, Mr. Carl Sharp.

OM: I know him. He worked for the city.

GP: He used to work--. Exactly. He's a super nice guy, Carl, there. He's involved with the Shelter House. And Ernie, don't get me wrong, for a country like Canada with the major natural resources that you can think of—and that's my opinion, okay—it's a shame for what's going on here in this country.

EE: It is a shame. I agree completely.

GP: You know why? Because the other night on the CTV News even, there is close to a million people and 14 percent--. I'm repeating close to accurate what I seen on TV, the lady on the news there. Fourteen percent it's children in Canada that they are hungry.

[1:30:21]

EE: Yeah. Well, Gino, this is why I'm a New Democrat.

GP: Hey, I supported you when, you know--.

EE: Because we need to work to change that.

GP: Listen, that's my opinion.

EE: I know it is, and I agree with you entirely. It's shameful.

GP: A friend of mine, he used to be a postman, and he volunteered. On Simpson Street, he's got a place that's called the Underground Gym, Peter Panetta. Actually, his father, he worked for Manitoba Pool.

EE: Oh, did he?

GP: He was an older guy. Sometime I used to--. He was such a good guy, Joe. I hope he rest in peace poor guy there. I felt sorry for him because he had a bunch of kids there and, you know, he was kind of slow there. You get an age. Sometimes I used to jump into his half of the boxcar and shovel half of it for him.

EE: Sure. Good for you.

GP: To give him a little bit of rest because he was such--. He was from a different province, but that didn't bother me because he was an honest guy. And so did--. If you go an interview this Mr. Scoccia, Gino --.

EE: We're aiming to.

GP: Yeah. He's from a different province all the way almost up north central there, but we used to help Joe there, you know, because he was an older guy and he needed. Peter, same thing. I even brought him--. I still--. If I go downstairs, I'm going to find--. I brought him, through the club that I'm volunteering there, I brought him $4,500 there. He wanted to build a little kitchen, eh? But all the money that we make there is for the community.

EE: Yes.

GP: And I want to tell you another thing that is shameful in my view because we got our own water tank, the only thing we use is an outlet for the deep freezer. And Lynn Peterson--. We used to do the Blues Festival there, you know?

EE: Mmhmm, yes. Well, that's what I was remember the--.

GP: Twice. Two days for the Blues Festival.

EE: Right.

GP: The city come up with a bright idea of charging us. I'm proving to you. I don't drink, I don't do pot, I don't--. I'm normal. I'm telling you the honest truth there. The city come to us to put a trailer there because we've got to have a trailer. We got our own trailer. It's made of solid stainless steel. We serve the food there and drinks and whatever. The city wants to make it short. They want $2,200 from us. So Bruno phoned me. He's got his plant there off Balmoral.

EE: Yes. Yes, I know the place.

GP: Anyway, I said, "Bruno." I said, "Listen. My nephew phones me to go fishing." They've got a camp at Lac des Milles Lacs or other lakes. I know the whole Northwestern Ontario from one end to the other.

EE: I bet you do.

GP: I'm an outdoor man.

EE: You fish that well, eh?

GP: I like fishing and I like hunting lots. I said, "If I have to spend my best weekends," because it happens all the Saturdays and Sundays. I says, "If I have to spend two days of my time," and sometimes I put in 12 hours there, Ernie.

EE: Yes.

GP: There are members of the club who put in 10, 12 hours a day.

EE: Sure.

GP: I said, "If I have to come there and give $2,200 of clear money, we have to sell a lot of Italian sausage, lot of roast beef, and roast pork Italian style, fries, and whatever." I said, "If I have to spend two days there," I said, "deal me out." Because to pay $2,200 to the city for what? Just for an outlet. We've got our own water tank.

EE: Yeah. That's shortsighted greediness on the part of the city.

GP: Well, they got so greedy, I tell you. We didn't do the Blues Festival. We didn't do the Dragon Boat at Boulevard Lake because on account of the price that they charge. Now we lost Kakabeka Falls because the lady that was running the--. I don't know if you heard about it or not. Marlene. I can't remember her last name, but they owned the hotel there at Kakabeka.

OM: She retired, eh?

GP: Yeah, she retired two years ago. Believe it or not, she couldn't find anybody to help to be in charge there. It happens that I met Marlene that I know, Mary there from Kakabeka there at the Superstore. "Gino," she says, "it's a hopeless case. We can find nobody to--." Now the manager of the Legion at Kakabeka, what the heck his name is? Marlenko? Anyway, he was willing to, and they've got the property to do it.

[1:35:29]

EE: Mmhmm. They do.

