

**Narrator:** Dennis Portman (DP)

**Company Affiliations:** Manitoba Pool Elevators, Canadian Wheat Board (CWB)

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**Interviewer:** Nancy Perozzo (NP)

**Recorder:** Nancy Perozzo (NP)

**Transcriber:** Sarah Lorenowich

**Summary:** Retired vice president of transportation logistics for the Canadian Wheat Board Dennis Portman discusses his career in Canada's grain industry in both the terminal elevators and Prairie offices. He describes his first grain role on the cleaner deck of Manitoba Pool 3 elevator, learning about grain varieties and quickly moving up to foreman position. He recalls the culture of elevator workers and his exposure to all operating MPE elevators in Thunder Bay. He discusses his move to MPE's head office in rail transportation logistics, working with the Canadian Wheat Board on railcar supply and allocation. Portman then describes his move to the CWB in transportation logistics as a block operator in charge of car supply. He recounts the major changes during his 11 years in the position, like shifts in eastward and westward movement, rail rationalization, hopper cars, and the introduction of the Grain Transportation Agency. He discusses his move to Seaboard operations, dealing with terminal supply and transportation coordination at a higher level and meeting with major grain players to forecast future grain crops and sales. He describes the major challenges of the positions, like working more closely with lake and ocean shippers, coordinating with the Lake Shippers Clearance Association, lining up grain stocks with rail and ship freight, working with West Coast idiosyncrasies, and working with the port of Churchill. He also recounts his close interactions with grain companies, farmers, terminal superintendents, the Canadian Grain Commission, and customers. Other topics discussed include the story of the *Windoc* ship accident, the demise of the CWB, predictions for the future of the industry and its various components, and predictions for the port of Thunder Bay.

**Keywords:** Manitoba Pool Elevators; Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Grain transportation—rail; Grain transportation—ships; Terminal grain elevators—St. Lawrence Seaway; Terminal grain elevators—British Columbia; Grain elevators—equipment and supplies; Grain cleaning; Grain varieties; Railcar allocation; Grain shipping logistics; Block shipping system; Rail line rationalization; Hopper cars; Grain Transportation Agency; Canadian National Railway; Canadian Pacific Railway; Lakers; Ocean-going vessels; Lake Shippers Clearance Association; Shipping accidents; *Windoc*; Grain farmers/producers; Canadian Grain Commission; Grain export destinations; MPE Pool 3; MPE Pool 2; MPE Pool 1; AWP Pool 9; Churchill

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: It is November 20, 2012, and I am in Winnipeg. I will ask the person being interviewed to introduce himself.

DP: My name is Dennis Portman.

NP: And, Dennis, if you could just quickly summarize your career. We'll come back and we will deal with it in pieces, but just for a quick summary of your career in the grain trade—when it started and when it ended.

DP: It started in 1970, September the 15th was my first day at Manitoba Pool 3. I worked in Thunder Bay for five years. In 1975, I went to Manitoba Pool's head office in Winnipeg, worked there until '78, took a winter off, and started at the Wheat Board—I think it was July 2nd of 1979. I retired early in September of 2007.

NP: Okay, good! So, you know that our project is Voices of the Grain Trade, and the core of our interviews up to this point have been either people in Thunder Bay or people in Winnipeg. So, it's really great to interview somebody who's had experience in both places. I'm going to start way back as your time as a boy in Thunder Bay. What was your first introduction to elevators? Was it before you started working in 1970?

DP: No. I was born and raised in Kenora.

NP: Ah! Okay.

DP: But I went to university for two years in Thunder Bay. Met a girl from Thunder Bay, so I wanted to stay there. Actually, I knew nothing about the grain elevators. Really, I walked into an unemployment office at the time in early September of, as I said, '70 looking for a job, and they sent me to Pool 3. As I say, the rest is history. So, that was the start. That was my introduction.

NP: Now, Keewatin had a flour mill.

DP: Flour mill, right.

NP: Anything that you recall about it?

DP: No, I knew they were there. In fact, I'm trying to think. There may have even been some flour milling going on when I was there, but not familiar with it. There was also a Searle Grain in Kenora, so there's one there as well, which was even earlier. Now, I'm not sure if that was milling or that was just storage, but there was a couple of elevators in Kenora. But no, I was young, and they didn't mean a whole bunch to me then.

