

Narrator: Tom Polhill (TP)

Company Affiliations: Parrish & Heimbecker [P&H]

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Summary: In this two-part interview retired manager of Parrish & Heimbecker Elevator Tom Polhill discusses his career in Thunder Bay's grain industry. In part one, he describes his family's extensive connection to the Canadian Grain Commission, he shares stories overheard from his father's era in the business, and he recounts the recent deregulation and diminishing of CGC duties. He discusses joining P&H as a general labourer and moving quickly into a foreman's position and then to manager. He describes the work conditions when he started as still labour-intensive before automation began. Polhill recalls major changes in the industry, like the introduction of hopper cars, the removal of CGC's inward inspections, the removal of the grain car pooling systems, downsizing, less cooperation between terminals, and the demise of the Canadian Wheat Board and Canada Ports Clearance Association. To end part one, he recalls the process of closing down P&H Elevator in his final year and amalgamating the staff with the Cargill-P&H joint venture in Superior Elevator. In part two, Polhill expands on the process of closing the elevator, recalls his mixed emotions about the closure, and shares memorable stories from his career.

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Audio Part One

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: Nancy Perozzo conducting an interview on April 16, 2015, at the Canadian Grain Commission [CGC] offices. I'm going to ask Tom, our narrator/interviewee of today, to introduce himself and just give us a brief statement—sentence or two—about his connection to the grain trade.

TP: Yes, I'm Tom Polhill. I retired in 2013 as manager of Parrish & Heimbecker Ltd. [P&H], the terminal here in Thunder Bay. I started in the grain trade in 1978. I was two months short of 35 years of service. I've got some interesting things that I have to say about what's happened in those 35 years, if I can remember them all.

NP: Well, do you want to also have a little pad to just jot down some notes? [Laughing]

TP: Yeah, okay!

NP: So, I think you told me you started in 19--?

TP: '78.

NP: '78 after a career as a journeyman printer?

TP: Right.

NP: And some sales experience with chemicals?

TP: Yeah.

NP: But just because we grew up in probably the same area of Thunder Bay, and our fathers both worked for the Grain Commission, I know that your knowledge of the grain industry in Thunder Bay goes back a little earlier than 1978 when you officially started. So, tell us a bit about your dad and his career.

TP: Well, my dad was a war vet, and after the Second World War, he started with the Grain Commission in 1946, I believe. Ironically, he worked until 1977 with the Grain Commission. He retired when he was 60. Two of his brothers also served overseas, and when they came back, they also worked for the CGC. One being Walter—which was better known as Bob—was on the weighing staff, and he was an older brother. Les was a younger brother, and he worked with the inspection staff with my dad. My uncle Les left Thunder Bay in the early '60s and relocated to Vancouver and worked in the inspection division in Vancouver and

Prince Rupert and then to Calgary, where he ended his tenure of duty. My uncle Bob worked until his 65th birthday and retired here locally as a government weighman. He retired to Kelowna.

So, I'm a second-generation person in the grain business. I have a son who was supervisor at the new Cargill-P&H joint venture called Superior Elevator. He's a supervisor there now. So, we're a three-generation family in the grain business in Thunder Bay. Besides my son, I also have a brother working at the new terminal, Superior.

NP: And what's your son's name and your brother's name?

PT: Scott is my son, and Michael is my brother.

NP: Okay. Um--.

PT: And I also have--. Excuse me. [Laughs] I may as well get them all in. I had a cousin, Bob—there was an uncle Bob and a cousin Bob—cousin Bob worked for the Grain Commission also. He retired, I think, let me think. He retired when he was 63 or 62, and he just turned 80, so 18 years ago he retired. He was on the weighing staff, and he was a--. Like I say, he was on the weighing staff, and he retired locally. He worked here in Thunder Bay his whole--. I think he put in 37 years, if I believe.

[0:05:01]

NP: And his name is Polhill as well?

TP: Polhill, yeah.

NP: Polhill, sorry. Get that pronunciation correct!

TP: Well, there's none of them left, but if my oldest aunt was alive, she would correct you on that. [Laughing] But she's not here to.

NP: Well, you know, I can understand.

TP: Everyone still calls it Polhill [pronouncing like Pole-Hill]. I don't know where they get that from. There's no e there.

NP: Ah, you're right.

TP: So, it is Polhill [pronouncing like Pawl-Hill] is the actual proper pronunciation.

NP: I'll try my best!

TP: Well, it's not a big deal. [Laughing]

NP: So, did you grow up in Westfort?

TP: Pretty much, yeah. We lived in Vickers Heights and then the downtown area of Franklin Street. Then around 1960, I believe, '59 or '60, moved to just off of Walsh, just this side of Edward, Grey Crescent. So, yeah, kind of Westfort pretty well our whole lives.

NP: Can you recall anything your dad said about working in the industry? Because he would have started several years before you.

TP: My dad was a real probably old-school. Of course, it was a different era. He worked. My mother, from the day they were married, my mother never worked, and that was kind of the way of life, I guess, at that time was. So, I guess my dad was kind of an Archie Bunker type, rather chauvinistic I would guess in today's day and age. Probably not at that time. He was just a normal guy like everybody else was. The woman's place was in the home and the man went out and provided for the family. So, big transitions for him. I guess, probably I would think that the biggest transition that I remember him talking about was the fact of female personnel coming onto the CGC in the '70s, I guess, that would be about the right time I would think.

Like I say, at his age and his timeframe, that was unheard of. "It should not have been and should not have happened," and he was kind of very strongly opinionated about that. I often remember him mentioning one person—and you may know her, Nancy, as Louise Christianson—she worked her way quite successfully up the ladder of the CGC. I haven't had contact with her for quite a few years. I don't know where she is, but I always remember my dad was in charge at Manitoba Pool 3, and in those days, the sample bags had to be carried from the office to out where they were picked up. I remember her saying to my dad that, "Mick, this bag is too heavy. I can't carry it." Of course, one of the other fellows was all ready to jump in and carry it down because I guess that was the way to do it. Of course, my dad wouldn't have anything to do with that. He said, "Well, if you can't carry it all in one," he says, "make two bags and make two trips. You hired on this job to do the job. You shall do the job. You will not use your womanly ways to get someone to do your work for you. You want to do the job, do the job. If not, go home."

Of course, the inspector in charge in the elevator at that time had quite a bit of authority, whereas now it's kind of more—in my day—it's kind of pretty loose. If you were the boss, that was fine, but everybody still got along and just did the job. Other than that, I guess--.

NP: So, what was her response?

TP: The response was she split it and made two trips.

[0:10:00]

NP: He was a problem solver, your dad.

TP: Well--. [Laughs]

NP: He could have just skipped that--.

TP: He probably created more than he solved, but--. [Laughs] One of his biggest faults—I wouldn't even call it a fault, but I guess for lack of a better word—he always looked out for the little guy for some reason. There was quite a few characters on the Grain Commission. There was many pretty heavy drinkers and this kind of situation, and he always kind of--. I guess he was before his time in that regard. He realized that this was a disease, and it was a problem. Rather than shunning these people, I guess he believed that they should be doing everything they can to help them. Of course, he got into quite a few--. Some of the guys that didn't agree with that way of thinking. I remember one guy who was one of the original representatives when the Grain Commission became unionized or association, who didn't want anything to do with these people that had problems with drugs and alcohol and everything else. It was an ironic thing that many years later this same guy that had nothing to do with these people became a falling down, drunken, drug-induced person. I guess it wasn't until then—I mean he did straighten himself out—but it wasn't until then that he realized that these people needed help and you should be there to help, not to just shun them or whatever you want to call them.

But other than that, I guess there's one other little, interesting story. When my dad was around in his fifties, he was thinking about retirement. He was a PI-3, which was a signing for inward inspection—signing privileges. He could sign, but he wasn't a shipping inspector. What they did then, they made people acting, and he did that quite often. So anyway, purely for monetary reasons. There was a competition open for a PI-4, which was one more step up the ladder, which made you in charge of an elevator, and you were in charge of the shipping from that elevator. So, the competition opened, and he applied. I remember he was 50-some years old and

studying and hitting the books. It was quite amazing to think that somebody of that age would be doing this. But anyway, he persevered. He came second on the written and the practical. Sammy Rudick was the inspector-in-charge at that time.

