

Narrator: Jim Poole (JP)

Company Affiliations: United Grain Growers (UGG), Canadian Wheat Board (CWB)

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Interviewer: Nancy Perozzo (NP)

Recorder: Nancy Perozzo (NP)

Transcriber: Sarah Lorenowich (SL)

Summary: Retired manager of area representatives for the Canadian Wheat Board and long-time employee of United Grain Growers Jim Poole discusses his career across the Prairies in various agricultural roles. He first describes his upbringing on a farm and his first job managing a zoo before joining UGG as a field representative, liaising between farmers and the board of directors. He details the major challenges of the role, the characters he dealt with in the country elevators, how farmers chose which company to deliver to, and main policy issues of the time. Poole then discusses his responsibilities in various other divisions for the company, like research and development, technical services, transportation coordination, human resources, managing UGG’s construction division, managing the field representative unit, and managing country operations. He describes his interactions with the Canadian Wheat Board before joining their organization as area rep manager, where he worked to change their role from “policemen” to “spokesperson and problem solver.” Other topics discussed include a major tour he facilitated for the training of country elevator managers, artifacts salvaged from old country elevators, and predictions for the future of the industry.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: It is April 7 th , 2009, and I am interviewing Jim Poole in his home at 153 Dickens--.

JP: Drive.

NP: Drive in Winnipeg. Thanks so much for agreeing to be part of our Voices of the Grain Trade.

JP: Oh, it's my pleasure.

NP: And what, I guess, we can start with is your history in the area of agriculture. Maybe where you first remember you saw a piece of grain and a quick review of your career from then until now.

JP: Okay. Well, I'm a farm boy, so we farmed just outside of Brandon, Manitoba. And my first recollection, of course, was going with dad to the local elevator, which was at Kemnay, which was five miles out of Brandon. No longer there. The elevator is no longer there. But growing up on the farm and growing cereal grains of all kinds. Then going to university at the University of Manitoba, taking agriculture with always the thought of going back to the farm, but a number of things come in. More exciting to do other things. So after many stints of—no, I shouldn't say many stints—but interesting things like managing the Assiniboine Park Zoo for a year and a half, I began to look around and was offered—. “You should do this. You should do that.” Before long, I was involved with the grain trade with United Grain Growers [UGG] as a field services rep, which was interacting with farmers, between the board of directors and farmers. Moved to Saskatoon and travelled west of Saskatoon through that whole northwest corner, and then moved back to Neepawa, Manitoba as an area representative there.

Following that, was offered the position to come into Winnipeg as a research and development person for United Grain Growers. Did that for a short while—probably a year and a half—and then was intrigued with going back to dealing more on the agricultural field, so moved to Yorkton as technical services, which was the agrologist for the area. And following a stint of that, was invited to become construction supervisor for United Grain Growers, which was quite a different challenge. Well, a real challenge for me, not having a real construction background. But that carried me for about nine years, I think it was. And there again, an interesting part as we watch the elevators develop from the small type of elevators that all of us were used to to the very start of the concrete giants. Not because the giants were coming, but I left that field and went back into the field services area because I was missing the contact with real life farmers. And did that for a little while, then got into the transportation area with United Grain Growers, then into coordinating country operations.

And I think following that, I think there was another step, but finally ending up in the human resource end of United Grain Growers where I was seconded into that field for, I think, just over two years. And then at that time, left United Grain Growers and joined the Canadian Wheat Board [CWB]. I joined the Canadian Wheat Board and managed the area representatives, which are now called the farmer representatives I think their name is, and there again supervised 18 people across the Prairies. So I've been

fortunate in literally seeing the grain industry from the ground to the ports, all ends. The ports are very important. The West Coast going to Vancouver and Prince Rupert and down the east from Thunder Bay right through, I think, all of the ports right down to Baie-Comeau at one time or another. So I've been blessed with a broad ranging field of endeavours.

NP: Wow!

JP: [Laughing] I know! When I put that together on a resume, it read like a book. [Laughs]

NP: What didn't you do! I want to go right back to the beginning because the farm boy--. So did your owning that farm go back even before your dad, or was your dad the first person who--?

[0:05:15]

JP: On that part of land, Mom and Dad had purchased that just after they were married, but of course, Dad was a farm boy from the area, from the Kemnay area. His father's father had actually come over and homesteaded in the area. So we've got roots, but my home farm, which I still own, you know, our Poole was just two generations—both Mom and Dad and now myself. I don't actively farm. I got out of that field when I found there was no money in it. [Laughing]

NP: That's right! Had to make a living.

JP: Yeah.

NP: So did your dad ever talk about the, I don't know, maybe we'd call them the "good old days" on the farm, but did you have an interest in how things had changed?

JP: Oh, yes. Mom and Dad were great in enjoying the farm. I mean, I enjoyed the farm. It's a wonderful life. I have nothing but great thoughts about the farm life that we had. We were fortunate in having all of the amenities anybody would want. We were remarkably close to school—a mile and a half away—and of course, were always driven back and forth to school. And then high school in Brandon, which was five miles away, was not a big hardship because you were either given the family car or you had one of your own to come and go on. So there was no hardships there. Mom and Dad talked about the old time, about how tough it was, but they made it--. Yes, it was tough, but they enjoyed it all the way through. So I don't have any bad thoughts of farming. I still say it's a wonderful life.

NP: So you grew up on the farm over what years?

JP: Oh, I guess I left for university--. Well, I graduated university in '64, so go back—and I'm a 1942 birth—so you can figure it out in that. I guess I can remember the '50s and '60s best because in '60, I guess, is when I rented some land of my own and kind of got a little better feel. I was very involved all the way through. Mom and Dad, I think, made us all feel very part of that family operation.

NP: So from the time that you started helping out on the farm, were there changes even from then until the '60s when you went to university?

JP: Well, yes, there was changes. Yes, I could say there was changes that I lived through there, but I think it accelerated extremely fast in the '70s in particular. I can remember in the mid '60s being in Saskatchewan—and, of course, it was a Manitoba boy brought to Saskatchewan—and I was talking about continuance cropping, about heavy use of fertilizers a way before that group was ready. Now, I go back there and, I mean, it's continuous crops, it's the best of everything out there, whereas I was telling them what we were doing back here and then having to realize that, "Don't talk that way Jim." [Laughs]

NP: Coming from the big province of Manitoba, yeah.

JP: Yeah! [Laughing] So I saw that. I guess in the grain industry, I think of the elevator system, which I visited all the time out there. It was the giant—well, not the concrete elevators that we think of—but the rows of country elevators in Rosetown and Biggar where there would be 12 elevators in a row. Whereas Manitoba you tended to see one or two. I guess that was the eye opener. I still recall driving from Saskatoon to Rosetown. You kind of go over one little hill, and it looks like Texas out there because it's big, flat, and elevators forever. I still remember that in my mind.

NP: So you went to university, always intending to take that agricultural education back to the farm.

JP: Yes. I always was going to go back to farm because, hey, I liked farming and enjoyed the university course very much. Enjoyed going through it, met a lot of interesting professors, and I guess like everything else, they set you attuned to things. They were never ones to belittle farms, but it was just, I guess, in my mind's eye saying, "Okay, I want to go back but--." I was young, thinking about getting married, and I'm saying, "Okay, do I really want to go back and settle in that fast?" And always saying, "Well, I think I'll work for a couple of years." I worked for a couple of years, and then the couple of years you get more challenges thrown at you. "Yeah, okay. I'll go back later on. I can still."

[0:10:41]

NP: Did you specialize at university?

JP: No, no. I took a diploma course, which is a very broad-based--. Mainly beamed, at that time, at going back to farms, although it gave you such a broad base of knowledge of the industry, of the agricultural industry, that set you on the good plane to do anything as the generalist.

NP: Right. That actually is very nicely led into the Assiniboine Zoo on graduation.

JP: [Laughing] That was a bit of a lark. In the wintertime when I did farm, I went to--. Following university, I went back and farmed one summer, and then I came back to the university and was working there in the wintertime. And of course, you'd be having coffee with all the profs from days gone by that you knew. And one day over coffee, one of them said, "What are you going to do, Jim?" And I said, "I guess I'll probably head back." "Well, do you want a challenge?" And of course, you should never say that to me at times. So anyways, I said, "What have you got in mind?" Well, he said he was on the zoological society, and he said, "We're looking for a manager of the Assiniboine Park Zoo." And I said, "Oh, yeah? Keep looking." He said, "No, you should go down and talk to Andy Curry," who was the director of Parks and Recreation for a time for Winnipeg, Metro Winnipeg. So I did that, and we had coffee and dainties down in his office. He offered me this job, and I kind of thought about it for a little while and said, "Well, jeez. Why not?"

So that was an interesting challenge. Very challenging because I was a young guy parachuted into a group of older people who really didn't want me there. They had their own way of doing things, and I'm not one to be all that forceful. I like to work with people, and I don't want people to work for me. I want them to work with me. So it was an interesting year and a half, but a young guy working for city councillors in Metro Winnipeg—not as Winnipeg as we know it now—and so it was trying to tiptoe around to keep myself sane and work with city councillors who thought things should be done a different way. So after a year and a half, probably the same prof said, "You know, why don't you join the industry?" So through that, went into the grain industry with United Grain Growers.

NP: Professors that--. Do you recall any of your professors at university? Were they specialists in different areas?