NP: When you say *in Kenora*, so in the town of Kenora itself as opposed to Keewatin area?

DP: Yes, yes. The Keewatin, the milling was still going on I suppose while I was growing up, but I'm not certain that there was anything going on in the facility in Kenora by then.

NP: Now, when you went into the employment office then in Thunder Bay, the--. **[Audio pauses]** Okay. We took a bit of a pause there to let Missy finish lapping up her water. So, we were starting to talk about when you went to the employment office in Thunder Bay in 1970. Were you looking for any particular job?

DP: No. This was just something that was going to be temporary until I found what I was really looking for because I hadn't finished my degree then. But I had fooled around at university enough and realized it was time I probably got out and got a job. I didn't know what I wanted to do, and they didn't seem to have anything really to plug me into, so they said, "Well, why don't you try to report to Pool 3?" Like I said, the rest is history. I went there knowing it would only be temporary, and I finished my career in the grain industry. [Laughs] So.

NP: So, when you went then to Pool 3, not being familiar with elevators, can you think back to either the day that you went—or if that was the first day you started—the sights, the sounds, your reactions? Any memories of what it was like when you first showed up?

DP: Having not been familiar with—well, not being familiar with it—I guess the activity. I started the very first day on the cleaning floor. So, I was immediately exposed to the dust, of course, and the rest of it, which, at the time, was something that I hadn't experienced, but not something that bothered me for a whole long time. I got used to that pretty easily. Being September, being on the water, it was still fairly pleasant. I guess I didn't realize how busy it was because in those days, once I started there, you were working at least six days a week and then sometimes overtime depending on what they were doing. Things were very busy then. So no, it was easy enough to get into. As I said, other than inhaling the dust and blowing your nose and seeing how dirty it was, [laughs] short of that there wasn't anything that really jumped out at me, no.

**[0:05:17]**

One of the things, though, when I started, I couldn't have told you the difference between flax and wheat or barley, but that certainly didn't take very long. But no, it wasn't intimidating. It could've been a lot worse because the day I started there was quite a few people were starting about then. I guess they were gearing up for the big push for the fall. Through the summer, always a little quieter, but by mid-September they were gearing up again because the crop was coming off in western Canada, I suppose. But there was a number of us started that day, and I think I lucked out. I got put in the cleaning area where the machines were, and I wasn't out in the car shed where they were dumping cars or shovelling cars, depending on where you were at. So no, I think I was kind of lucky in that respect.

NP: What about the culture of the grain elevator in those days?

DP: I want to answer the question as best I can. By culture, Nancy, what are you thinking?

NP: Well, different workplaces have different cultures.

DP: Okay! I kind of thought along that line. I had been born and raised in Kenora, which was a mill town. The first thing I noticed, not in a negative way, but there was a very large workforce of both Italian and Finnish workers, which I had never been exposed to. So, that was a little different. Now, it wasn't something that I was totally unfamiliar with simply because I played basketball at Lakehead University, and I did play with an Italian fellow, and I got to meet his family and have supper with them. We also had a Finnish player on the team. So, it wasn't cultures that I was totally unfamiliar with, but I was surprised at how many workers were in the terminals from those ethnic groups. Having come from Kenora where, I said, mostly basically-- Well, I'm from an English background, but certainly we didn't have those kind of cultures in Kenora. So, that was new for me. It was interesting in that respect.

NP: Was it busy?

DP: Very. Like I said, I started on a 4:00 to 12:00 shift. I don't recall whether they were working three shifts at that time, but we were at least two shifts six days a week. I started in September, and I think about the end of December when most of us got laid off. From the day I started until then we worked, as I said, at least six days a week and sometimes Sundays or sometimes evenings loading refuse screenings and that sort of thing. So yeah, it was hectic, more than I expected it. There's two things that caught my attention. One, I was a little surprised the wages seemed pretty decent because I had worked in the paper mill when I was going to university. But the paper mill was five days a week and that was it, whereas there we were working, as I said, far more extra hours than that. So, that part was interesting and something I wasn't used to.

NP: It was probably about that time that they started hiring university students.

DP: There wasn't a lot of us, but yes.

NP: And how did they fit in? Because, as you mentioned, a lot of these people would have been around the elevators for a long time, started young. A number of people from the war vets coming back would still be on when you started.