So anyway, Sammy called my dad in and said, “Well, Mick, you came number two, but unfortunately the hiring policy with the Grain Commission is that you have to have Grade 12 education.” Of course, in those days, nobody had Grade 12 education—well, very few. So, my dad said, “Well, in other words, Sam, you’re saying that if I had Grade 12, I would get the position?” And he said, “Yes, that’s right.” So, my dad wasn’t out of the office and rushed home, went into the office, and showed him his Grade 12 senior matriculation papers and said, “Okay, Sam, now what’s your excuse?” But that was the way he was. Of course, pardon my French, but there were a lot of promotions and such within the government, whereas it wasn’t always your abilities. It was who the boss liked and who the boss didn’t like. It was a merit system, and of course the head guy was the person that did the merit.

[0:15:48]

NP: So, did he get the job?

TP: Yep. Yeah, yeah, and he had no recourse. Then there was some animosity between him and Sammy Rudick, but that’s the way-- . It all got lost in the wash anyways because in those days between the weighing staff and the inspection staff there was like 250-300 people working in the grain trade. That’s just the inspection and weighing staff. The elevator companies were around the 2,500 mark. Even prior to that they were even bigger. I remember my dad saying that the union, the elevator workers union, was having a strike vote, and the only place they could have it was at the Fort William Gardens because there wasn’t a big enough venue in town to hold them all. It was pushing 5,000 people back in the early ‘50s. Of course, there was 27 or 28 elevators here at that time too. That’s gone by the wayside, that’s for sure.

NP: Do you think your dad liked his work?

TP: Yeah, I think he rather enjoyed it. Yeah, he did. He didn’t believe some of the path that the Grain Commission was going on. We talked about this quite often—or, not quite often—but my dad passed away six years ago. He lived to be 91. So I mean he was retired over 30 years. I was on the job, and I remember when he left, he says, “Yeah, things are just changing too much, Tom.” He says, “I’ve got to get out of this bloody job. I don’t understand what’s going on or the thinking of the powers that be.” [Laughs]

NP: You know, it was a long time ago when you would have been discussing this, but you can remember what direction he was not very happy with? What concerns he had?

TP: Well, I believe one of the biggest things that he was concerned with was the fact that--. He believed that if you work with the companies, with the elevator companies, it was all to a goal of--. I mean they were both there to have a goal in mind and that was to move the grain from the western Canada to market. He didn't believe in the fact that you should be in bed with the grain companies, but you should try to work with them. It got to the point where some people made themselves become, lack of a better word, prima donnas. "I'm a grain inspector, and you're a lowly grain elevator worker. So I'm better than you. I'll show you," and this type of situation.

It was very ironic because here I am just at the end of my tenure was the demise, if you may say, of the CGC. In all the years that I worked loading boats and unloading cars and doing what we do and cleaning and all the rest of that stuff, there were a vast many of people on the Grain Commission that were great, that would work with you and help you to achieve your goal because they realized that, if the grain companies aren't there, we're not there. But there was too many that—and this was something I said many times—was instead of the Grain Commission enhancing what they have and going forward and making things better, they put up roadblocks. Unbeknownst to them, it was their demise. I mean, that was, you know, as soon as the first Progressive Conservative government got in, that was the end of them. They all thought that they were untouchable, and that's just not the way things are.

[0:21:05]

I can remember Bill Parrish, Sr. coming to the elevator and walking through the room where we had our scales—our computerized scales—and there was our weighman, and there was five people on the weighing staff in that little room. Bill Parrish went through and said, "How many of those are ours, Tom?" I said, "One." He said, "What are the other five doing?" I says, "Well, they work for the CGC." He says, "What are they doing?" And it just happened it was July, and three guys were there to deliver the winter parkas for the year, in July.

A person like Mr. Parrish, who was the owner of our company—oh, sorry—Mr. Parrish who was the owner of our company sees something like this. I'd say to him, "Bill, don't worry, Bill. We're unloading cars. We're being charged so much a car for inspection and weighing. Like in reality it doesn't matter how many people they have." Well, he says, "Yes, but that doesn't make it right." He says, "How can you manage our people where you have someone who has a job to do, and they look over there and they see four guys doing nothing and one guy working?" He says, "That isn't the way you can do business." I said, "Yes, I agree with you, but that's beyond my realm." or whatever the case may be.

So, consequently, yeah, those little things like that and something that a person that—probably one of the most fair people I've known or have ever had to work for or know of—but I'm sure that he remembered that, and I'm sure that that came up with the

powers that be. The Richardsons, the Patersons, they were all the players. So, it was a terrible thing, the demise of something that had been around for you know hundreds of years.

NP: Maybe this is a good time to talk about Mr. Parrish. We have interviewed Mr. Parrish. It was a very enjoyable interview. He kept tapping the table.

TP: Just like me?

NP: Just like you! [Laughing]

TP: I guess that's maybe our pent-up frustrations possibly. [Laughing]

NP: Finally, I reached over and touched his hand, and I have him on tape saying, "My bad." [Laughing] Anyway, so tell me about Mr. Parrish, who is renowned and a character in the Winnipeg industry.

TP: A real gentleman. Well, yeah. He's not quite as big a character as his son. His son is a real--. And his son is the CEO, president of P&H now. Bill, we call him Junior, like he's 60 years old. Bill says, "I don't know why. We shouldn't be calling him that. He's 60 years old. He's not a junior anymore." This is Senior talking. But anyway, he is one heck of a man. He helped probably me as much as anything. Kept me on the straight and narrow. When I had to vent, I'd phone him. In ten minutes on the phone, he would have me calmed down and heading back in the right direction.

[0:25:10]

I remember talking to him and I'd say, "Bill, why did I have to end up with these bunch of idiots? These guys, they're driving me crazy." So, he'd calm me down, and the last thing he'd say to me, he says, "Well, Tom," he says "I understand. It takes all kinds of people to make the world go round. And by the way, all those people that you were running down and calling bad names and everything else, what percentage of those people did you hire, Tom?" I said, "Oh, boy. Okay Bill!" [Laughing] "You got me!" But anyway, Bill was a real gentleman. He was the kind of guy that if you were walking down the street, he would stop and talk to that poor guy that was on the corner as a bum or he could speak to the Queen of England and hold his own. That's how versatile this man was. Just an amazing person.

He received the Order of Canada a few years back, and there wasn't any person more deserving than him. I think one of the main reasons that he received it was--. To put an expansion on at the University of Manitoba at the Agricultural wing for research, he

himself raised over \$7 million. So, I would imagine he probably pulled in a lot of chits from a lot of people over the years that I'm sure that he's helped out or guided through some sort of era or problem. He was a very fair man, but very astute. If you were doing good, you were doing good, but if you weren't, he'd let you know in not so many words. So, he was a real taskmaster, but a real gentleman, a real gentleman.

I've been fortunate enough—I'm going to guess, but I believe he's going to be 90 years old this year—I was fortunate enough to spend some time with him last summer out at his cottage in Kenora, Lake of the Woods. I have a son that lives there, so I go there quite often. He makes you feel family, and I guess that's the big thing about P&H. That whole system, it's you are someone and he makes you feel like you are someone. You're part of the P&H family. You're not just a number or whatever the case may be. You're part of the group. You're an integral part of the system. I guess he believed in the fact that people are P&H, and that's what we are.

And even to this day, believe it or not, as big as a company it is getting to be—like I think it's pushing between 1,500 and 2,000 employees now across Canada—not that a lot of people would like this, but it doesn't have a Human Resources department. I often said to the powers that be, including Bill, "Why don't we have a Human Resources department? Like why don't we have that?" He said, "Tom, every manager of every outlet that we have, they are our Human Resources." I said, "Okay, but what if we have--?" He says, "There's always someone here." He says, "If you can't handle it at your level," he says, "send it to one of the boys in Winnipeg, and we'll figure it out." That's pretty amazing. To this day they still don't have a Human Resources department. He was not a great believer in that. I think the reason is because when you have something like that, you lose your feel for one-on-one. It becomes them and us. As long as you have that you don't have that intermediary there I guess, it works out well. So, anyway.

[0:30:22]

NP: Were there certain issues that you can think of that you worked with him on that related to the elevator in Thunder Bay that pop to mind as stories of working together with him to solve problems?