GP: But the insurance, he's fighting with the insurance. The insurance wouldn't give it to him, the permit to sponsor that. We used to make really good there for a small place like Kakabeka for two days. Excellent. All we do now is Da Vinci Centre. They put a new manager, and he made a mess out of it. They used to do the Thunder Fest there at the Da Vinci, and it's out. This year we didn't do it. I don't know if they're going to put it back next year.

EE: I guess you're right. There wasn't one this year.

GP: But we do three events for the Anishinaabe--.

EE: Anishinaabe, yes.

GP: Days at the Old Fort.

EE: Right.

GP: Plus another two events there. And the big one we got here in the weekend in August that--.

OM: Festa Italia?

GP: At the Italia. Yeah, exactly.

EE: Yeah. Festa Italia is going strong.

GP: At the Italian Centre there. Yeah. But like I said, all the money that we raise just for local charities, and the city got greedy.

EE: And that's what the city should remember that when you're raising for the city--.

GP: Well, you know, I mentioned it to Rebecca Johnson. She's the--.

EE: Yes, yes. I know Rebecca.

GP: Councillor at large there or whatever.

EE: Yes, she's on the council. One of the five at large.

GP: Yeah. Boshcoff and few others, even Joe Virdiramo there. I got angry with him.

EE: Mmhmm. Because they weren't listening?

GP: Well, he says, "What am I going to do?"

EE: Well, raise it in the council.

GP: I said, "You're on the council there. Just because you represent Westfort, you know, it's a bit of the city." I said. So it's--.

EE: Sure. Let me take us back to the elevators again. [Laughs]

GP: Yes.

EE: There are a couple of questions. Do you think that the work you did contributed to Canada's success as an international grain trader?

GP: Yes.

EE: Obviously it did.

GP: I think so.

EE: We can press on.

GP: I think so.

EE: Describe any connections you see between your work and the work of farmers growing the grain handled in the grain trade. You can see connections?

GP: I've got a respect for the farmers there.

EE: Right. There's a question about changes that took place over the years, and you've mentioned when the Pool 1 got the shakers in to empty the boxcars, for example, might be one of the changes.

GP: Yeah.

EE: Did you see improvements in handling dust and so on in the elevators?

GP: Yes. Toward the end, they had come up with a better suction system, you know? Instead of having what they used to call cyclones, and they were pulling the dust from inside, but spreading it outside the elevators.

EE: All over the city, eh? [Laughs]

GP: Yeah. Then they come up with a better suction system. And they were collecting the dust, and it go into a special bin there, and they come up with an idea that they were making pellets. You know, back to the farmer.

EE: By-product.

GP: By-products for feed, for cows, and whatever. Horses.

EE: Yes.

GP: It was a better--. It had improved lots compared to the beginning in the ‘60s there.

EE: Were there other changes you saw over the 32 years, was it?

GP: Automation too.

EE: Automation.

GP: Yeah. They used to have hydraulic scales, but they were manual. Then toward the end there, it was almost with computer, eh?

EE: Sure.

GP: Yeah, that was a big change. But in the meantime, it was an improvement, yeah, but they’re eliminating jobs too.

EE: Could you compare the numbers? How many jobs were lost would you say?

GP: With Manitoba Pool?

EE: Yeah, just with Manitoba Pool.

GP: It would be pretty close to 100.

EE: 100 jobs.

GP: Yeah, they were eliminated on account of that automation.

EE: Because I remember there were other things I might ask about, but I remember Frank talking about 1984 that there were maybe 1,800 grain handlers along the waterfront. And those numbers were dropping.

GP: Ernie, at one time, Saskatchewan Pool alone when they were operating the elevators at the river, you know?

EE: Yes.

GP: And the huge Pool 4s, the two houses, huge houses there at the North End. In the summertime when they were hiring all students and everything, they had almost 2,000 working just for Saskatchewan Pool.

EE: Just for Saskatchewan Wheat Pool?

GP: And we had 368-370 with Manitoba Pool. I couldn't tell you about United Grain Growers [UGG], you know, and--.

[1:40:10]

EE: But that's an indication of the contribution that the grain trade made to employment in the city too.

GP: Now to this day, as far as I know, there is, what, 260 people working across the waterfront.

EE: Yeah. I wouldn't be surprised.

GP: Because you only got that elevator that was next to Pool 1, Cargill grain took it over, and they're operating. That's a full automated house there, Cargill Grain.

EE: Frank took me through Cargill once.

GP: Yeah?

EE: Yeah, back about '87 or 8.

GP: Pool 7A is the one, and the same thing, it's automated. The Pool 4, Pool 6—you know the story of Pool 6—was gone.