JP: Well, yes. I mean, I think of Marvin Seal, who was the animal science prof. Hodgson, I think, he was the poultry guy. Oh, there was Al Ridley, the soils man. A lot of them that I carried along with as I left and got into the other fields. We'd keep running into

each other, or I'd have the opportunity to kind of refer back on a soils thing to say, "Al Ridley, I remember you saying this, but can you tell me more and more?" So it kind of helped me expand that way. Yeah.

NP: Was Mr. Bushuk there or Dr. Bushuk there at that time?

JP: Oh, I knew--. Yes, he was. And of course, through the grain industry, I got to know him better, as well as his son who worked for the Canadian Wheat Board. [Laughs] So there was a connection there.

NP: Last question about the zoo. Was it through the animal area of your studies that--?

JP: No, it was strictly through--.

NP: Administration?

JP: Through me, just the prof thinking they knew me that, "Hey, this guy could fit." No, it wasn't through animals, no. It was nothing to do with that. It was really administration or whatever it was.

NP: So not much of a chance to apply your diploma?

JP: Oh, in a lot of ways--. No, I suppose the diploma in agriculture, what did it do for me? Nothing there, except just the people experiences that you've encountered through it. No.

[0:15:09]

NP: Then it was onto UGG as a field rep. What do you recall about those days?

JP: Well, it was interesting. Here again, I was interviewed by Manitoba Pool Elevators as well as United Grain Growers for similar jobs. After meeting a number of people in both offices and spending some time with both presidents of the days, I decided I really wanted to work for United Grain Growers. It was so weird having to sit waiting for the phone call and knowing that Man Pool would phone me first, which they did, offered me the job. And how do you hesitate, hoping the other guy is going to phone? So United Grain did within the next two days, but I still remember having to hedge my bets there. And joining United Grain Growers, and learning about them, and getting my feet under me here a little bit, and then moving to Saskatoon, which was a big challenge

for me because I hadn't moved as such. I mean, sure, from Brandon to Winnipeg, but leaving the province in a brand-new job, and actually, we were married by that time, so that was a real challenge. But a good challenge.

NP: What did you see as the difference between UGG and Manitoba Pool Elevators? What attracted you to one as opposed to the other?

JP: Well, it was strictly the people, and that's being unfair to Manitoba Pool because there's a lot of very good people there that I've known and still know. It was the people and kind of the surroundings. I'm not sure why I'm saying that because it was Don Wilton at Manitoba Pool that interviewed me, and Don's a great guy. It was Mr. Parker who was an extremely good president of Man Pool. Both of them were, I don't know, very good to be interviewed by and spend a little time with, but Don Fraiser at United Grain Growers and Mac Runciman just seemed to instill upon me that, hey, this is the group that I could, I wouldn't say excel with—I don't mean that—but they were the people that attracted me.

NP: A little more vibrant, perhaps?

JP: I think probably that's right. Yeah. It was more vibrant. Man Pool was somewhat staid, extremely staid in their way, and I guess older management style. UGG had younger people in the top management positions. So probably that's a good way to put it.

NP: And what did a field representative do?

JP: Well, our challenges--.

NP: What were your remembrances there?

JP: Well, our mandate was to work as liaisons between the board of directors and the local boards because we had local boards throughout the country. That was the mandate, but it was mainly a very broad PR job insofar as getting to know farmers and being Mr. United Grain Growers. Now, the elevator manager was the most important person, but still in all it was you as a representative were representing the big head office. You know, this was it. I remember meeting characters, both the elevator managers, and back then there were real characters as elevator managers. More so than now, because now they're so bent on making a dollar. But the old characters in the elevators, they were the interesting ones where you'd get to know them, and they'd take you out to meet farmers. That was really the interesting part was the characters you met.

NP: Can you think of some of those characters or someone that represents the epitome of a character?

JP: Well, I've been trying to put my head around that because, you know, since you were asking me, I wanted to bring out characters. I was trying to put together a good map of a character. It's a difficult one to put in words because I tend to think of too many of them out there. There was a lot of them. And some of them were located in, you might say, single elevator points, so when you came to call on them, they were so happy to see you. My gosh, you know. And then there'd be other ones who--. And back then—far more so than now—one of the things about characters was, hey, if you dropped in, you had to drink. I think it came in the grain industry. [Laughing] That was a challenge for a young guy to, hey, you had to drive home. [Laughs] So that was one of the things was a bit of that.

[0:20:48]

In areas when some of the farmers would bring loads of grain in, they knew that there'd be coffee laced with rum, and that was okay on a cold day. That was very welcome for all of us at times. But some of the characters that used to--. Well, if there was more than one elevator in a point, they might war against each other, of course, for more business. And at that time, railcars were very hard to get, and there was--. Well, really tough to get. So sometimes they'd steal each other's empty cars late at night. My gosh, it was nothing to see them out at 2:00 in the morning. They'd take somebody else's car down and load it up, and then they'd get in a mighty big war in the morning because it was loaded. But they would do the likes of those things just to get more grain through the elevator system. Characters are hard to write about.

NP: Pigeonhole.

JP: Hard to pigeonhole. That's right.

NP: Hard to pigeonhole because that's why they're characters! [Laughs]

JP: That's right. They don't fit a mold. But back then, there was characters galore, whereas there isn't the same characters now. I think it's too bad.

NP: What were the challenges for you in that position, other than being a young guy, again, going and talking to farmers probably twice or three times your age?

JP: Yes, that was one of the real challenges that you'd have is getting on the right plateau with farmers because you would be the age of their sons, and some of them had sons working with them. Some didn't. But it was to build that bridge there. Some of the

challenges was to know how to deal with farmers and know how to deal with them insofar as their minds would be made up on something—particularly if it may come to a company policy or something—and you had to kind of persuade them that for the good of the organization, the policy might be different from what they wanted. That was difficult for a young guy to sit around with 20 or 24 more senior people—who are very set in their way a lot of them—and have to defend a company policy. That was a bit of a challenge.

NP: Can you think of a policy that they had trouble with?

JP: No, I can't. Oh, what would a policy be there now?

NP: Must have had something to do with deliveries, most--.

JP: Well, a lot of them were deliveries, but then you could blame the Wheat Board at that time, so. [Laughing] When it came to those kinds of things, you could offload those. It was, “Why can't I have a new elevator? Hey, I mean, look at the amount of grain that we're putting through this old thing. We want a new elevator, and we've been on the books for a long time.” You might know that there was going to be a trade coming off because at that time, companies would trade elevators amongst themselves. I would takeover the two elevators at [inaudible] and the Pools would take over our elevator over at [inaudible]. It was to know that and not tell anybody until it happened. That was one of the things that you were always challenged with. And then one of the big things was when you did that trade, having to go and tell farmers that, “Look, we have left your community for the good of the organization.” Now, that didn't sit well, and we all had to do that. That was always a tough sell to go in and hold a meeting or go one-to-one around the community and tell people that, you know, “Thank you for the past, but we're leaving. Come and see us 20 miles away.” So that was one of the big challenges. Mmhmm.

[0:25:00]

NP: Would you--. I'm always interested in how farmers picked which group they went with, whether it was the Pool or UGG or one of the private firms. Any comments on that? I mean, if it was a one-elevator town, that was pretty obvious, but--.

JP: No, lots of times it would be four elevators in a town, and they literally picked it to the man behind the desk, the person. It didn't matter what colour uniform he wore. It was the man. It was how he interacted with that farmer, with that customer. That was so true right across. Well, when I worked with United Grain Growers, I said, well, we had the best managers because they attracted the best people. I guess if I was on the other side of the street, I'd say the same thing too. But no, it was strictly a personality contest when it comes to that. I do think it still to some extent does that in the Prairies at the present time, because I do see grain being

trucked right past one elevator and going for another 25-mile run. Now, I know there's dollars involved because some people can do things differently, but I think there is a personality contest out there yet.

NP: In seeing the competition when you were the field representative, there wasn't much to distinguish UGG once you got into the field from the others?

JP: No, there wasn't a great deal. Grain is dumped in a pit, and of course, everybody wants the best grade they can get and the least dockage taken out of it and whatnot. Aside from that, there wasn't too much. To some extent, there is an element out there that really said the board of directors was doing the best for them because at that time, both United Grain Growers and the Pools were the real big decision makers when it came to agricultural policies. And that did overlap at that time, and it made a--. The United Grain Growers' policy might differ from Sask Pool's, and that would bring some people into UGG or into Sask Pool's memberships. Whereas that's not the case now because none of the grain industries out here have any agricultural policy fields at all, so farmers are left out in the cold when it comes to ag policy.

NP: Any policy differences come to mind, or was it sort of those weren't big issues for you back then?

JP: Probably—and I can't remember them—but probably the Crow Rate was one of them. I think United Grain Growers definitely wanted the Crow Rate done away with, whereas the Pools didn't want to see that. That was one of the issues, and that was actually after my time as a field rep. I'm trying to think of what else there would be. Well, the policies, that would have been it. I'm trying to think of what the policy might have been. It was in Saskatchewan at the time, and it was very UGG versus Sask Pool, but I can't remember what that would have been at the time.

NP: So there would have been flare ups occasionally of policy differences?

JP: Definitely, yes. And that was at the board level and beyond to make a reflection into the Ottawa federal government.

NP: Would that ever make any changes in who delivered to who?

JP: Yes, it would at times. Yeah, you could see that at times where they would be very vehement thoughts and just said "I can't support UGG" or "I can't support Sask Pool" or whatever. That did play a portion, yeah.