TP: Well, one of the biggest, biggest issues with him was trying to get a buck out of him to spend some money in making improvements. [Laughs] I'm not saying that he didn't, but we had a real catastrophe in—I'm trying to think—1996 or '97. He came into work. It was after the long weekend in May. He came to work on the Tuesday morning. We had a warehouse on the lakeside, facing out to the lake, and our dock along there, it collapsed and fell into the lake.

NP: Just out of the blue?

TP: Yeah, it just deteriorated, and it fell. Just leaned right over and was in the slip. So, that was a rather trying thing, and of course it was a major, major expense to clean that up and then make a decision on what was to be done. At that time, very, very close—it ended up going to the board of directors—very, very close to closing the elevator at that time because the expense to have to put a new revetment wall and all the rest was an astronomical amount of money. But myself and Gene Prystay—the manager at the time, I was his assistant—between us we were able to convince Bill to repair it, and we were still a viable operation, which we were. Fortunately, he took our side, and he was the chairman of the board at the time, so he swayed a little bit of power. So, thank goodness we were able to do that, and of course that was a big plus for us. I mean, at that time, we had about 35-40 employees, which was 35-40 jobs in a dwindling profession of grain elevators. So, yeah that was probably the biggest issue I would think.

NP: Sort of went off track a little bit to get into your experience with Mr. Parrish. I like to have people talking about people that we've interviewed because it makes for a nice story when you pull it together. But that took me away from a question that I wanted to ask earlier about your association with the elevators. So, how old were you when you started with the elevators then? You would have been--?

TP: 28.

NP: 28, okay. So, was that your first experience with an elevator or did you--?

TP: No, yeah that was it. I didn't--.

NP: As a kid you never skulked around elevators or--?

TP: No, no. Well, my dad took me to work a couple of times, but other than that, no. I believe he wanted me to do better, and that's why he didn't--. [Laughs] Like he had gotten some of my cousins and family associates summertime jobs back in the day, but he never pushed me or any of us in that direction. The only one, like I say, is my youngest brother, and he's quite a bit younger. He's 15 years, 14 years younger than me, so.

NP: But your older brother went into--.

TP: No, I'm the oldest.

NP: Oh, I see.

TP: My other brother went into forestry. Yeah.

[0:35:02]

NP: So, what then led you to go into applying for the job for P&H?

TP: It was just kind of an ironic thing. I ran into Larry Carroll, who was the manager of P&H at the time, and we just got to talking. He mentioned that he was looking for people. Larry had worked for the CGC, had worked with my dad, and left the Grain Commission and went to work for Searle Elevator, and then Sask Pool when Sask Pool took over Searle. Then there was an opening at P&H, and he became the manager. Of course, my dad knew Larry, and I knew him when I was a kid growing up. So, yeah. He said, "I'm looking for people if you're interested." So, I went down and saw him, and I started as a labourer in '78. Not even two years—like about a year and a half—there was an opening for a general foreman, and I was picked! [Laughs] Well, I was asked, and I took it on. That's how I came into that fold, and it's just been onward and upward since then. Onward, upwards, and outward! [Laughs]

NP: Yeah, and it was a long career just the same, but it goes so fast, doesn't it?

TP: Yeah, I'll say.

NP: Can you think back to that first week? Because you went from a job, chemical sales at that point, so how was--?

TP: Yeah, I kind of went from a suit and tie to coveralls and work boots.

NP: Describe that first week and what you learned, both positive and negative.

TP: [Laughs] Well, it was interesting. It was interesting. Back in those days, there were some hopper cars, but the majority were still boxcars, so we were still kind of in that era. We were a kind of a unique little place that we didn't have automatic dumpers or anything. We still did them not with the surfboards, but we had what they called an auger-mobile, which you open the door, and this auger-mobile went in on just a big screw and pulled the grain out. Then you went in and cleaned up around and that was it! When I started, it was still labour-intensive. There was still people on the scale floor. Automation as far as electronic scales and electronic equipment had not really gone that far into the elevator stage as of yet. I mean it changed very quickly. When I started, they were just doing the elevators that were going to keep going. They were just doing the pollution control for all these elevators, which was, I guess, one of the major changes, I guess, that I would have saw was whether to keep these places operating or shut them down

because the cost of the pollution control was quite astronomical. I guess that was really the beginning of a lot of the elevators closing. I'm thinking along the river in Fort William. It wasn't worth to spend the money to--. The return on their expenditure, I guess, was not there, and that was the beginning of the end for quite a few of them. So, yeah.

NP: How many people were working at P&H at the time when you first started?

[0:40:00]

TP: About 45, 48.

NP: Had they stopped the shift work?

TP: No, we were working around the clock. We were working around the clock then.

NP: And how many people when you left, when you retired?

TP: Uh, 14, 15, yeah.

NP: And the same or increased productivity or shipping, would you say?

TP: Well, probably the last ten years or the last eight years, I guess, the shipping and productivity was rather stagnant. Of course, the reason that our plant did close is because of the way they've changed doing business. The Wheat Board probably was the biggest, the changer, whereas the end of the Canadian Ports Clearance Association, which used to be the association that directed the loading of vessels--. The way things are done now is the grain companies are pretty well chartering their own vessels, maybe in partnership with someone else, but probably 90 percent of it is the whole vessel is chartered by the company. Our elevator did not have the first thing—we didn't have the water. We didn't have the capacity to load a vessel to Seaway draft, and we did not have the tonnage per hour to do a full loaded vessel in a one-day period. It would take us a couple of days to do that. And the cost of dredging and redoing the revetment walls and increasing the shipping--. We were very small. We didn't have a large storage capacity, only around 44,000 metric tonne.

So, the best deal for P&H was to find a partner. Originally, they had tried to purchase Manitoba Pool 1—or Agricore 1, I guess it's called. To me, it was Man Pool 1 anyway, right next door to where P&H is because it had sat vacant for quite a few years. Sask

Pool ended up with it, Viterra, and of course they would never sell anything to a competitor. So there was no opportunity for them to purchase something on their own. So, that's why they went into partnership with Cargill, and the name is Superior.

NP: We had this discussion with other people in the industry too. What comes to mind is the conversation I had with Greg Arason, who was with Manitoba Pool Elevators, and his comment on just that issue that you're talking about was the essentially non-competition restrictions when they closed down elevators, which Greg felt was really bad for the port of Thunder Bay that this kind of clause would be allowed. Is that what you're saying as well?

TP: Yes, yeah. I guess--. [Clears throat] Excuse me. And the other thing is I'm kind of in disagreement of which--. Greg Arason is on the Port Authority. He's actually the grain group representative on the Port Authority. He was the CEO of Man Pool. Very, very astute gentleman, but as opposed to--. The part that I don't like is the fact that—[coughs] excuse me—they won't sell it to another grain company, yet they'll sell it to the Thunder Bay Port Authority, which is another bad thing for the city of Thunder Bay, purely because anything that the Port Authority owns, they do not pay municipal taxes. So, I know the city fathers do not like the idea of the Port Authority gaining any more ground or getting any more waterfront property, purely because of that because nothing is going to go into the coffers of the city.

[0:45:54]

So, yeah, I would believe Mr. Arason. I mean, the thing about it is it's--. I think the same thing would have happened whether it be Manitoba Pool or if Cargill would have--. Cargill was under-utilized, and that's why they were receptive to this amalgamation. P&H needed the capacity. They are starting to grow. They've purchased quite a few country points. I guess the last biggest one being Weyburn Terminals. So, I think it was inevitable. I don't think it was going to--. Either Cargill would have enhanced their throughput on their own, or they would have had to partner up with someone, whether it be us or someone at one of the other players. I don't know, so it's--. But as it is, it's a real shame that a structure like that is sitting there stagnant and dormant. It would take quite a bit to get it up and running, but virtually it's intact.

NP: Yeah. This interview is going a little--.

TP: Outside the box?

NP: No, no, definitely not outside the box, but for anybody transcribing it we're not following in our usual order, but I think that's working fine. I'm just going to take a pause now because I notice that you could probably use a glass of water.

TP: Yeah.

[Audio pauses]

NP: I was saying is this something that you would put on? We've just had a brief break. I've shown some mercy to Tom, and we've got some coffee, so we're re-starting the interview now. We were talking about the difference in busyness at different elevators.