EE: Yeah, it's gone. Yes.

GP: The two Pool 4s, they're still idling today. They don't use it. So in the North End, you've got Richardson and, well, Agricore there. That used to be--.

EE: Yes. Or Viterra now.

GP: Yeah, Viterra. It used to be United Grain Growers.

EE: With further changes.

GP: Yeah, that's it. So the automation was good in a way, you know, but family men, they lost their living there because they got eliminated.

EE: Yeah. I remember in the '88 campaign calling on someone on High Street, an Italian chap who had been in the elevators. It felt so sad because he didn't have a job, and I don't know that--. Would you have any sense of what did happen to Italian workers who lost their jobs? And others too for that matter.

GP: Well, if he's young, I still say that if you really went looking for a job and you committed to the job there, you still find a job.

EE: You should be able to find a--.

GP: Even today, if my back was okay--. You know, I got a little bit of back trouble there.

EE: Do you?

GP: yeah, because one of the pullbacks was a three-eighths cable there that was pulling the heavy-duty cable back, it snapped there. And I went behind a pillar, but I got whacked pretty good. Actually, I should have been dead 34 years ago there if it was--.

EE: When that happened?

GP: Yeah. It come around, like, you know? And I got whacked right on my third disk and my knee, and I was black and blue there for a long time. My family doctor at that time—he passed away, the old Dr. Gwozdecky there--.

OM: George?

GP: George Gwozdecky. He had advised me to put a claim in, but my daughter was at the University of Edmonton. We were paying good money. I said, "Why--." I was talking to George like he was a--. I said, "Dr. Gwozdecky, George," I said, "Monday morning, I'm going back to work." And he couldn't believe that.

EE: And you survived, you managed?

GP: When you're young, you know, you don't feel those things.

EE: Was that the only injury you suffered all--?

GP: But he also told me one thing. He says, "Gino." He says, "After 60," he says, "you're going to find out that you should--."

EE: You'll feel it.

GP: You'll feel it. And guess what? He passed away a few years ago now.

EE: So you can't go back and tell him he was right. [Laughs]

GP: No, no. He hit the proverbial nail on the head there.

EE: Was it about age 60 you began noticing it?

GP: Yes. Started to feel it. Then arthritis sets in, you know?

EE: Yes, yeah.

GP: All the other crazy things that I did too. Fishing or hunting I did. You know the merit of both.

EE: So that's one of the reasons for being in Canada, you can fish and hunt a lot?

GP: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that's true.

EE: Did your father come to visit you here in Canada?

GP: No. My father, he ended up working for CN after.

EE: Oh, yeah. I'm sorry. He was here, of course. Your grandfather.

GP: When he turned 63, for all the sacrifice that he made, he was right in Nipigon. I went to there in June. He was 63 years old. I said, "Dad?" "Yeah?" I said, "Guess what?" I says, "It's time that you retired in home now." And he listened.

EE: He--.

GP: He went to Vancouver to visit—no, to Edmonton, pardon me—to visit his sister. He come back here, and then he went back home.

EE: Back to Italy?

GP: Yeah.

EE: Because there's been a lot of Italian men working South America and back and so on, and so--.

GP: I had a sister here.

EE: Yes.

GP: She's older, my older sister. She was here, her husband was here, and she didn't like it in the worst way. The winter, eh?

EE: Well, the winter. [Laughs]

GP: She says to her husband, "No. We've got to go back. We've got to go back." And they went back to Italy, and she told my mom that we was here. And my mom being old fashioned—things have changed now, you know—my grandmother on both sides,

she took care of her mother and the mother-in-law on top of that, you know? She never had any vision of coming to Canada, my mom. She died--.

[1:45:23]

EE: I see. So your mother stayed over there and your father was here?

GP: Yeah. On and off, yeah. But on and off he spent almost 23 years going back and forth, back and forth.

EE: I see.

GP: But when he turned 63, I told him to quit.

EE: Yeah. "Go home and stay there. Enjoy it." [Laughs]

GP: Go home and stay, yeah. He enjoyed--.

EE: A gift to your mother too, I presume.

GP: Yeah, but he enjoyed--. My dad was a healthy guy up to, actually, until the day he died.

EE: Good.

GP: Was in '91.

EE: You want to ask a question?

OM: What did you miss about Italy?

GP: Everything. [Laughing] Most of all--. No, no. I'm used to it a little bit here now.

OM: Yeah.

GP: You know, I do gardening, and I like the outdoors, you know?

EE: Yeah. But it was just the whole way of life in Italy that you missed to the present day, eh?