NP: You raised the Crow Rate, as just about everybody who speaks does.

JP: Mmhmm.

NP: What are your thoughts on having it, not having it, changes resulting from it being removed?

JP: Yeah. I think probably it was a good thing for western Canada because we should never have carried on just on a subsidy level. But I think because there was such a division of thoughts out there, we left an awful lot of money on the table. The Feds would have paid a lot more to get rid of it. Whereas the farm groups were so splintered that they didn't know enough to get together and ask for a lot more. I do think it was for the best that they did away with it. But, boy, that was a--. It's a tough one to really say because, hey, who knows what it would be like if we still had it? We might not have the giants that we have out there. We might not see Viterra controlling the industry as they do. I don't know.

[0:30:29]

NP: So you then moved, after how many years do you recall, back into the research and development?

JP: Well, I guess I would have been with the company probably five or six years, and then moved back into Winnipeg as a research development person.

NP: And what does a research development person do with an elevator company?

JP: Mainly it was looking at new acquisitions, where new elevators should be built in the Prairies, or doing a lot of work on these trades that I mentioned whereby United Grain Growers might give up an elevator one place and get another elevator in another place from another company. Those were the big issues that I remember, but at times we would get into some of the things that we might look at, like buying fertilizer plants. I mean, this is not just small plants, but this was manufacturing plants where we took a look at some things that were available to us. So it was kind of a broad-ranging thing. Whatever might be, you take a look at.

NP: So they were looking at diversification a little bit?

JP: Oh, definitely, yes. We did a lot of looking at things. That was not during my time that we diversified into the feed, that was done prior to that. But no, we looked at a number of things.

NP: When I think of research and development, I think of, you know, like researching types of crops or the effects of fertilizers. Was there a piece of that in research and development of UGG done by someone else?

JP: No, there wasn't. Actually, at the time, the company was not into researching crops or fertilizer. We were leaving that up to both the fertilizer industry that we were purchasing from, and at the time, we were in the seed division, but not into anything developing, just merely merchandising seed. So yes, we didn't get into that as such. That came later.

NP: So actually, when you moved on later into construction, there was a thread of a connection there, but in the interim you had technical services. So what did--?

JP: Well, technical services, at the time, the company set up an agrologist group across the Prairies. So we had agrologists located-- . I think there was five or seven of us in the Prairies. And there again, both advising farmers, but mainly advising elevator managers because that was just at the time when fertilizer use was escalating. New pesticides were just coming out a dime a dozen. And it was to interact with elevator managers to quite a degree, but also with farmers to the use of these. At that time, we were, well, we were in the infancy or working what they called the "Hybrid Wheat Project," which I was involved in as the lead on that.

NP: And what was that?

JP: It was the hybridization of wheat to see if that could be done. It was working with Dekalb out of the United States whereby--.

NP: Who in the United States?

JP: Dekalb. It's a very large seed organization. Dekalb are mainly into corn.

NP: And how is that spelled?

JP: D-E-K-A-L-B.

NP: Okay.

JP: We worked with them for two or three years seeing if we could. And hybridization of wheats is extremely hard and still hasn't been done, but in the infancy, we did work a little bit.

NP: What exactly is the goal of hybridization? What are they--?

JP: Well, to increase yields. If you can hybridize something and get extra yields. Eventually, of course, you get into the GMOs of wheat, well that's still--. Wheat is not able to be done very easily, if at all.

NP: Oh, really?

JP: But that was an interesting couple of years where I worked with them both here and travelling to Mexico with them on the winter projects to try and get that going. But it didn't, and I don't think it will for quite a while.

[0:35:04]

NP: Were there other people in Winnipeg working on that?

JP: No, I think we were the only ones at the time. We brought, well, both the university and the scientists out there and also the Grain Commission into the fold as far as telling them what we were doing just in the hopes that things were going to develop, but it didn't, and Dekalb decided to fold that portion of their operations because it's just--. And it's still being looked at by others, but--.

NP: Interesting.

JP: Yeah.

NP: So how does that vary from where they improve upon--. Cross-breeding. How does hybridization vary from that? Because I'm thinking, you know, they started out with Red Fife, which wasn't suitable for, I think, short growing season, and then working into the Marquis. And so--.

JP: It's a similar process. You still have to bring one into the other, but to hybridize, it's to take the best out of this one and put it with this to bring it together to get a more genetically--. Mainly yield was what we were looking for. Larger yield. At the time, it was in the triticale area where they would put the wheat with the rye to get another. It was the hope that we could do things like that to get another jump on yields. But it didn't work because wheat is sterile, and if you don't do it by hand, it ain't going to get there. [Laughs] So it was--. We eventually found that.

NP: Sort of a version of artificial insemination for grain.

JP: Yep. That's well put. That's what we did by hand. [Laughs]

NP: So that was technical services. How long did you stay with that?

JP: I think it was a year and a half, and then I was invited, would I take over this construction job, which really set me on my ears saying, “Why me?”

NP: Mmhmm. Why you?

JP: “It’s not because you know construction, Jim, but it’s because you get along with people.” [Laughs] So I could see what they mean because I knew the construction of old, and it was pretty bad out there. They didn’t treat people very well at all.

NP: Was this UGG’s construction arm?

JP: Yes.

NP: Had it existed?

JP: Oh, yeah. It had existed every--.

NP: So tell us a bit about the construction arm of UGG. What--?

JP: Well, every elevator company had a construction arm, because they were building elevators. Prior to that, they used to build elevators all over. Like holus-bolus, they go in and build an elevator in a month because that’s what they were doing. At this time, it was back talk considerably. I guess United Grain might have built four or five elevators a year in their system, but they were having to repair elevators and redo them. UGG was no different than the other elevator companies, and the elevator construction group was a fairly rough and ready group who didn’t have facilities to literally live in. When they were brought on a site, they would live in a coal shed or an elevator office, and I kind of couldn’t believe this that this was the way that anything like that should happen. So I guess that’s--. And I don’t think I voiced it all that often, but the manager of country operations pulled me aside at a meeting one day, and he said, “Would you take this on?” And I said, “Jeez, why me?” [Laughing] But after thinking about it, and there again thinking of the challenge, that’s what I did. And it was mainly to overcome some of those, well, bad things, because I think everybody realized we were not treating people as we wanted to be treated. So we made some fairly major changes in how we do things. Not construction wise, but how we treat people.

NP: So how did those changes--? What were those changes?

JP: Well, we would bring on complete construction camps with bunkhouses and cookhouses and a chef. We had better vehicles for them to travel in, ATCO trailers pulled behind trucks for smaller crews. That was the main thing was living conditions were improved. So therefore you improved the group that you had working with you.

[0:40:13]

NP: And the quality of the construction as a result.

JP: That's what you hoped for, yes.

NP: What could go wrong with the construction of a country elevator? What can be done badly?

JP: Well, workmanship of any kind. At that time, they were all made out of wood. They were all made out of cribs, which is 2x8s laid on top of each other and nailed down, then all the rest. It was not that they were done badly, it was just that you said they could be done better. Even if the work wasn't done better, you felt better that you were treating them as you were treated yourself. Because you'd go onto the job, and you'd go to your motel room, and they would go to you didn't know where. [Laughing] So that was what bothered me, and we changed that around in a hurry. Then through my tenure in that position, we saw a lot of changes, and that's where changes of design of the elevator came in to some extent. The use of drag conveyors rather than screw conveyors, which are augers on--. You had drag conveyors lined with a special kind of plastic to let grain flow more easily and also wear better, because you were always wearing things out. So if you lined them with a—I'm going to say PVC, but no, it's not PVC—but it's a compound. Then you got away from the wearing out of steel. Those things were just in their infancy when we got into that.

Of course, we were also looking at the fact that we had elevators that all of a sudden were handling two and three million bushels a year, which was kind of unheard of, and you had to speed things up. You had to make bigger car spots, another inch where you could spot more cars at one time. So I was trying to look ahead, and in a lot of ways, tongue in cheek, I got out at the right time. I mean, we built one concrete elevator either just at my end or just at my beginning because I remember I wasn't in anything other than the planning of it and then going out and watching the contractor put the concrete up but was not involved as such. And then, of course, looking at it from there on, it just got bigger. The big giants out there.

NP: And the little ones came down.

JP: The little ones came down. That's one thing that shocks me now as I travel the Prairies. All of these sentinels are gone. I don't know where I'm at. [Laughing] It's shocking now when you can't see an elevator for miles. It's so different. I find that really a difference.

NP: A difference, I would think, in communities as well.

JP: Oh, communities have been so called devastated with that because a lot of times your elevator was naturally your focal point because, aside from the tax base that it brought to a community—which was horrendously large if you were paying it, or gloriously great if you were on the receiving end—that was kind of where everybody came. There might be a school there, but there might not have been. So you saw the schools amalgamating, and then you saw the elevators going, and before long, the post office was gone. So yeah, there was nothing left.

NP: The little community that you started out in outside Brandon where your parents were, did they have their own elevator, or did they ship to Brandon?

JP: No, we had an elevator at Kemnay, and of course, it's been torn down since. But Kemnay is a bedroom community of Brandon, so it's still there. In fact, it's kind of growing a little bit as well as acreages around it. So it's gone. It's been gone for probably 25 or 30 years, but it was so close to Brandon that it was a natural one to go.

NP: Could you think back on any challenges in the construction group other than the challenge that change brings in the first place?