TP: Eras, yes. Nancy had just said something, and it reminded me of something going back to my father's era. I guess it kind of went into touch with the Grain Commission. I guess the thing was is I can remember him working at Pool 7, which of course is the biggest and busiest elevator on the waterfront at the time—I guess still is—at its peak. But anyway, it was all boxcars, and they could unload 300 boxcars in an eight-hour shift. The job description there, back in those days, there were samplers who were out on the tracks still sampling cars. There was a couple of guys on the sheets, and that was just writing down the car numbers and the origins and grades and all the documentation. Everything was done really longhand. There was an inspector-in-charge, which would be the number 4 [PI-4], and three signers, which would be the fellows for the inward cars. These three guys, everything being equal, would probably grade, each in an eight-hour day, 100 cars, which was kind of unheard of. The restrictions on grading at that time were probably not as strict as far as some of the methods they use today.

[0:50:15]

But anyway, this was going back to kind of the demise of the CGC is the fact that here was these guys back in the '50s and '60s could unload and grade 100 cars each, sign, in an eight-hour period. Now, when I was working, not that P&H was busy enough, like everybody liked to go there because we only did 20, maybe 25 cars in an eight-hour period. But at the other elevators once the hopper cars came, like there was no such thing as doing 300 cars. You may do 100, maybe 110 or something in an eight-hour period at Pool 7. That would be the only place, everybody else was in the 50s and 60s. But they used to have to fill the office with people from the CGC, probably have six signers to do these 80 or 100 cars, whereas back in the day, one guy did 100 cars. Three guys did 100 cars each, roughly.

I guess it just goes to show that everybody said, "Well, I got a government job, and you know everything's kind of sweet and rosy," but when the work was there, these fellows had to step up to the plate and do the job. Maybe they didn't like it and maybe they got sent to Pool 7 as penance for doing something. You never know in those days how they did things, but they always, whatever task was thrown at them, it was always done. I guess this is kind of what I was getting at about the demise of the Grain Commission is the fact they'd rather whine and complain and say, "I can't do it," or whatever the case may be instead of stepping up to the plate and doing the job and moving on. Anyway. That's just a thought.

NP: And you did mention, too, that testing had changed. They had to do the protein testing, which I think was a little more time consuming.

TP: Oh, of course. Yeah, it was just [No.] 1-, 2-, 3-Northern, or whatever.

NP: Now, the difference in the number of grain cars I think would be more because of the size of the grain cars.

TP: Yeah, but a sample is a sample. It doesn't matter whether it's a 90-tonne hopper car or a 40-tonne boxcar.

NP: But they just weren't getting as many cars in?

TP: Well, no because it switched over from--. Like the tonnage-wise, doing 100 hopper cars would be about the same as doing 300 boxcars. The only thing is, on the weighing staff, that meant that you were only doing a third of what you used to as far as weighing went. But on inspection, you only did a third less too because of the fact that you're only doing one sample for every car. So, each car had to stand on its own, so.

NP: Since we're talking about weighing and inspecting cars, were you in on discussions of eliminating inward inspection on cars or was that done after you had left?

TP: It was done in the last year that I was there.

NP: And what are your thoughts on that?

TP: For us personally, at P&H, it was quite a change because we didn't have a house inspector. Because of the size that we had, that we were, myself or my partner or my partner and my assistant, we would have to have the final say on the grading of what was coming in. So, for us it was a little bit of a transition. For the bigger players, I don't think it was that big of a deal because of the fact that they didn't need a third party on the inward side. And of course, now it's gotten to the point where they don't even have anyone on the outward side except for saltwater vessels. From what I understand, I hear that's going to change too, but I don't know.

[0:55:26]

But all in all, I believe it all boils back to cost and what the grain companies were getting for what they were paying. They weren't getting their fair share. The CGC spent, you know, a great amount of their budget on research and development and all the rest of that stuff, and the frontline people got left in behind. It's almost you get to the point where these people, they didn't want to take the responsibility of putting your name on a piece of paper that said what it was. I do believe it's just-- I don't know.

NP: Did your father ever comment on that issue, the stress of putting your name on the line, especially when you had to put your name on the line for a whole shipload?

TP: No, no. It's not that it was perfect. Nobody was perfect. I mean, I do recall him being called up to the office and being chastised for making an error. It wasn't, I don't believe, a life-and-death situation, but it was an error and was pointed out. But that was the way things were. I think what's happened is they just made it so difficult for the frontline people that-- I don't know. It almost makes me think about that mushroom building in Winnipeg. It's long narrow at the bottom and a big mushroom at the top, and I think the top should be narrow and the bottom should be a little bigger. Maybe that's where I believe the demise may have had something to do with. There's too much at the top and not enough down below.

NP: Did you and your dad, in your discussions after he had retired and you had gone into management, did his career—what's the word I'm looking for?—did his career influence how you interacted with the Grain Commission? And did your career influence how he felt about the Grain Commission? Does that make sense to you? Is that a question that makes sense to you?

TP: Yeah, I understand what you're saying, and I will have to say that I had many friends within the CGC. Our friendships were, I mean, outside of work we socialized. We fished together. We hunted together. We did whatever northwestern Ontario people do. But when work was work, like if a friend was there and I screwed up, I mean, they were there to let me know. So, I don't think it really had an influence, but the fact of the matter was I guess it kind of was ingrained in me the kind of, "We're all here for one reason, and that reason is to get the job done. It's much easier to do it if we work together than if we butt heads." I dealt with other grain companies, and some of the people with these other companies were very confrontational with the Grain Commission. I don't want to say hate, that's a pretty heavy word, but they would rather butt heads with them than try to work together. It just made for a bad feeling amongst the whole situation. I guess some of these people that did that, they stated their case to their superiors, and maybe some of them listened. To me it was a sad day when the Grain Commission became non-existent. Or not totally non-existent, but.

[1:01:02]

Just when we were having coffee, Nancy mentioned we went out and I saw a fellow that I had worked with, Alan Tarkka, and his dad had worked with Nancy's dad and my dad. I asked him, like there's 11 people left on the inspection side now, and that's a far cry from the 150 or so--.

NP: I think you mentioned 250 at one point.

TP: Might have been 250, yeah. I don't know. It was a big number anyway.

NP: I have a question, just a very brief one. The certificate final you would be familiar with, that's the sort of major sign-off sheet that says, "This is the load that you're getting. We guarantee it." When does ownership--. The grain is owned--. Let's go back to the time of the Wheat Board. So, let's assume you're shipping a Wheat Board shipment.

TP: You want to do the Wheat Board way? Okay.

NP: Well, we'll do, yeah. Let's say it was a Wheat Board shipment. So, the farmers owned it through the Wheat Board, and then it was loaded onto the ship. At what point did the customer take ownership of it? Was it with the signing of the certificate final?

TP: Hm, you know what? I'm not even quite sure. I think the certificate final was the certification for the elevator company, and the actual ownership didn't change until it became into the hands of the person.

NP: Who purchased it at the destination?

TP: Yeah, at destination. That's why we used to always have a little bit of an argument, or whatever you want to call it, with the Wheat Board in the day. If there was something wrong—I would surmise to say the biggest thing was probably bugs—if we ever got a buggy shipment leaving on a laker, it would have to be transhipped, which it was going to be anyway down below somewhere, and whatever the hold was, it would have to be fumigated. The charge for that fumigation reverted to the Wheat Board. So, because of those charges going to the Wheat Board, I would believe that the Wheat Board still owned that grain.

NP: Because you would be shipping lakers mostly out of P&H?

TP: Well, yeah. Yeah. Both.

NP: Because then it wouldn't really be onboard shipped to go to the final destination until St. Lawrence.

TP: No, that's right. That's right. Right.

NP: Okay. You mentioned earlier, and you may not want to elaborate, is you said sometimes you did something wrong, and they would have to tell you about it. So, what kinds of things could go wrong?

TP: Are you saying the Grain Commission?