GP: The whole way of life. But there is another thing too, Ernie. If I go to Italy when I grow up, you know, even now or 10 years ago, it's--. **[Door opens]**

EE: Is this the granddaughter?

GP: Yes. It's not the same thing anymore.

EE: No, I'm sure it's changed.

GP: The young people--. First of all, there's lack of respect even for the older people. You know, when I grow up, it didn't matter if we were relatives or not. If he was older than me, he was Uncle Joe or Uncle John or Uncle this, you know?

EE: Well, that's how I was raised too.

GP: No, no, I'm talk--.

EE: I agree.

GP: You know. Or if it was an Aunt Mary or Aunt whatever, you know. We had respect not just to relative. Respect.

EE: Yes.

GP: And even my grandmother, my grandfather on my father's side, both of them, they were--. If my grandmother said, "We didn't have the water running--." We have water running through the house there, you know, but the spring water was from not even 300 metres away. But there was a spring there. If my grandmother was to say, "Ah, go get me a jug of fresh water, "I never said no to my grandmother.

EE: No. Pick it up and go.

GP: I wouldn't say, "Oh, no, no, I don't want to do it." Now it's changed there. I said to my sister, "What are you going to do?" She says, "Times are changing." I says, "Yeah, okay." It wasn't the same way that I grew up, you know? Being a little bit old fashioned, it had bothered me, like, for my grandmothers or whatever. If we had to go out in the country there, taking a bus, get some fruits or whatever, my mom and my grandmother were the first ones to eat it, you know? You know. Now it's changed.

EE: Yeah. That's the way it should be.

GP: And even the old timers there, like in my grandfather's time, they didn't have too much. They had their old wines–all you wanted–olive oil and potatoes. They had turkeys and chickens and milk and cheese and whatever. In Italy probably there is 250 kinds of cheese, you know? But sometime most of all--. But it was always Saturday or Friday nights there they used to get together as long as there was some cheese. Italians, they do their own home–what we call salami–pork stuff there like sausage and other cuts of meat.

EE: Sure. I grew up on a farm. Twice a year—spring and fall—a pig was slaughtered, and sausage was made and so on.

GP: That's right. As long as there was something on a tray there, you know? cheese, olives, or whatever; artichokes or preserve, because my grandmother, even my mom, they were preserving everything there for the winter months. In the winter we still had vegetables in the garden there in January where I grew up.

EE: Sure.

GP: Oranges and lemon. My wife can tell you. It was at my parent's house was a patio almost 12, 14 feet of a concrete slab, there was a little fence, and then in January--. My mother had been really Catholic, you know? I don't really follow that tradition anymore. But Friday was a fish day and potatoes and salad, take it or leave it. [Laughing] No meat.

EE: You can starve until Saturday, eh?

GP: But I used to go, there was a big lemon tree there right in front of our house where I grew up. Lemons like that, not like they sell here at the--.

[1:50:07]

OM: Puny lemons.

GP: I'm telling you the honest truth there. If you go to the conservatory there--. I don't know if it's still open.

EE: I think it's open again.

GP: There used to be an old Italian guy that was taking care of the thing, and he had planted some two lemon trees there. And honest to God, I said to my wife, "That lemon tree reminds me right of home." I said because it was this big there, you know? Then if you go up the coast there, it's called Amalfi, probably you have heard.

EE: I have heard of it.

GP: Amalfi there it's got a bit--. Lemon capital of the world. [Laughing] Serious. They even make liqueur now in Italy of the--.

EE: From the lemons?

GP: Of the lemons there. They are famous all over the world there. You know, that's what I miss there and that.

EE: Sure. Well, I can understand. The richness of the--.

GP: You went to the lemon tree, pick up a lemon, squeeze it on your fish on Friday. And the climate, of course.

EE: Yeah, yeah.

OM: We'll have to talk about the elevators next interview. [Laughing]

GP: Go ahead.

EE: Obviously these changes had an impact on your job, we'll just let those be. Challenges. Would you talk about challenges in addition to what you've said? Challenges of the job.

GP: In a sense of on the job?

EE: Yeah, on the job, in the elevators.

GP: It was challenging because with the idea, again, being an immigrant, you know?

EE: Yes.

GP: You know, coming from the old country here. It wasn't a mistake. Is that my thinking was to stay two, three years. I thought of work two, three years on the railroad tracks here with CN.

EE: Sure. Earns some money and take it back.