[0:44:40]

JP: Well, I recall the one challenge, and it would be in--. Oh, I don't know what year it would have been in. It might have been the '70s sometime. It was mainly getting manpower to build. It was when, I think, Alberta was booming, and you just couldn't get people. I remember one foreman phoning one day, and he said, "Well." I said, "How's it going?" He said, "Well, I got three crews." I said, "Oh, jeez. That's a change." He said, "Yeah. I got one coming, one going, one here for a day." [Laughs] That was about it at times. It was just horrendous to get anybody to stick it out because, hey, there was more money elsewhere. They're a fairly moveable group anyway. That was one of the big challenges was to get good people. And after looking at it, you'd say, "Okay, it's not much wonder." Now, we did have some good people. I wouldn't want to say there wasn't good people there, but that was always a challenge. That and the so-called not knowing the industry and the terminology. I learned that in a hurry from my foreman who would--. They were a good group to work for, but they'd always kind of challenge you a little bit. For a guy that loves to be more down on the ground than up in the air, there'd always be a challenge. "You better come up and take a look at this, Jim."

It wasn't long before they knew that I didn't really want to go up. [Laughs] But you had to overcome that and get up there and stand on a plank and then on the top. It's a piece of cake. [Laughing] That was one of my big--.

NP: Safety rules probably aren't then what they are now.

JP: No, they weren't. I mean, we were learning that as we went through. That was one of the challenges was to get safety equipment, safety boots and whatnot worn and used.

NP: Were accidents common?

JP: No, actually, they weren't. They were not really common, but it was just when you went onto a site and you saw running shoes instead of hard steel-toed boots, you said, "Hey, there's something wrong here, guys." I mean, there is an accident waiting to be had, so it was a bit of a learning process there. But it's like everything else. Once you point it out and made it worth their while—we would help them out—then, yeah, people started to accept it. Yeah, there were some challenges.

NP: Just have to ask you a question, an obscure one. But I understand that some of the elevator companies, they used wood from Thunder Bay storage elevators. Was that happening at the time you were there?

JP: No. It was before my time. I heard about that. There was the temporary storage was taken down and brought out here. But as an aside, my son and daughter-in-law's house over in Wildwood Park is made out of that very same wood that Bird Construction brought out. When we redid their house, it's right down there. You can tell it's from Thunder Bay. So. [Laughs]

NP: How can you tell?

JP: As I remember, as we opened up the inside to reinsulate and whatnot, there was some comments there. "Thunder Bay Terminal, so-and-so." I forget what that was. Then as we read about the Wildwood Park—because there is a good book on Wildwood Park—it's the Bird Construction had torn that down and rebuilt a lot of that, used a lot of that lumber. But you'd come across--. God, I can't remember the terminal. Jeez, I wish I had known that now. I should have taken a picture because I know I laughed about that because I said, "Jeez. Brent, see that?"

NP: They show up everywhere!

JP: That's right! Can't get away. Can't get away from it. [Laughing] Yeah.

NP: So nine years with the construction.

JP: I believe it was nine years, yeah. It was a long time. It was a job I didn't really like. It was honestly--.

NP: And yet it was one you stayed with a fairly long time.

JP: It was just, you know, I could have moved, I'm sure, but it was just you said, "Jeez, I'm needed here." It was one that, I guess, I didn't feel most comfortable with. And I missed farmers. I missed talking with real-life people. Mmhmm.

NP: So according to my list here, then you went back to a field rep position.

JP: No. Well, I was managing the field reps at the time. Yeah, I went back into that organization, but it was in the office as, I think, it was called assistant manager of field reps. Part of it was, at that time, we were Blue Shield Tours. United Grain was involved with Blue Shield Tours, so it was co-managing that as well as reps in the country.

NP: How were they involved with Blue Shield Tours?

[0:49:59]

JP: Oh, we'd set up a humongously large tour company where we took farmers all over the world. No, it was a very, very large tour group, probably the largest there was in Canada at the time. Literally, we—I mean, farmers paid—but we took people--. Well, Phil and I were in Europe twice with groups for two weeks at a time, and we had them into Australia. Oh, all over. You name it. It was just an interesting thing. We wanted to expand farmers' outlooks. It was farm tours. I mean, we went to Europe, and we visited farms throughout, and the same in Australia, the same in New Zealand. Don't think we got into Asia at all. No, I didn't. But that was--. I helped manage that with Phil Quinton and that group.

NP: And how did you arrange the tours on the other side?

JP: Well, it was working through a group in Houston who had the connections. We would land in London, and a tour guide would meet us with two big coaches, and you'd have 90 people with you. Sorry. You'd tour England for two or three days and then across the continent and through France, Switzerland, and Germany and Holland, I guess it was, and then you'd come out of Amsterdam again. That was our loop a couple of times. If it was three weeks, you'd go a little further afield there. Yeah, that was an interesting

time. I think I just worked in that for I'm going to say two years. It was working with that as well as managing the groups on the country end here.

NP: So when you think of the farming that you got to see in Europe, or that the farmers here saw in Europe, anything strike them as--? I mean, the size, obviously, would be quite different.

JP: Well, the size was quite different in all cases, and there again, what they were farming. They might be into vegetables in Holland and grapes in--. No, it wouldn't be grapes we'd see in France. It was an awful lot of dairy. But really, in hindsight, it opened farmers' eyes to what was really happening in the world. A lot of times, they would get into some very good discussions with the farmers. You see, Europe is so heavily subsidized, you know. It's shocking to see some of these farms so well off because they're subsidized so heavily. That was an interesting one for all of us and for farmers from Canada to interact with these people. On the other hand, they might be an extremely small farm but still viable because of the amount of money they're getting from subsidies. That was one of the things. And also, farmers would bring back some innovations that they had seen in a machine. They salted it away here, and I might run into them during the summer out in the country. "You know what we saw there, Jim? Come and take a look." He'd done something to his own to make it a little better. So that was the good part, as well as expanding their overall knowledge of the world. I know it didn't last forever, but it was a real good effort that the company had put in.

NP: That was the good part. Does that mean there was a bad part to it?

JP: No, I don't think there was a bad part. No, I don't think there was a bad part that way. I wasn't meaning anything there. Just a matter of it's too bad that there wasn't a company that was doing that now.

NP: Mmhhh. How long did it last? Just the two years, or did it go on beyond your time there?

JP: Oh, yeah. I'm going to say it's probably eight or ten years. I can't remember. It would probably be about that, because I know when I retired from the Wheat Board, three of us thought we might set up a similar thing. But it's really tough. You've got to have the connections. We did one into Australia, but that was it. I'd forecast the guys. "You've got to have deep pockets. You've got to have connections all over. You can't do it yourself." Well, Bob Roehle was one of the guys in that. We did one to Australia, but you've got to really have the fortitude to carry through, and you've got to have the connections.

[0:55:05]

NP: Did you take tours to Thunder Bay?

JP: Oh, yeah. Well, we did. Let me see. Did we go through Thunder Bay? Well, yes, we did through Blue Shield. We did Thunder Bay. We did Vancouver because—. Yes, we've been to Vancouver. Thunder Bay, I think, we had three- or four-day tours to Thunder Bay as I remember it. I never took one because I knew Thunder Bay too well. I said, "No, I don't need to go back there." [Laughs]

NP: So you have no idea how the farmers reacted to seeing where their grain was shipped out?

JP: No. But I do know how they reacted to Vancouver, and it was eye opening. That's what they want. No, oh, no. And I did that after I got to the Canadian Wheat Board, took them to the ports. And there again, it's that knowledge that they need. "What happens after you dump it out of your--?" We can show them, but now they've been there. That was a good part. Need to do more of it. Yeah. Mmhmm.

NP: Keeps dissention a little bit less because of a broader understanding of why things are done.

JP: It does, yes, because they don't realize what the challenges are at the port. They think--. And I mean, sure, all of us threw a lot of rocks at the ports when the longshoremen go on strike and all the rest, but farmers needed to see what they're faced with irregardless. They can talk to the manager, and they can understand some of the labour strife that he's going through, but also, they can see some of the congestion the railcars into in Vancouver or some of the things that go by bus from here to Thunder Bay. You can see some of the challenges that the rails go through to get it there. And then in Thunder Bay, of course, I remember when there were so many terminals on that wharf, and now, my god, where'd they go? [Laughs] That was the shocking part of the last time I was there.

NP: When was the last time you were there? Not the date or even the year, but--. [Laughs]

JP: Not that long ago, yeah. I drove down there one time when I was with the Wheat Board because I wanted to line up a tour for farmers. And I said, "I can't line one up until I go there because I don't know what there is there anymore." I was trying to make the connection with--. Oh, gosh. What's the terminal way around to the very southwest corner?

NP: Cargill or Mission?

JP: Mission Terminal, yeah. And you know, I got down to what used to be the old UGG Terminal A or whatever. It was a big terminal anyway. Thinking, "Where the hell am I?" Couldn't get any landmark. I remember phoning back to the office to Dennis

saying, “Dennis, where the devil is Mission?” “Well, here’s this number.” So anyway, I talked to the manager, and he laughed. He said, “Go here, here, here, and keep driving. Keep driving.” Finally got out there, and I spent a couple or three hours with him. But I couldn’t get over how it had changed, because I was down in Thunder Bay in 1968 setting up some of the temporary driers that the company had put up. That was the year of that extremely wet harvest. I think it was ’68. We set up either four or six great big farm-type driers on the end of the terminal, and they’d ask me if I’d go down and light them up, teach the guys how to do them. I remember spending a couple of weeks there. That was when there was terminals everywhere you look. Now, they’re not there anymore. [Laughs] And that’s not all that long ago. That’s into five or six years or whatever. I think it’s been more than that. Eight years.