NP: Yes. [Laughs]

TP: Well, something within the specs of whatever you were shipping, whether it be [No.] 1-Red, 2-Red, 3-Red, whatever the case may be, you may not be in the spec of the Grain Commission's specifications. It's not really that they'd give you heck. They'd make you aware of it. They'd give you a letter stating that if you proceed so much, they are going to either--. If it was a grading factor, they would de-grade the grain. If the order was calling for Number 2 and you were putting stuff on that could be Number 3, then you had that. If you had too much dirt or whatever you want to call it just in layman's language, it could end up with a dockage. So, all those things are de-grading factors, and they're all things that they're warning you. In other words, "Straighten it out, or you're going to be in poop."

[1:05:53]

So, majority of the time we were able to straighten it out. Other times, we were very fortunate that we had an association amongst each other, especially on Wheat Board shipments. Or not even just on Wheat Board shipments. Sometimes these vessels used to have to go to three and four and five different elevators. So, if you had a little bit of a problem on a grading issue or something and it was told to you and you were kind of under the gun, but if it was going to another elevator and they could help it out or make it better, then I would call. We had a kind of working relationship with everyone in the port because, in reality, we were all kind of together with the Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association. So, that was kind of unique, and it was a good thing. It was, I think, very seldom a vessel ever left here that there was a problem. I'm sure that there were quite a few, but not a great amount. Very, very small percentage. And if there was, it was usually going to be transshipped, and if it was transshipped to say Montreal or something, then lots of times before it hit the saltwater vessel if it was going overseas, then Montreal was able to actually straighten out the mess.

We had a good guy here, Brian Storry here with the CGC, was very good at his job and understood the whole situation. He's a little bit older than I am, but he was fortunate. He had a lot of the old-school attributes and was young enough to encompass the new-

school attributes, I guess you'd call it. Like he was young—I guess he's around 70 now, I don't know, and he's been retired for quite a while—and he was a good intermediary. He had a good rapport with the local people, and he had a good rapport with the people in Montreal. He could normally get things squared away if we did run into any kind of a major problem.

NP: Couple of things come up as a result of what you've just said. What changes occurred over your career related to your competition on the waterfront and your interactions with them? Did it remain the same or did that change?

TP: We really never--. [Laughs] This was kind of a misnomer, I would believe. Some of the people just didn't understand that. I mean we've got a Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association.

NP: Still exists?

[1:09:36]

TP: Yes. I guess one of the major things to that is our labour is negotiated by the existing people in the Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association as a whole. The other thing is that for some reason some people didn't understand the fact that, you know what? If we're here and we work together, we can get this done. We always looked at it this way that all of the merchandising end, or whatever you want to call it, was done in the country to buy that tonne of grain or whatever the case may be. When it hit Thunder Bay, and it hit your grain elevator, it didn't matter because the fight had already taken place over who was going to get that tonne of grain. So, what are we doing fighting with each other? Why aren't we doing things to try to help each other? Enhance each other? But some people just couldn't get by that to the point where, "I worked for this company," and that's what you know. And they--.

NP: Was that pretty much the same throughout your career or were there changes in that? And was it almost a personality issue as opposed to a company policy issue?

TP: I think almost a company policy issue with some of the players. I think that kind of reverts back to what we were talking about earlier, that you were saying about Mr. Arason. You know, don't sell to a competitor. Don't give someone else an edge. The edge is the edge. It's what you're going to put through at this point is what happens in western Canada. It's got absolutely nothing to do with--. It all deals with volumes. So, because you've got a bigger place that means you automatically are going to utilize it? Well, possibly. If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. [Laughs] I mean, that's really what it is.

NP: Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but my understanding is that there was an attempt at fairness in determining allocation of grain cars under the Wheat Board system where it all depends on, as you said, what battles were won out in the Prairies. So, the Wheat

Board would distribute to elevators here based upon percentages of sales in the country, and that the reason a ship could go from one place to the other was it was all Wheat Board grain. So, whether they loaded it at P&H or Saskatchewan Wheat Pool didn't matter because it was all from the pooled grain. So, if that is an accurate description, what would change then and--. I guess it had just started to change when you retired. What would have changed in that? You mentioned the Lake Shippers.

TP: Well, the pooling changed. I mean, the pooling changed and that was a--. The pooling changed not because of the grain companies. The pooling changed because of the railroads.

NP: Describe that change.

TP: Well, the railroads, at one point P&H was what we used to call the pocket—which the railroad called it the pocket—which was P&H, Manitoba Pool, and Grain Growers or McCabe's. Those were the three elevators, and it didn't matter whether it was CN cars, CP cars, whatever. Those three elevators were serviced by the CPR. The CN would, if the cars were allocated from the CN side, they would be put over into a yard and picked up by the CPR. Then the non-pooling came along, and each railroad looked after their--. If the cars were allocated to P&H, whether they were CP and CN, rather than switching them over and letting one certain area handle it, CN did their cars, CP did their cars, and the whole bit. It was, I don't know.

NP: What kind of impact did that have on you as an elevator manager, the switch?

TP: Well, it all came about with the railroads and the pure fact that they had a demurrage system. There was a demurrage system always, but it was never really instituted.

[1:15:18]

NP: For those who're listening wouldn't understand what a demurrage system is, can you explain a little bit?

TP: Well, a demurrage system is you have--. I'm trying to remember now. [Laughs] Once a car hit Thunder Bay, I think you had like 48 hours to have it unloaded and gone. So, they would send you a list saying such-and-such of cars are in town. We'd send it back and say, "Okay. Spot them on our tracks. We want to unload them." Well, for whatever reason, you may not get the service that you wanted. We wouldn't be able to get it done within that 48-hour period. Whether it be we didn't get the service, our elevator was plugged, we were inundated with cars and there was just no way we could get them in and unloaded in this time frame. That was probably one of the small reasons that P&H ended up closing because of the fact we didn't have a big car spot. We didn't have the capacity to unload them in a quick time, like the bigger players. So, that was kind of one of the nails in the coffin to us.

Of course, the other nail in the coffin was, like I said, the water and the shipping speed and all the rest. The investment to put into that little plant would've been too great as opposed to just putting in straight cash, which they did to Cargill. I want to emphasize that it is not Cargill. It is a joint venture. P&H owns 50 percent of it. Cargill owns 50 percent of it. There's no controlling by Cargill. There's no controlling by P&H. It's 50/50, and that was one of the prerequisites that P&H went in because they did not want to be the 49. I mean, they would've been the 51, but they weren't going to be the 49 because, as you all know, Cargill is the biggest in the world and they could eat up and spit P&H out pretty easily.

NP: Well, and Superior was the original name of P&H.

TP: Yeah, we slipped that one in. Did you know that?

NP: I did!

TP: You did know that, okay. [Laughing] Yes, yeah.

NP: Yay, P&H!

TP: John Heimbecker was very proud of that. He phoned me. He says, "Yeah, Tom!" He says, "I got a pass on it. None of those guys over there even knew that our elevator used to be called Superior."

NP: I did! [Laughs] I felt very proud. You know I thought they weren't quite lost to the waterfront. They just resurrected in a different spot.

TP: Yeah, yeah.

NP: But let's go back to this demurrage system with the railways. If I'm reading what you said, demurrage was put in place so that there would be a penalty for non-performance, either on the part of the elevator or the railway.

TP: Well, if it was on the part of the railway, then if we could make our case and win, then we didn't have to pay the demurrage. If it was at our fault--.

NP: But what if it was the railway's fault that they didn't deliver within the 48 hours?

TP: Well, that's right. If they didn't fulfill their obligation to have it there, but that was something you had to play out. So, it was a bookkeeping nightmare to be honest because you had to do all this stuff. Of course, the biggest problem was that this system was put in place, and it wasn't done locally. It was the CNR. You've got your accounting of your unloads or whatever for demurrage purposes from Montreal, and CPR was Calgary. So, in reality, it's because a piece of paper came across someone's desk, but not knowing the actual, physical happening here. Of course, the guy on the railway side says, "You know, well, we did ours," because he's not going to say he wasn't doing his job well. So, of course, it all fell on the grain companies, and as far as I know it still does. [Laughs] I have no idea.

[1:20:15]

NP: So, is there still the demurrage system as far as you know?

TP: Oh, I believe there still is, yeah.

NP: Okay. Now the pooling, they just decided not to bother doing that anymore?

TP: Yeah. I think that was railway driven. I'm not really sure. I can't remember to be honest with you. Of course, the pooling went, the GTA went—the Grain Transportation Agency—which was a government agency. They were the guys that controlled the cars coming in. It was quite a system. You think about it, in the '80s, this port was doing 7,000 cars a week, you know? That's a lot of grain, boy.