GP: Earn some money and go back home, you know? And then the challenge was to make an adjustment after that I decided, "No, I'm not going there to serve their armies." Not to be scared or anything, but I said, "I come to the conclusion that between my uncles and my dad and my grandfather, they had done enough for the--." And it was peacetime, you know? Even to do two year--. Sometimes I say, "Ah, I would have been better off if I knew to go and do the two years in the army and get a pension," but it didn't happen. I got no regrets.

EE: No. And I suppose the challenge of going back to work that Monday after the cable hit you would be an example of something where you showed your courage.

GP: Yeah, that's true. But I was really, you know, proud to have a job there. Most of all, it's a simple thing there. To have something in the fridge for my kids, education most of all.

EE: Sure. Where are we in terms of--? Four minutes or so? Yeah, I was looking at my watch. What are the most vivid memories you have about the job?

GP: At the elevator?

EE: Yeah.

GP: Starting there, and you're meeting people from other--. I had Italian friends, but no relatives whatsoever there, you know? After I met my wife there, it happens that her brother, he come to work at the elevator. But at the beginnings, there was this gentleman down at the Unemployment Insurance, was right behind the post office there on Court Street.

OM: Erik Erikson?

GP: Erik Erikson. That's the gentleman there. He used to come and have a few drinks at the Italian Hall there. We were talking there, and he says, "Gino, you're working?" I says, "Not right now." "Oh," he says, "how would you like--." He says, "I'm getting call from Saskatchewan Pool, Manitoba Pool." He says, "All the elevators in the waterfront, they're looking for help." I says, "You sure?" He says, "Yeah." I had a friend—that he passed away now—but he was working for Manitoba Pool. He always said that Manitoba Pool was a good company. I said, "What's the chance?" I says, "To Manitoba Pool?" "Oh, yeah," he says, "They've been phoning and that." No sooner I go there, right away Mr. Stanfield—it was Harry Stanfield was the superintendent—he says, "You shovelled before?" I says. "No." I says, "I work in construction." "Oh," he says, "you should have no problem to--." They used a couple days training there, but it was nothing to it if you were willing to work.

In the meantime, he asked me, he says, "You got any other friends that are looking for a job?" [Laughing] I said, "Come to think," I says, "two of them." I says, "I know that they got laid off and they're looking for job." I says, "They got families." And it happens that I went downtown, and there was another three Croatian guys there. **[1:55:24 Mr. Malovic]** who was one of them, and one of the others that was living behind here on Cherry Lane, **[1:55:31 Joe Grovaric]**. He passed away too. Anyway, I said, "You guys looking for a job?" "Oh, yeah. Where?" "At the elevator." "You sure?" I says, "Yeah. Come to Pool 3." I said, "I'll take you to Mr. Stanfield and guaranteed you got a job." And six of them, they got the job.

[1:55:45]

EE: Six of them? You should have had a bonus! You were recruiting.

GP: No. They, you know--. Two days before I started there, they got jobs, and they retired from Manitoba--. They were good workers. Yeah, and they retired from Manitoba Pool.

EE: Sure, like yourself. Yeah. Well, that's satisfying to--.

GP: Some of them, they were older than me. They went ahead. But they had their family, you know?

EE: Right. Well, I don't know whether we have most important events--. I don't know whether we'll pursue that. Do you think it's a good thing we're doing here, interviewing you?

GP: Yes.

EE: Do you have any questions we should have asked you?

GP: Not really. But I think in my view, for the future generations, you know, probably they're never going to work in an elevator or in the grain industry. It was an essential thing to do because not only for the Canadian economy, but people all over the world. We had Italian boats that used to come here to take the Canadian durum and provide jobs and make pasta and other stuff there.

EE: Good stuff in Italy.

GP: Not just pasta, milling flour. And not only that, they went to Greece or Germany there or, you know, all over.

EE: Well, that's the answer to the question about the importance of this work in the global economy.

GP: Yes.

EE: You've nailed it. Well, thank you very, very much, Gino, for interviewing with us.

GP: Oh, it's been a pleasure talking to you.

EE: It's been a great joy to learn a lot more about the trade among other things.

GP: And like I said, the one thing about the Canadian durum, no United States, Argentina, or Australia. I know for a fact because I ask there in Italy there. The Canadian grain, Canadian durum is number one. Don't matter what.

EE: Mmhmm. Good.

OM: What a good point to finish that!

EE: Yes, indeed.

OM: Thank you, Gino. That was really interesting. I enjoyed that.

GP: Yeah, nice. A pleasure too.

OM: Yeah.

EE: Yeah.

OM: I think I'll go run home and--.

GP: No, no, no. You hold a second.

OM: No, no., But I've got to make one of those platters with the olives and the salami and the cheese. That sounded good!

End of Interview.