NP: So after your construction supervision, how did it come about that you got into transportation?

JP: Jeez, what was the deal? I think I asked if I would go into the transportation end, and that was, yeah, coordinating shipments. Coordinating shipments. There again, I did that, I’m going to say for a year or year and a half. And I found it not very challenging. It wasn’t what I thought. They asked me, “Would you go in and do this?” I did, but I thought it less than challenging than I thought it was going to be. So that was when I moved over to country operations, I think it was.

[1:00:02]

NP: So what exactly was entailed with transportation? Was it like rail and ship or--?

JP: No, it was just rail. It was just coordinating. You were given a number of railcars from the Canadian Wheat Board, and you were having to allot it out to different elevators just based on a criteria of what they had in store and what we needed at the terminals and a number of things like that, which was okay, but it was not very challenging, I found. I mean, it was pretty mediocre after you got it down in your head what you look for, I thought, “Oh, this is kind of clerical.” [Laughs]

NP: Same old, same old?

JP: Same old, same old, and that’s where I guess that was. It wasn’t into determining what was on lake ships or anything like that. It was mainly just what can I get out of the country and dealing with--. You know, the odd time you’d deal with some hiccup of some kind, but it was--.

NP: So did you have to deal with the railways in that, and how was that?

JP: Yes. It was the railways and the Wheat Board, mainly the Wheat Board. The railways, I mean, you had your contacts there, but dealing with the railways was up another level. Well, there again, the railways dealt with the Wheat Board more than anything. You know, the Wheat Board are the people that get the cars from the railway, and the Wheat Board allotted out to the companies based on your percentage of market share and whatnot.

NP: But that would be all for wheat. So it was special crops or the other crops you would deal with?

JP: Yes. Special crops of all kinds you dealt with.

NP: Rye or bird seed or--.

JP: Well, it was mainly canola would be the big one. The other ones, of course, you did also, but canola was the big one, and there you'd get your cars directly from the railways. You got your association with the railways, but there again, it was more cut and dried than really--. You couldn't make too much of a difference. That was maybe what I would say.

NP: Was there a difference needed, do you think?

JP: No, I don't think so.

NP: Everything went pretty smoothly?

JP: Actually, it was amazingly smooth. That was the thing. I mean, I guess that's why it was kind of ho-hum. Do your work on Tuesday, Wednesday, and kind of wait. [Laughing] No, it wasn't quite, but it was almost. It was just, "Hm, okay." It was pretty ho-hum, I found.

NP: Not a whole lot of people interaction.

JP: No, it wasn't. No, and that was the other thing. Yeah, I mean, anybody could sit in a hole and do it. No, that was probably the biggest thing was there wasn't too much interaction, and there wasn't too much you could do outside to do anything as far as if you wanted to make a--. If you said, "Gee, there's a better way, or could we do it?" It's very, no. It's solid. You can't do--. I mean, this is the way. Because there was so many players then, it isn't something that you could do on your own as a company because the Wheat Board did certain things, and you as a company couldn't do too much outside of that. So, yeah, that was one that I didn't enjoy.

NP: So did you have a big map of all the--.

JP: No, no.

NP: And all the train cars to move around? [Laughing]

JP: No, we didn't.

NP: Nothing entertaining like that?

JP: We had maps, but no, they didn't go on. [laughing] In your head it did. But no, we'd go over to the Wheat Board, they did have their big map at that time. That was good. I'm a visual person, and that was a good part. No, we didn't have anything like that. [Laughing]

NP: Nothing entertaining.

JP: I said, "We should, guys!" [Laughs]

NP: So then, moving right along--.

JP: Yeah, moving right along.

NP: To country operations. So what is country operations as opposed to field representative? Or is it--?

JP: Well, country ops is managing the grain industry, you know, the operations in the country. So I was the coordinator of that working with Nils Nystrom [sp?] who was the manager of that. And that was, you know, you've got your elevator managers, you've got your district managers who they respond to, and your district manager responds to your area managers, blah-blah-blah. But that was kind of coordinating that whole group, working with them all, channeling them. They channel a lot of things through you, so you were interacting with them on a day-to-day basis to quite a degree. As far as new ideas or--. And there again, doing, well, let's see, doing some of the research. Not necessarily the research I was doing before, but kind of working through a lot of those things as far as where we might do something new or where we might do something different. Yeah. That was more

enjoyable as well as all sorts of things. Dreaming up new ideas for things, new programs, incentive programs, how to get them to do things different or better or whatever. Yeah, that was good. I liked that.

[1:05:41]

[Audio pauses]

NP: Okay. So we've just come back from a little break, and you were starting to talk about your time with the country operations and that it involved trying to bring about some changes in the operation to improve them. So anything special stick in your mind about that time of your career?

JP: I'm trying to think of how I would put some changes. It was evolving long before my time there, but I think it, like everything else, escalated about that time as everything did, and that was becoming more and more vigilant on the economies of scale. The economies were dictating more and more what would be done. Business had to be profitable, and I think that maybe escalated throughout that time that elevator managers became more vigilant, more aware of the profitability of their stations. If a station wasn't profitable, both the elevator manager's job was on the line, but also the longevity of that elevator at that place would be. So probably that was one of the changes that I saw more than anything. The other thing was trying to put together incentive programs to get them to do more with less, and I think that's kind of typical of today's society is doing more with less. And that was the forerunner of that was how do you get more productivity out of manpower, out of facilities of any kind? Do you run 20 hours a day instead of 10 hours? You know, that kind of thing. That was some of the challenges we had.

I think of one thing that we did for our elevator managers at the time was took all of the elevator managers to Vancouver. We were divided into three areas at the time—there was East, Central, and West—pretty well following the borders of the provinces. But we took them out to Vancouver to the terminal elevator on a tour and did an operations meeting out in Vancouver at the time as well as touring the elevator, and that was the first time for a lot of them that they would have had a chance to see the terminal. That was just at the time that the major overhaul had been completed out in the Vancouver terminal. So we showed them both the Vancouver terminal and held a two-day meeting as well as a harbour cruise to really show them what it was like, and also took them out on the train because, hey, grain moves by train. We move them by train. Not in boxcars, but--.

NP: [Laughs]

JP: It was suggested when we were putting that whole package together that we wanted them to remember that—Vancouver '89—as something they would remember as well as their first-born child. So a lot of them do. I still run into them on my travels, and they still say, “Poole, we remember 1989 in Vancouver.” So that was, I say, a noteworthy thing for elevator managers at the time.

NP: So what would they say about what surprised them or added to their knowledge?

[1:09:53]

JP: Some of the things that surprised them was the train trip, you know, how long it takes to get there. I mean, yes, a railcar they leave and don't worry about what happens. They're seeing, okay—excuse me—it's a long journey out there. But also, then once they got to the terminal, it's the magnitude, how large. Oh, man! How big this is, how much grain they can spill through there. And then, never being on a ship before, how large it is. My gosh! That grain car or that tanker that we put 3,000 bushels in, where did it go? It's dropped out there. That was the eye openers that they all came away with saucer-sized eyes saying, “You know, that's just a pittance what I've put together. I had 12 cars leave Monday morning, and that wouldn't do much to the hold of this ship.” That was the learning experience that a lot of them went through was just the magnitude of what happens. Once it hits the Vancouver wharf, it goes through the terminal, it's cleaned, it's ready, and it's out on the ship. So that was, I think, a highlight for a lot of them. It was really a good one.

NP: A couple of questions come to mind from your last bit of information. One of them is what precipitated the cost consciousness at a certain time?

JP: I don't know whether anybody could say it happened in 1974. [Laughs] I think management that was in charge began to say, “Okay, rather than this lump sum that we see at the end of the year where we either made money or we didn't, we have to break it down to know where we made the money from.” I think before that time, it was just a lump sum at the end of the year. “Hey, either we made or we didn't.” And then they began to say, “Look, we have to know during the year what amount of money we're making so we can budget.” And then it was dissecting it again. “Okay, where is the money coming from? Where is the most profitable? Because we want more of them.” I don't know what the timeline would be. I really think it was a gradual process that we went through to-- Well, maybe the costs got more, revenues got less. I'm not sure.

NP: Or they had differently trained accounting staff that had more awareness for that, of that.

JP: I'm sure that might have been it, and maybe the advent of computers where you can plunk them in and get it out. Whereas before if it was manually put in, it took a long time to figure out, "Did we do it or not?" It may have been the advent of computers as we got more automated.

NP: Did automation make much difference in any of the areas you worked in?

JP: In elevators, well, here again--. Not where I worked. I was thinking of the elevators where we got more automated in there, but, no, I can't say that other than computers began to be part of our worksites. No, I can't really think of an instance there.

NP: What automation took place in the elevators?

JP: Well, I guess I'm thinking of the very start of what's in the big high-throughputs now where you--. A truck might drive in and be on a scale, and the scale ticket would be printed there but also be inputted right into the computer. That, rather than have to input them two or three times, it would be automated right through and right into head office rather than once or twice a week or whatever. I think that was the advent of things that I saw. And now, of course, it's instantaneous when things are done.

NP: Did UGG have a courier service in those earlier days or did they--?