NP: I've done a lot of interviews, and I had a sense—and this is just my sense—that there was a very efficient system going on that worked pretty well.

TP: Mmhmm.

NP: But there was dissatisfaction, as you mentioned earlier. The system that exists now, has it taken care of all the problems?

TP: I wouldn't think. I wouldn't think. And being out of the game--.

NP: But from your perspective, you still know people in the industry.

TP: Well, yeah. I would believe that there's still problems. I mean there's--.

NP: So, new ones?

TP: Yeah, since I left.

NP: So, what problems do they--. So, they got rid of this one, like getting rid of inefficiencies of the Grain Commission, what problems--.

TP: You said that, not me.

NP: No, no, you said it. [Laughing]

TP: Yeah, I guess I did. [Laughing]

NP: But that's okay, you can challenge my interpretation of what you said.

TP: That's not a big deal.

NP: Yeah. So, what--?

TP: Well, just look at what happened. The government had to step in because the railroads weren't performing, and they had to put in a penalty system and everything. So, it's an ongoing problem. The railroads are mean and lean. They just do what they do, and in my mind they have too much control. If you're below Number 1 Highway in western Canada, you're CPR, and if you're above highway Number 1 in western Canada, you're CNR. Where's the competition? There is none. There's two railroads, and there's no competition. It's not a very good system, as far as I'm concerned. But anyway.

NP: Now, I live in an apartment that overlooks the bay. Last year I saw eight ships sitting in harbour, several of them for many days. That can't be efficient. What's happening there?

TP: Not lake vessels, I wouldn't think. Were they?

NP: A combination.

TP: Well.

NP: What was happening there?

TP: With the saltwater vessels, you can't really--. Just because they're in the bay, their contract may not have started. They have a window of time to start shipping. And the other ones, I would believe it's because--. There's charters, as opposed to the way we used to do it where the vessel used to come in and if it had to go to five or six elevators at one time. It might have to bounce around all over the place to get a load, but I mean it got a load and left. Well now, now with the charter system, either the commodity isn't there or there's a vessel at the elevator that's supposed to load. They could have two or three. I haven't talked to the people at Richardson's, but apparently, they're just inundated. Busy. They're not getting the product here, or they're just backed up.

[1:25:06]

NP: Yes, and certainly last year there was a lot of talk about not getting the product here, and extreme dissatisfaction with the railways.

TP: Yeah, like I say, and that's probably—since I got out of the game—it's probably even worse in that regard because of the fact that you are chartering your vessel. Getting it in, getting in out--.

NP: And you're not able to contact the next guy and say, "Hey, can you help me out here and top up this ship?"

TP: Well, you know, without not mentioning any names, but there's a company in town that 50 percent—they have a 50/50—and one half of the 50 will help out the other half, but the other help won't help this half. It's Superior. I just hear this from word of mouth, and I don't know whether it's gospel or not, but I hear this that there could be a vessel and Cargill as the shipper. They are short of grain, so P&H will come up to plate and help them out. But P&H have got a vessel at the dock, and they'll be short of grain, and it's right at the same elevator, and the grain is in the same place, and Cargill won't help P&H. So. I don't know how that is, and I haven't talked to anybody about it. It's just that, you know, it's two different companies, and it's the mindset of one company as opposed to the mindset of another company. I believe P&H is the kind of company that, you know, they'll help anybody.

NP: And when you think of it, though, with the Canadian Wheat Board system, regardless of how you felt about it since it wasn't your grain, but you were paid to handle it—which was a good thing—there was no loss to you to have somebody else help fill a

ship because you were all earning money because you were handling it. But with the demise of that system and companies owning their own grain, it is a disadvantage to cooperate with other companies, I would think. Not that it wouldn't be done, but there's more of a potential cost to it than there was when you were just dealing with Wheat Board grain.

TP: Yeah, I guess that's very true. The only thing is is that, I guess, it--. I mean, the whole system from years ago was you brought it in, you stored it, you got paid to store. There's no money in storage. There hasn't been for many, many years. Throughput is the name of the game, and everything is just-in-time. It's a just-in-time service and everything has to happen. I guess one of the major things is the country elevators have to receive their cars so that they can get them loaded, and once they're spotted then the railroad has to get there to haul it to Thunder Bay in a timely fashion. They have to be unloaded in a timely fashion and they have to be shipped in a timely fashion. All those things have to come together, and I guess it's pretty haphazard right now that all those things, or last year like you say, you see all these vessels sitting.

Well, maybe half of them were salties and the other half were lakers. Well, the lakers, there's no reason for that in the old system. But with the new system with the charter system, yeah, maybe the player doesn't have the grain, doesn't have the commodity to put in it. Whereas if that happened in the pooling system, or the Wheat Board system, they would look at their stocks of what they've got in the waterfront, totally, and they would switch things around, whatever commodity they had. Because everything is based on turnaround, whether it be boxcars and hopper cars unloaded and sent back out West to get loaded again in a timely fashion to make the turnaround. Vessels sitting at anchor, you do that a couple of times, and because we have a confined shipping season, that can mean one or two less trips that that vessel can make, which is a cost factor to the vessel owner. So, everything has to kind of fall into place. I guess it's not. [Laughing]

[1:30:40]

NP: Big changes in a very short time period, and any change, as you've known from your experience, normally involves some glitches. So, we're in the early stages of transitioning from one system to another, I guess. Is that fair to say?

TP: Yeah. I guess, really, that's—fortunate or not—that's one of the many interesting things about the grain business. You think you've got a handle on everything, and everything's just rolling along perfect, then all of a sudden, this glitch comes from somewhere out of nowhere and it's something else to deal with.

But I will say for the port of Thunder Bay, all the players—the companies, all the employees—whatever the case may be, I think probably I would say probably one of the most efficient grain handling facilities anywhere. There has never been anything thrown at the people in the grain business in Thunder Bay that hasn't been done. They have many companies, many different players—

whether it be the Wheat Board or individual companies—have thrown stuff at people, and whatever has happened they've always been able to do the job. I'd say that's a pat on the back for everybody that's from the guy at the bottom of the totem pole right through. I believe that, still I'm not in the game, but I still believe that they're all still doing that. Whatever's thrown at them, they can handle it. Or they'll find a way to handle it.

NP: You've talked about challenges. Have you talked about all the challenges that you had to face over the time of your career?

TP: No, I wouldn't say that. [Laughs] I wouldn't say that.

NP: So, what would you say are the challenges you haven't talked about yet?

TP: Well, as a business-wise, I guess some of the challenges were people. [Laughs] I mean, that's a challenge in itself. We had some pretty diverse people. Well, right from the top right to the bottom, there was some pretty diverse players. [Laughs] But overall, I don't know if it was a challenge or not.

NP: Well, you must have gone through the major era of downsizing in Thunder Bay.

TP: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Was that a challenge?

TP: Of course, of course. It was a major thing for probably the other players as opposed to us because we were small. [Laughs] The other guys, when they downsized, they used to have three people doing this certain job and they went down to one. We only had one to start with, so we couldn't really downsize to a great extent. But there was a time—I'll always remember the guy, the Stanley Report—it was during negotiations, who ended up mediation. I wasn't the manager or anything at the time. This was, I guess, in the '80s. Anyway, the report came out, and it was bad for the union, and it was bad for the companies. It was like a lose-lose.

NP: What was the Stanley Report?

[1:35:00]

TP: Well, it was his ruling, the mediator—Stanley was the mediator—jeez, I can't remember if it was six or eight percent wage increases every year for three years or something. It was a major blow. But in reality, right after that there was, I think, total loss in

the waterfront of about 600 jobs. So, in all his wisdom, this mediator, like I say, he created a problem for the unions. They realized it. It just cost too much. For the companies it was the same because it cost too much, and there was only one recourse and that was to downsize or automate. So, instead of having a body there, we had a piece of equipment there.

NP: I'm just going to throw out a few points here, which I think relates to what you're saying, and I'd be interested in your comments. People we've interviewed at head offices in Winnipeg have been pretty adamant in saying the downsize in Thunder Bay had very little to do with labour, had mostly to do with change in markets to the West Coast.

TP: Uh-huh.