JP: Oh, yes. Yeah, it used to be, then, mail, but then it was courier service. I forget. Probably three times a week, yeah, courier service. That was definitely it. Mmhmm.

NP: Good. So country operations was your last position with UGG?

JP: I think--. No, I was in farm supplies too. Just a minute. What was the--?

NP: In there somewhere?

JP: Yeah. But I can't remember. Okay. I came out of--. No, I was in country ops then went to HR.

[1:15:16]

NP: Oh, okay.

JP: Doesn't matter about the farm supplies. I was there for a year and a half or two years. [Laughs] That doesn't matter.

NP: So then HR would just be dealing with the head office mainly personnel?

JP: No. What transpired was while I was still coordinating country ops, our HR division, along with-- Well, country ops had decided that we have to do things differently with elevator managers. They needed more training out there as far as people skills. So it was put upon HR and myself as part of it to come up with a training session for elevator managers. Soft skills. Soft skills was part of dealing with people, but just what makes people click. So I was seconded to HR for two years, and we trained elevator managers out in the country on a continuous basis, a week at a time, 20 at a time, all throughout, and went through a training session with them. It was good. There again, it was off--.

Elevator managers are not ones to really think they're going to enjoy soft skill training. They're a hardened bunch. They're none of this B.S., you know? [Laughing] It was good. They gained a lot out of it, as we did too, but they gained a lot out of it because we did a lot of roleplaying in how would you deal with a customer, or how would you deal with an employee? If an employee had B.O., how do you get around to telling him that? Well, you can imagine some of the roleplaying you might get on that. [Laughs] How would you deal with an angry customer? You know, those kinds of things. That's just a couple of the instances, but they gained a lot. And I think a lot of them, as they left on Friday afternoon, they said to me, "We thought you were full of you-know-what on Monday morning, but this was okay." So that's what I did. Then I was there for about two years and kind of ran out of a job. That was okay, then left them and went with the Canadian Wheat Board.

NP: The characters that you started to talk about earlier, you think of a rough and ready kind of crew. Did that match up with the farmer at the time? I'm thinking, like, what all of a sudden—or not all of a sudden—but what precipitated a need for those soft skill training in people that were managing to service their clientele? Was it a change in the farmers too?

JP: You know, it probably was and probably is. Because you're right, back with some of the characters I was speaking of before, they were a rough and ready group, and the farmers, you know, were, some of them, rough and ready. Yes, you're right. The farmers are becoming more sophisticated, very definitely, and that meant that elevator managers had to get more sophisticated. Now, some of them, of course, could meet that challenge very easily, and a lot of them couldn't. And I think, yes, I hadn't thought about that. You're probably right, and that's probably what we saw without seeing it was that we needed to make them more sophisticated than the average Joe, than the average farmer. Be the leader not the follower because no farmer that I know of, none of us will deal with somebody that we don't respect. You know, if they're not up to snuff, we'll go elsewhere, and that's probably what we saw. I hadn't thought about that that way, but you probably are very right.

NP: I'm sort of smiling because I'm thinking of the B.O. issue. [Laughing]

JP: Well, I brought that up because so often this would be one of the highlights. You know, if it was really on a slow Thursday afternoon, you bring that up. [Laughs] But no, we would get so much lark out of that. On a Friday afternoon at 2:00, they would have to do a picture. You'd get brown paper on the floor, and they had to do--. Oh, I can't remember how it was. They had to do a map, a picture map, of how they were going to attract more business or something. It was so great. Some of them have so much imagination after they're able to get out of their shell. Once they can leave their shell at the door, they just--. So that was some of them that--. Some weeks were better than others. [Laughing]

[1:20:53]

NP: Some groups were better than others.

JP: Yeah, that's right.

NP: Yeah. So what was happening in UGG, then, that--. Like you were, I think, at the time where changes in the whole industry were starting up.

JP: There was, yes. I think--. Let me see. Well, we would have had a major change in the upper management of things, a very new management group, and they were looking at things. They had grown up with some very good mentoring of old, but they were, I think, probably at that time you could see a change in management style, that they wanted to get ahead of the game, do some things differently. That may have been part of it, not to their detriment. In one sense, you might say, "Well, they did that, but they didn't survive." [Dog barks]

[Audio pauses]

NP: [Laughs] Well, we paused a bit there for a dog interruption, and we were talking about the change in management style. They wanted to get ahead of the game.

JP: Well, in one sense, I guess it was a new management style and a younger group of managers that were at the head of UGG at the time. I think that may have been part of what precipitated the fact that we needed to get this training out to elevator managers to become a little better people rather than the rough and ready--.

NP: Better skills.

JP: Better skills. A smoother skill group. I think maybe that might have been part of what precipitated that out of there. It was to prepare people for future--. As well as more management skills, it's a matter of people skills that they were needing also, and that's where the soft skills came in. It wasn't computer skills—that came later on—but it was really more people skills.

NP: Yeah. You had mentioned--. I think we had stopped the tape when you had said, “Well, they may have said that the company didn't survive anyway,” and that's sort of where we were interrupted.

JP: Oh. No, I think what I was meaning--. It's probably not a good thing to put down there. [Laughs]

NP: Well, I probably actually misquoted you.

JP: Well, I think what I was maybe aiming at—it shouldn't be quoted anyway—was this new group of managers came in, and they did well for a while, but of course, the company did not survive under them. So call it whatever you want. That's not--.

NP: So what happened? Like, it was a time of a lot of change. It wasn't just their company. It was just--.

JP: Oh, no. It was a lot of change. There again, I was out of United Grain by the time they dissolved and all the rest, so I was not there. If I would have lived it, I'm sure I would have had a different look at it, because maybe they weren't large enough to survive. But as I look at Sask Pool, and I looked at their share prices at one time—I should have bought some—but they were bankrupt, and yet they were able to come out. And now they're the big kids on the block. So there's something quite different in philosophies there. But.

NP: And there are those that say that it's not really Sask Pool anymore either, that it's--.

JP: Oh, it's no. No, no. It's all--.

NP: Money from outside the country.

[1:25:00]

JP: It's strictly money out of New York that's doing it, and that's fair. I mean, hey, it's Viterra. It's not Sask Pool. It's just a large company. Yeah.

NP: I'm going to check back with some of my official questions here, although we've actually covered an awful lot of them just because of what you've said in your comments on the various jobs that you've had. A lot of people have trouble with this question, but I'll throw it out anyway since it's here. What might surprise people about the work that you did?

JP: Well, I did so many things. [Laughs]

NP: That's a surprise in itself!

JP: No, I mean, I didn't interview for many places, but every time they said, "Oh, jeez. Your resume, we didn't know where to--. It's a book!" [Laughing] I didn't know what not to put in. I don't know. What would surprise people? I guess the most surprising thing is that I had so many different positions in one company. I think that was--.

NP: Yeah. With an agriculture diploma.

JP: Yeah. Mmhmm.

NP: That agriculture took you in so many different directions.

JP: Yeah. I think that's probably true. I'm just going to let the dog in here before he barks.

[Audio pauses]

NP: All right. I'd like to ask a question about your time with UGG before we move on to talk a little bit about your career path with the Canadian Wheat Board. What are you most proud of in the work that you did in that time? There's so much to choose from. Is there something you can identify as--?

JP: Most proud of? Hm. I think probably I had a lot of them, but the one that I would think about is where I think most people benefited most from would be, I think, I alluded to Vancouver '89, and I will admit that I was kind of the instigator of that saying we should. It was just, actually, my boss and I and another chap sitting over lunch one day, and I said, "You know, we should." And that was where it started from. But because we were able to take 385 people out to Vancouver in three different groups of 100-

and-some each and put them up in the Hotel Vancouver for three or four days each and run a meeting, take them to the brand-new terminal, take them out on the port to show them from the water side, and expand their knowledge that way. I think that would be the place that I would say I'm most proud of, and that's just a wink of the eye of my tenure there. But that was where I think I would say would be--.

NP: Good. The Canadian Wheat Board, you moved onto there, but we didn't really talk about—other than the rail transportation when you were working in rail transportation—your interaction with or reaction to--. I'll leave that fairly open. It would have been out there, even when you first started in field operations. So just speak about the Wheat Board.

JP: Well, interesting you say that because prior to joining the Canadian Wheat Board as a career, when I was travelling, I very seldom met the Canadian Wheat Board travellers. There were people out there, and there still are, but I very seldom met them. I would hear about the damn travellers in town. "We had to watch so-and-so," and whatever that meant. [Laughing] I never got into that very far. But then as I moved into the office and was in charge of some of the training courses, I would take people over to the Canadian Wheat Board for both transportation and to meet the commissioners and whatnot. But that was kind of the extent of where I really knew the Wheat Board. With my stint in transportation, I got to know the transportation people over there, but that was kind of the extent of my connections with the Wheat Board until such time as I applied for and got the position of manager of area representatives.

[1:30:00]

NP: Did you have a philosophy about the Wheat Board?

JP: My philosophy was that it was a good organization even though the damn travellers were there. [Laughing] Yeah. No, it was always my philosophy that the Canadian Wheat Board was and is a good organization, and it still is even though I haven't worked for them, and I'm retired from them. But I do have a very staunch philosophy that it's good.

NP: Would that have been a general philosophy of the farmers that you worked with and the elevator managers?

JP: No. Actually, well, probably the United Grain Growers was very much against the Canadian Wheat Board. Yes, I think I could say the vast majority of managers—both elevator managers and management—was, "Get out of our way. We can do better without them." I disagreed, and I still disagree with that philosophy. Mmhmm.