NP: One person commented, and this was locally, that—and it may have been the same strike you're talking about, or mediation that you're talking about—that one thing that they learned from the strike was how much they could do with so many fewer people, and I think that was even without automation. Then automation obviously being another factor, but that--.

TP: Uh-huh. Well, the demise of, I guess, of the Russian system. When we quit shipping to Russia, that was the biggest blow. I agree, the shifting to western Canada was a big blow also. But there was automation. Not every place went wholeheartedly, but there was quite a bit. I always laugh, like when I said three to one, and we only had one to start with. A lot of guys made themselves look like heroes and said, "Well, we used to have three guys in this department and now we only have one. We're getting the job done." That may be what you're talking about, but the bottom line is is that you know what, buddy? I don't think you were managing the place right in the first place if it took something like that to get you to the point where--. But that was a different mindset.

NP: Yes, and I think--.

TP: People were people.

NP: And I think that is very similar to what you were saying about the CGC, or is it the same as what you're saying about the CGC? That things were changing, but there was no push to have, let's say, a reduction of staff, that you were talking about, until you were forced by this new—in the case you were mentioning—new, higher wage cost, that if it hadn't been so high, you might not have done as close a look at cost?

TP: It probably would have happened, but not as quickly and as drastically as it did. It bodes to go with, I guess, I'm going back. Here we go. We're going back again. But my dad's era in the CGC, sorry, they used to get sick days. I don't know what they used

to get, 15 days a year or some bloody thing. So, anyway, probably in your father's era and my father's era, probably I would say at least 56 percent of the people that were on the job left the job with probably a couple hundred of sick days in the bank and got nothing for it because that was the way they were. They went to work. If they had a runny nose? Big deal. Just a different, different mindset. I think those things were put in place for those people just to keep them going if, God forbid, there was an illness or something and those things were needed. Whereas the mentality of the people nowadays is not anywhere near that. It's, "I got them. I use them. Whatever." Like when I talk to supervisors on the Grain Commission, they would tell me that they have an absentee rate of over 20 percent every day of the week at the end—20 percent! And on Fridays and Mondays, it was even higher.

[1:40:51]

NP: Using up their sick day entitlement?

TP: Yeah. There was no, I don't know, I think you had to be off five days or something before you had to even have a doctor's slip or something to say get back to work, to return to work. So, you could take a day here, a day there, as long as you had them. They lost that. You'd think about that in reality what you're doing is you're carrying 20 percent more people than you have to start with just to cover because that's what your absentee rate is. Like who the heck in private industry could ever do that? Pretty scary. But anyway. Here we go again.

NP: Well, I think part of that is the whole—what should we say?—depression, and I mean psychological depression of the workforce that sees the end of their existence, would you say?

TP: But that's the part that always got me was the fact that, yeah, you may see the end or the demise, so rather than giving up, why wouldn't you do something to try to enhance your position or what you do or whatever the case may be? To me that's just the lazy way out is to give up. I don't know, that's just a--.

NP: No, and being in this office here—because this is sort of unofficial headquarters—you see people's different reactions to decisions, yeah. I wanted to talk with you, and I may have to switch the tape over. Are you okay for time?

TP: I've got an appointment at 12:30, so can we make it?

NP: Okay. Yeah, or if we can't we just book another time. Because you were in a rare situation where they actually closed down your elevator simultaneous with you leaving, I would take--. You were the last--?

TP: I had the opportunity to move on, but I didn't want to do that.

NP: The elevator closed, and you were leaving at the same time. The reason I'm saying this is what is entailed in actually closing down an elevator? Like what happens? So, take us quickly through the decision making, of which you've talked previously. Then once the decision is made, what arrangements have to be made to shut down an elevator?

TP: Well, I guess the big thing is that that place had been there since 1913. It was expanded in 1925 and then again in 1961. So, with the changing of the way the grain business is done, and we've touched on that, the costs of dredging, the costs or expansion—because the terminal was small, like I said it only held 44,000 tonnes—to speed up the process would be cost prohibitive. They went the other way and went into this system. So, anyway what it was was--.

NP: Were you part of that decision making or was that a head office decision largely?

[1:44:57]

TP: The head office decision. I was abreast of the situation for quite a few months. That was kind of trying because of the fact that I knew, and I was sworn to secrecy. [Laughs] It was happening with Cargill. I knew that. I mean, it did go to the eleventh hour when it finally happened at the end of May of 2013, but I was aware of the negotiation and everything happening. This bodes again with P&H. John Heimbecker was kind of the player. He was my immediate boss. He kept me abreast of what was going on, and of course I had to just keep quiet. Cargill, the fellow that was the manager there, their company did not see fit to tell him. So, you know, it's very ironic. We're going through union negotiations and everything's going on, and I know what's happening and he doesn't, and he's still playing along. I really thought it was unfair of them to not keep him abreast of what was going on. But that being said, that wasn't my decision.

But anyway, it was mutually agreed with the companies, and we followed the rules of the union agreement. Because we were closing our plant, anybody that was eligible—well, not even just if you were eligible—to retire, you could. You would receive a severance, which was stated in the union agreement. So, we had a few people that left. The rest of the people were taken on by the new company. It was done in a way that had never been done before with any of the other companies that had amalgamated or been taken over by another company or whatever the case may be. Our people were co-mingled with theirs as far as seniority went. Whereas when all these other things happened—if Sask Pool took over someone else—it was Sask Pool people were on the top and the rest were on the bottom. So, this was the fairest way that it could happen. I was very pleased that the union had gone along with that, and it was mutually agreed upon. If it ever happens again, I hope they use that format because I believe it's the fairest way to do things.

Other than that, it was just clean out the grain. It ran very smoothly, the transition of our people, and I think that bodes well with our company. No one lost any time. They just moved over from one place to another place, and away they went. As far as the plant itself, we have, naturally, we have operations in western Canada and people from our western division came here and looked at—the country division—and looked at our equipment and stuff, decided on what they wanted to keep and what they didn't want to keep, and hired some local people to dismantle a bunch of things and have them shipped out west. Unbeknownst to me, I happened to drive by a few weeks ago, and there's a sign on the old gate that says "TransGlobal Services", which is a demolition outfit. So, whether that outfit has taken ownership or what has happened, I'm not privy to that information.

[1:50:34]

NP: I'm going to stop you right now be--.

End of part one.

Audio Part Two

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: Okay, so we were talking about dealing with equipment, and you were saying you weren't quite sure what had happened now that there's a new sign "Global Recycling" at the elevator. Yes, the elevator was sold for the usual, what, \$1 to the recycling company, who is, I have heard, trying to make some money from it. So, I did take a tour of the elevator a couple months ago, very tragically, I felt. So, they were looking at perhaps having somebody take it over for the use of the dock, exploring any kind of possibilities of what they could do. But, because they're a recycling company, they're also interested in any kind of salvaging profits that they can make from it. So, dealing with the equipment then, I think we ended this off with you saying that people came in from P&H to look at what was salvageable for use. Where would they have used it out west?

TP: What they did was, from what I understand, we have a country operation in Transcona and there used to be a feed mill associated with the elevator there. Quite a few years ago, they shut the feed mill down, so there's some very big warehousing there. What I understand is they've taken all this stuff from what they wanted, and they've kind of just put it in Winnipeg in these warehouses, and then they have country operations in all three western provinces. So, the majority of this stuff is the same—whether it be country or whatever—so they'll just use that as a distribution point and use it within their country operations. Then,

like I say, the employees, the transition was pretty transparent. It went well as far as I understand, and then it was just a matter of locking the doors and giving up your license.

NP: And what does giving up your licence mean? Actually, physically handing it over?

TP: Well, you know, you just say you're giving up your licence as a terminal operation, which is a government licence to operate a terminal facility. We said, "That's it. We are no more." So, that was it.

NP: How did you feel on that last day? I mean, it's a horrible way to sort of end the interview, but.

TP: You know, I don't know whether my principals would be happy with me divulging this information, but I will divulge it. It bodes well to the point of what I said about the company that I worked for. I was going to pull the pin, as the railroaders would say—which is retire. One of the principals of the company said to me, "Tom, hang on. There's something in the wind, and I'd like you to hang on please." This was probably about a year prior to the actual closing. I said, "Okay." So, as time went on, I don't think I was totally instrumental, but I helped along the way of probably employee transition more than anything to make sure our people got a fair shake between myself and the union, I guess, because I guess I'm still kind of old-school. I may be management, but I do realize that people are your best asset, and anybody who doesn't believe that probably won't be around for over 100 years like P&H was.

[0:05:07]

But anyway, yeah. It was kind of, yeah, mixed emotions. [Laughs] Mixed emotions. I was ready to go. I was ready to go probably a year prior to that. I'd been there, and there was, as you well know, there was sort of a lot of changes that I went through with the whole situation with the grain trade, and there was a bunch more coming up. You know what? I didn't have the wherewithal to want to really--. I didn't have the gusto to carry on with that, and it kind of worked out very well for me. My assistant, he pulled the pin, and he left the same time as me.

NP: Who was that?

TP: Rod Wittig. It's kind of an ironic thing. Rod's dad was superintendent at Cargill many, many years ago. Passed away young at 53 years old, but it's funny how Rod came to work at P&H, and now P&H and Cargill are together. [Laughs] I guess it's kind of funnier for him than it is for me because I didn't have any real ties to Cargill at all, other than Jerry Franklin being a close friend.

NP: Do you think that Rod would be a good person to, or willing to, be interviewed?

TP: I talked to him. Ah, no. Rod's not that kind of guy. He's kind of an in-house kind of guy.

NP: To balance that sort of sweet, sad farewell to the elevator and the same time to your career, what was the funniest thing that ever happened to you during your career, would you say? [Laughs] Or were there any amusing things?

TP: Yeah, you know I kind of thought about that stuff. I guess I can remember back just after I became a foreman. We had some problems with mixes of commodities in bins, and somebody--. It was almost like a person was sabotaging. As it ended up, that's more or less what it was. This person ended up losing their job. But we were shipping to a boat, and we were supposed to be shipping barley, and the next thing is wheat comes, next thing oats come, and next thing durum comes. Larry Carroll was the manager then. Those were the days, the rah-rah days, so he kind of lost it. He grabbed the radio that was in the foreman's office and went out the door and threw the radio against the side of the ship. He just said, "Too damn much listening to radio and people not paying enough attention to their job!" The whole bit and everything, and he went on and on and on with some expletives that you can only imagine.

And it was a very trying time. That's terrible. But anyway, about an hour later he came up to me and he says, "By the way, whose radio was that?" I said, "Larry, you bought that for the office." [Laughs] So, I mean, that's just kind of a little play, but that's the kind of relationship we had. I don't know, Larry Carroll was quite a character. He was rough and gruff, but he had a heart of gold. I think he put on this persona of making lots of noise and that was his thing. But when it all came down to it, he was a pretty good guy to work for. But he was the old-school gang. A little different. A lot of business done at lunch hours, you know. [Laughs] As you well know, lunch kind of went into, "Well, there's not much point. It's 3:00, not going back now!" You know? But that didn't happen a lot. You still had to have the responsibility and the whole bit. There's probably some comical things, but the majority of them might be a little bit too off-colour for this, and I wouldn't want to divulge them. But it was fun. It was fun.

[0:10:21]

NP: You can tell me offline because then I'm going to interview myself and say, "I can't tell you who told me this, but here are the stories I've heard." [Laughs]

TP: But anyway, yeah, it was a lot of fun. It was a lot of fun. We went through quite a few characters. I can remember—just to let you know how it was in the old, old days—was I went to use the washroom once, and I went to flush the toilet, and nothing happened. So, I lifted the lid off the toilet and the reservoir, and the reason why there wasn't any water in it because there was about

eight bottles of beer in the reservoir. Those were the days. There was a lot of booze going on in the waterfront, I guess, up until probably the time that a fellow from Sask Pool lost his life, fell in the slip and drowned. That kind of put the kibosh on everything as far as--. It was amazing nobody got hurt prior to that. But anyway, yeah.

NP: What are you most proud of when you look back?

TP: Huh, I don't know. Yeah, I'm not sure. I have to really think about that.

NP: It could be just a situation. It could be a broader view of your time there. You know, say you were talking to your grandchildren, assuming you have some.

TP: Yeah, I do. Yeah, I got lots.

NP: You know, "I'm really proud, little grandson, of this!"

TP: I'm not that kind of guy that pats himself on the back very well. I have a hard time doing that. I mean I'm proud of the fact that the legacy of P&H is carrying on. That's not really a personal thing. Like I said before, I'm very proud of the fact that I had the opportunity to work for the company that I worked for. I listen to a lot of people that work in a lot of different places, and I find it really, really fortunate to be able to have done what I did with the company that I did.

NP: Here's a statement. Canada, in spite of a lot of things working against it—such as geography and climate—has established itself as a world leader, not alone, in grain trading. Would you agree with that? We're amongst the biggest players?

TP: Yes. And I think the fact of the matter that that is what it is is because of the quality.

NP: Quality of--?

TP: The quality of the product. It is unsurpassed. To quote a thing that used to be the way it was when the--. With the Grain Commission going the way it's going like, who knows, but I mean Canada was one of the only countries—probably the only country—in the world that could sell their commodity on paper. That's quite an accomplishment. If the CGC put their sign and their seal on that certificate, that boded well with every country in the world.

NP: And what part did you play in guaranteeing that quality?

[0:14:56]

TP: We had to ship and move the grain by the standard of the CGC.

NP: And what did you do to ensure that? You, personally. This is where you get to talk about yourself, Tom. [Laughs] I know you're reluctant. What if you hadn't done your job right? What would have happened if you hadn't done your job?

TP: I mean it's--. I wouldn't be there. I wouldn't be there! Yeah, I wouldn't be there.

NP: Because--?

TP: Well, because the thing is that you have to make sure you have the quality control within your plant, not just because of the fact of the Grain Commission. That funnels right down from the guy at the top to the guy at the bottom. I believe that's why the people in Thunder Bay have done an excellent job. Any task that has been thrown at them they have been able to complete it without any problem whatsoever. Well, not not a problem whatsoever. It's always easy to say that after the job is done. A lot of the times there was a lot more to the situation, but rather than delving into all that stuff and patting yourself on the back, like.

NP: We did it!

TP: We got the job done and let's move onto the next challenge.

NP: We, Friends of Grain Elevators are hoping, sometimes I think against hope, that we can establish a grain industry centre here that recognizes Canada's accomplishment, and Thunder Bay as part of that—certainly a major, major part of it in the early stages of the grain industry. We want to recognize that accomplishment. So, what kinds of things do you think deserve recognition if we were able to get--? And we're looking mainly at the handling and shipping internationally as our focus, to distinguish us from western Canada where they actually produce the grain. So, what kinds of things do you think we should recognize in the centre?

TP: Hm. Well, I guess probably the biggest thing we did here, and it's kind of gone by the wayside—not totally, but partially—is the cleaning, is getting the grain to the cleanliness standard of the Grain Commission. Our standards are very stringent compared to, well, we'll just use the United States for instance. What they call clean and what we call clean, ours is totally different. I would say that the cleaning is probably the major thing that we do. Once it's at that point and you're confident at that, then it's the shipping. I mean, it can be done. Wasn't there a model done years ago by somebody?

NP: There is something that the Port Authority has stored away. Somebody actually told me that there was like a working model somewhere and I have no idea where it went.

TP: Do you have any contact with Billy Green?

NP: Oh, yeah.

TP: Ask Billy. He might know. There used to be a model, and they used to have the trade shows here years ago, and it was an actual model of the whole--. Some guy's probably got it in his rec room or something. [Laughs] But anyway, yeah, if you talk to Billy, Billy's been around. He could probably know where somebody's got it hidden. Maybe it's in his basement!

NP: Do you have any memorabilia? Did you take photographs? Did you keep special items that will go to the junkyard after you're gone?

TP: No, the only thing I did was I kept a couple of pictures of the elevator itself. I didn't really--.

NP: Okay, well, I would like to thank you very much. This has been great. It has been years since we made our first contact and life interfered along the way. [Laughing]

TP: Yeah, you came back to Thunder Bay to retire!

NP: Again! Two times. But we'll say goodbye officially here, and then we'll just sort of wrap it up with a couple of things I want to mention.

TP: Oh, okay. Thank you!

End of interview.