NP: Okay. So you left UGG, and then so what year would it have been when you went to the Wheat Board? Within a decade.
[Laughing]

JP: Oh, God! I think it was 1994/1995, thereabouts, that I joined the Canadian Wheat Board as manager of area representatives. That was managing the country staff of 18 reps who are in the country, and they—at the time that I took them over—they were policemen. They were the Wheat Board policemen. Well, because I--.

NP: Were they the travellers these people were talking about?

JP: They were the travellers, yeah.

NP: And that's what they were called, the travellers, by the--?

JP: Yeah.

NP: Okay.

JP: Yeah, they were--. They had a different term, but they were the Wheat Board travellers, and they went around and policed everything. They did have to collect numbers as far as the amount of grain that was going to be delivered. That was one of their main jobs, but also it was to police the Wheat Board Act. Well, that was a bit of a misnomer in my head, so it wasn't very long until I began to make some changes within the group and say, "You know, we want to be nicer people. I, for one, want to be a nicer person because I ain't a policeman." [Laughing] So we began to broaden their scope out to being people that farmers could approach. "Can you tell me about the programs that the Wheat Board have, and can you help me out?" Rather than just the big negative, "No, we can never do that." All of a sudden, farmers liked us or began to like us.

NP: Problem solvers.

JP: Problem solvers, yes. Now, in Alberta, you can never be liked if you're a Wheat Board person. [Laughs] You wear a target on your back continually. [Laughing] But be that aside. We did become problem solvers and related with farmers, related with the industry, began to tell the industry what we were able to do, what we wanted to do. The new programs that we began to come out with, we were the spokesmen on that and broadened their knowledge, be it elevator managers and/or farmers.

NP: So would you say that that was your biggest challenge there was to change this--?

JP: It was when I walked in the door. I mean, well, not when I walked in the door, but as I began to take over the position. But also, as I began to shop this idea around, I found within the organization in the head office, there was people that realized, “Yes, we had been doing something old for too long.” I was fortunate in having good commissioners with the Lorne Hehns of the world who could see things ahead and broaden the base of things and kind of agreed, “Yes, let’s go try it.” It was tough on the people that were working for me because they were of the old school, and some of them didn’t feel comfortable getting up, speaking at small groups. But as we both trained them and as they retired and got new people in, then it became, yeah, they were the spokesmen of the organization out there. So it began to work quite well, and it's working better all the time.

[1:35:06]

NP: How long did you stay there?

JP: I was there about 12 years I think it was. Yeah. Wonderful place to work. If I had to do it over again, I would probably apply to them early on in my career, [laughs] because it is a mind-opening place. There were so many challenges there.

NP: Just explain more about that, the wonderful place to work, the mind opening.

JP: Well, yes. Wonderful place to work insofar as the people that you’re in contact with were knowledgeable, smart, knowledgeable, personable. A number of them, world travellers who were willing to share their knowledge with you, and if you brought farmers in on a tour, open them up. I mean, they would tell about their experiences here and there. But I found them just a very open group to work with, and I was fortunate in getting to know some of them throughout that organization because they probably got to know me whether they wanted to or not because I made the point. [Laughs] But no, it’s a great spot. Or it was when I worked there.

NP: Changes occur in the time you were there?

JP: You know, changes were occurring. They’ve occurred a lot after I left. Probably with the new federal government change, that has changed them an awful lot to what I was accustomed to. I think there is a feeling there that I wouldn’t enjoy right now.

NP: A feeling?

JP: Of insecurity. We went through insecurity, I mean, but not to that extent. I mean, farmers hated us, but when--. Well, I shouldn't say all. There was a small element of farmers that disliked the Board and whatnot. But when I was there and I was at arms-length to the ministers in charge, but they were always on our side, whereas under the administration that there is now, that's definitely not it. I think that's got to be terribly tough on management of any kind there to be doing that but realize that you have people on the board who are definitely wanting to do away with the Canadian Wheat Board as well as a minister that wants that. I think that's just dreadful. I cannot see why farmers could put up with it.

NP: So when you say farmers disliked the Canadian Wheat Board, a necessary evil in the eyes of some and a downright unnecessary evil in others? Or--?

JP: I think there's a small minority who could do a lot better without the Canadian Wheat Board, economically. There is the vast majority that are doing better because of the monopoly the Canadian Wheat Board has. And there is that small minority who are very vocal on their thoughts, and the vast majority who sit on their hands and don't say anything. That's always going to be the way, but that's always the frustrating part of it, when you know the vast majority are with you, but they don't say anything.

NP: The silent majority.

JP: It's a silent majority. A lot of us, we do that too at times. [Laughs] But I found that in my travels. It was always tough.

NP: So if you look back on that part of your career, what are you most proud of?

JP: Probably beginning to make the change as we look at that group of people. And I say beginning because it's an ongoing change that they're in. But I think making that first change, which was very subtle, but, I mean, it came about. That would be probably--. Well, there again, because of the subtle changes, we did so many things that were unheard of. You know, taking tours to Vancouver, taking tours to Thunder Bay, getting farmers--. I mean, hey, they paid their way, but we showed them. And also bringing, here again, being a part of bringing numerous farmers in here to train them for a week on the grain industry. That was unheard of. It wasn't altogether my doing but, hey, very definitely part of the "Why don't we?" So I guess those would be the things that I'm most proud of.

[1:40:24]

NP: Just taking a broader look at your time in the industry, starting right back to where you started as a boy on the farm—and you still, I know from having talked to you, you still have an interest in what’s happening—what do you see as the big changes, the impact of those, and perhaps where things are heading?

JP: I’m not sure what to say. The impact, if it was an impact on me that we’re thinking of or an impact on the industry. Good lord, I hate to say how many years that would be. [Laughs] But if you look back 50 years, 55 years, and say, “My gosh.” The impact that that change has had-- On me, it’s been wonderful. It’s been a broadening experience, my gosh. When I go to reunions of classmates, and I see them, hey, they’re probably more rich in a way, but my God, I don’t think anybody’s had the experiences I’ve had. I’m saying, “Okay.” As far as future goes, that’s always a most interesting one because if we could really forecast the future, that would be great. But I guess I look at agriculture., maybe Ag in the overall, it’s got a wonderful future, and it’s going to be just ongoing. Farmers of tomorrow are going to have to be so clued into so many things. They’re not going to be driving tractors as we know them. I mean, some of them will be, but they’re operating \$10 and 20 million businesses, and they’re good businesspeople. They have to be.

As far as the grain industry goes, sure, we’re going to see some changes, but I don’t know how we can see too many other changes than we’ve seen. We’ve kind of peaked in a way as far as changes as we will see them in the country elevators. I don’t see that we’re going to make too many other humongous changes. You might see a different colour on the logo, but I tend to think you won’t see too many more or too many less of anything. You’ll see managers who are managing, well, perhaps larger numbers, likely more one-stop shops insofar as they may provide more services. But then again, the vast majority provide all the services except the banker now. So I don’t know about the grain industry there, just what we may see in the change there. But I think agriculture, though, we’ll just an ongoing change. I don’t think it will be escalating as much because I think we’ve seen such humongous changes over the past 20 years that, here again, it’s plateaued a little. You’ll see farms getting larger. We will. Hey, now you see 20,000-acre farms in Saskatchewan.

NP: And how big was your family farm?

JP: We were only 1,000 acres. There again, it’s not unheard of in Manitoba, but Saskatchewan, you know, you get the 20,000, 15-20s—not unheard of. There’s not many of them. There are some larger. There again, I keep thinking about one time I had to do a look at the industry for the board of directors. So I said in closing, I said, “Now, I think one opportunity we have is we export grain, but we should import wives.” “What the hell are you doing, Poole?” [Laughing] “Well,” I said, “in some of my travels, these 20-acre farms are operated by bachelors because they’re located 70, 80, 110 miles away from Regina or Saskatoon. Not bad guys, some of them, but they can’t attract a wife because the wife is a professional, and she wants to be close by someplace where she can do her profession.” And I said, “I think we’ve got to import wives.” [Laughing] You’ve got to say it tongue in cheek. You’ve

got to know some of those guys around the table saying, “Oh, jeez. Get rid of this guy fast.” They haven’t done it yet! [Laughing] It’s always a good closing.

[1:45:38]

NP: Yes! Well. It will be interesting. The changes, you think on the whole positive?

JP: In the changes I’ve seen you mean? Or in the--?

NP: Yes. Yeah.

JP: Oh, yes. They have been positive. Yeah. There probably has been the odd hiccup where you really have to say, “Now, why did that change happen?” But no, overall, it’s been a positive change right throughout. I couldn’t think that it hasn’t been in any way shape or form.

NP: Good. Now, before I let you go—and we’re narrowing in on our two-hour mark—so there’s just a couple of general questions. What is your sense of the role that you and your company—or we can think of the Wheat Board as a company as well—companies played in Canada’s success as an international grain trader? You know, a little country, a few people.

JP: Well, as far as the Canadian Wheat Board goes, I mean, it kind of stands on its own as far as we are the leader in Canada through the Canadian Wheat Board. And the Canadian Grain Commission [CGC] is such a leader in the overall grain industry as far as quality goes. That’s the big key right there. Here again, is being diluted and done away with right now as we speak, unfortunately. But that’s one of the things. I think if I look back to United Grain Growers, they did some interesting things in some of the exports they did, but gosh, that goes back so damn far. I can’t even remember it. Dusty might have touched on-- Did you remember--? What the heck did they do? Well, the United Grain Growers was huge in the yellow mustard field exporting to French—and exporting into French would be in New York—and also to France, I think, it was in the brown mustard. Those were a couple of instances that I remember where we kind of cornered the market at one time on some yellow mustard. That goes back in history so far.

NP: So is think making like fancy French mustards out of Canadian mustard product?

JP: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. We had the highest quality mustard. French, they wanted our yellow mustard, and it seemed to me that even though we as consumers would buy the mustard out of France-- I’m trying to think of the name.

NP: Dijon?

JP: Dijon. It seemed to me that we used to export our brown and oriental in there so they could manufacture it to bring here. [Laughing] But that's what we do with the durum wheat too. We send it to Italy so they can manufacture it and send it back. [Laughs]

NP: Yes. Why does that happen, do you think?

JP: Oh, it's just the way it works. Got to have "Made in Italy."

NP: Ah.

JP: It's just manufactured, but made in Italy, so it's better.

NP: So maybe we need a little bit more of a PR promotion of--.

JP: Oh, we've been working on it.

NP: Yeah?

JP: Yeah.

NP: Good. Are there any questions that I should have asked you that I didn't ask?

JP: Oh, I don't think so. Gosh, I think--. No, you've touched on all. Yeah, I just jotted down a couple of things because I didn't know where we were going on this thing.

NP: We like to keep you guessing. [Laughs]

JP: Yeah. Well, that's the way to do it. That's right. Oh, I can't think of anything we've left unturned.

NP: Good. Just a question or two, again, about the future of our project.

JP: Oh, sure.

NP: Do you have any memorabilia that, at some point in your life, you think you would like to have preserved somewhere?

[1:50:03]

JP: I've got--. Oh, gosh. I've got some stuff around that I've collected, like some old hand sieves. Like old, old, old, old, old. Where did I put the damn stuff? That people said, "Jeez, we don't want to throw this away." And of course, I'm such a packrat, I have to figure out where it is. [Laughs] But I do have some of that stuff that whenever you get a place to store it, let me know. [Laughs]

NP: Okay. Or if you can at some point find it, even if we had an inventory or photograph of it--.

JP: Oh, yeah. Okay.

NP: That would be good. So think about that.

JP: Yeah, okay. I'll try and find them and send it in. Yeah.

NP: That would be great because then, I mean, if something were to happen to you, and you're the only one that knew what it was-- . Of course, we could always have a website that said, "What is this?"

JP: Yeah. You might have to because I'm not sure of--. [Laughing] Yeah.

NP: And if we ever did get our centre going—or even if we do, more likely, we'd have a website—what do you think are the really important pieces to make available to the public? Like there's a lot of collections in university archives or national archives, but there's not a lot available to the general public. So what would you like to see featured, commemorated?

JP: Well. I suppose, there again, the general public wouldn't know what these things are, and here again, I think of the old, I think, it's called the 4-in-1 scale or something. I've got two or three of them. They're brass. You know, you hold them here, and they've got a scale on here, and you fill it up with grain here and then weigh it out there, and it tells you how many pounds a bushel it is. They're just beautiful to look at. I mean, when they were closing up elevators, these things were left laying around. They're brass.

I'm saying, "Jeez, they're lovely." But you have to put an explanation on it. That would be one because they're really nice. The scales. You know, they had very intricate little scales there. Some of them beautiful those scales, the old ones, for there again, taking a little pot of grain and weighing it, and that would tell you how many pounds to the bushel it was going to be. Then I suppose, the old dockage tester. There was one with a crank, as I remember it. You put the grain in here, and it had sieves in it. You'd rotate it by hand before it got electrified, and that would take the dockage out of your grain.

NP: That wouldn't be an Emerson kicker?

JP: Well, it was before that.

NP: Oh, okay.

JP: Before the Emerson kicker.

NP: I have an Emerson kicker.

JP: Oh, that's good. There was some that were before that, and there again, don't know--.

NP: Is that in your collection?

JP: No, it's not. It's--.

NP: Oh. Maybe nobody's collection.

JP: No. Well, I'd have to look out in Austin Museum. They might. I don't know. Here again, there's nothing special about these round sieves that everybody took grain samples. The grain probes, they were a natural thing which you'd have. And of course, dockage testers. Now, they're getting very automated now, but before my time, they used to have to boil. They had a burner, and they boiled. I don't know how they worked.

NP: Boiled something.

JP: Boiled something to get them to know how much moisture there was in the grain.

NP: Hm!

JP: That seems to me--. There again, you have to get an explanation. Those are some of the real old things I think of. But then, of course, you've got to think more up to date maybe.

NP: Or even the stories. Like the sort of overall story that needs to be told.

JP: Mmhhh. Well, if--. Actually, gee wiz. Oh, I think, yeah, it would be in the library. God, I don't know whose library now. Don Fraiser did the histories of the local boards for United Grain Growers for the 100th anniversary or the 80th anniversary. And Don did an excellent job of researching those, the history of how those elevators were built, you know. I don't know where those books would be.

NP: I suspect, well, UGG has an archive. I think they may have--.

JP: Have they still got--?

NP: They may have donated it to the University of Manitoba.

JP: Oh, I believe, maybe.

NP: I think they have.

JP: I think maybe that's right.

NP: Yeah.

JP: Those books would be good in looking at some of the histories of some of the country elevators. Yes, he did a good--. Actually, Carol Rogers might know. I think they're at the university. I'm sure, because I know there was some discussion of where could they go because they were--. That, you could get some history. They would be good, and he did a good job of writing it. Don was a good writer. What else? I'm not sure.

[1:55:30]

NP: Yeah. Just keep it in mind. If something else comes to mind, give me a call. Let me know.

JP: Yeah.

NP: Are there any others that we should interview? I know I've talked to you about this before, and I have a few. You mentioned Lorne Hehn, and I think somebody mentioned--.

JP: Well, Lorne would not be good, unfortunately. He'd had that stroke and a heart attack at the same time. I visit him over the phone every once in a while. He's in Saskatoon, but he's so vague. Otherwise, he would have been a wonderful guy to interview. But the same as Mac Runciman, the both of them. I mean, Mac's gone, but Lorne would have been wonderful. Let me see. Was there anyone else in that board of directors? Let me see. Not--. I'm trying to think of the real hotshots in that board, you know, if--. No, they're--. Now, have you talked to Adrian Measner? We talked about that at one time, and I'm not sure--.

NP: Yes. I actually saw him the other day at Mission Terminal because that's where he is now, and Bruce introduced me to him again, and I said that he's on our list. But he's--. Even you are really too young for the ones we've been talking to. [Laughs]

JP: Well, no, he is. He's too young, but he has a depth of knowledge. Maybe not what you want. I mean, Adrian—and I have such a high regard for him—but maybe not in the deep depth there.

NP: I think, like, he's certainly on our list. It's just been--.

JP: If you get a chance.

NP: Going to the retired people first, and then working our way down.

JP: No, that's good. You've got Dusty, which is grain.[inaudible]. Hm. Who else would be--? I can say Don Fraiser, and Don has a depth of knowledge, but right now he's in Deer Lodge. I dropped to see him the other day, and he's a great visitor, but he's short of breath now. So he can only talk about 15 minutes, and he kind of runs out. He was my first boss as field rep.

NP: Oh, really? Okay.

JP: So he was in field services for United Grain right from 1947 through. So he's got-- I don't think he would be what you'd want. Who else would there be? I just came from a retirees' luncheon with the old folks, but I looked around the group, and I said, "Ah, there's nobody here from United Grain."

NP: Now, United Grain Growers was in Manitoba. Were they right across the Prairies?

JP: They were right across the Prairies, yeah.

NP: So I'll let you think upon this. We do at one point have to branch out and catch people in Saskatchewan and Alberta, and so just think about it and send me an email, perhaps, if some names come to mind. Even if it's in the other provinces.

JP: Yeah. I thought about that. The one storyteller of years gone by was Nils Nystrom. He was actually a manager of country ops. But there again, well, he's out in Kelowna. No, not Kelowna. Close there. But I don't know. He would know the characters. He'd be able to fill out the characters because we used to-- He's a good storyteller. But in Alberta, there again, it was never head office. There you'd get the characters. But as far as the depth of the grain industry as I see it, you're here, you'll get somebody out of Regina if you could think of the Sask Pool group.

NP: Yeah. But most of the head office stuff was happening here for UGG?

[2:00:03]

JP: The head office, oh, yeah, it was all here.

NP: Yeah.

JP: That's kind of it with all of the--

NP: Unless some retired back to where they came from, but long-termers probably got really used to Winnipeg.

JP: Well, most of the long-termers-- I mean, there would be some. Here again, Albert Canton, he was with United Grain for a long time. Albert's in the West Coast now, but here again, I keep thinking, "Okay, what could Albert add to what you've got?" And I'm not sure.

NP: And some people are storytellers, and some people aren't.

JP: Yeah. And I'm not a storyteller, I'm just not sure if these guys could fill any big void. That's why I'm being kind of choosy. I shouldn't be. [Laughing]

NP: Well! I'm going to thank you very much for a wonderful session.

JP: It's been a great afternoon, yeah.

NP: Yes! It's been very good. And filled in pieces of the puzzle that haven't been filled in before, so thank you so much.

JP: Well, you're more than welcome, of course. It's been my pleasure. Mmhmm.

End of interview.