DP: They were. I would have been, I suspect, early on with respect to university students, I don't think there was a lot of them. Whether that opened any doors for me, I don't know, because I don't suppose the day I got hired that made any difference to them. But after five years being there, I'm sure that's one of the reasons that I ended up in Winnipeg, having had a university background—and very few working at the time did. I would have been in the initial group. Certainly, I think that as long as you did your job, of course, people did take note of the fact that I did come from a post-secondary education.

NP: Who were your supervisors in those days?

DP: At that time, the supervisor in Pool 3 was Percy Height. Bill Barkley was a foreman. Freddy Kaser was one I remember. He took me under his belt for whatever reason. He was very good to me, and I learned a lot because of him. I got opportunities because of Freddy. He was the shift supervisor the day I walked in. He said, "Well, why don't you go down and try the cleaning deck?" I did, and that worked out quite well. Wasn't long before he had me in a foreman position. I was cleaner-deck foreman before the first time I got laid off. So, somewhere between September and December, he already had pushed me up a little bit to try to help me along. He obviously must have thought he saw something in me that he thought would work out. But anyways, he took me under his wing. He's one I remember very well.

**[0:10:54]**

NP: So, the cleaner deck, what challenges did you face there? What are they typical challenges for cleaner deck people?

DP: Well, in the wintertime it's staying warm. [Laughs] In those days, they didn't encourage us to sit around and do nothing. If you did, they said, "Well, there's a broom out there. That's how you keep warm here." You know what? There wasn't any real challenges other than getting used to the, like I said, to the environment, to the dust, that kind of thing. But it wasn't a difficult job. When I started Pool 3, I think we had, oh, 10 or 12 cleaners in the area that I worked in, and they had a person—two of us at least,

sometimes three—two for the most part looking after the three sets of cleaners. So, it was a job that kept you busy, but it wasn't backbreaking or anything like that.

I guess the best part was if you were going to make a career out of it—which I didn't think I would, but that I did—was being in the cleaning floor is I was exposed to all the grains very quickly and knew what to look for. So, that was an education pretty quickly on what grains we were going through, and how you handled them, and what clean looked like as opposed to dirty, and all the rest of it. It was noisy in there, again, but when I was going to university and working at the paper mill, that was a noisy environment as well. So, it wasn't something that was difficult to get used to, but it was always there.

NP: As a Manitoba Pool employee versus a Saskatchewan Wheat Pool or a Richardson's employee, any sense of pride with your organization versus the others? Was that ever a factor that people said, "Oh well, gee, too bad you work for such-and-such because I work for such-and-such"?

DP: Not so much that, but the one thing that you were always interested in--. It didn't take me long to realize that there was targets with respect to volumes. I mean, you wanted to be one of the top handling terminals on the waterfront. There was some of that, but not so much Saskatchewan Wheat Pool versus Manitoba Pool. For me, the only real exposure—especially the first little while—to the fact that there was other companies out there was I initially got a ride to work with a fellow who worked at Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. I knew there was other elevators there, but not in that respect. Certainly, there was pride in how much you were handling. You always wanted to make sure you were getting a laker at your dockside as opposed to somebody else. So, you knew they were out there, but there wasn't that kind of a push.

In fact, even until I was done, there was always a certain amount of—even though I guess they were competitors—there was a certain amount of cooperation between terminals and superintendents. They all had the same kind of issues to deal with. I guess once I got that far down the line—I wasn't aware of it initially—but I was surprised how cooperative it was and how they met and that sort of thing. So, there was a bond between companies, even though you were competitors.

NP: This is out of sequence, but because you raised the issue, having conducted several interviews now with people from various elevator companies, that seems to have been something that changed, that cooperation.

DP: And it may have.

NP: But not something that you noticed, even from your position in the Wheat Board?

DP: So, are you suggesting that it went from cooperation to less cooperation? You know, I never saw that, and I worked there until, well, I retired in '07. Well, I should back up. For the most part, the core group cooperated. Now, when a new player came into the picture, there was very little if probably no cooperation with—and I'm speaking of Mission Terminal, of course—but I did see the cooperation still, for the most part, with the terminal operators that had been there with the core companies.

**[0:15:30]**

NP: Now, I can't recall, did you say who was the superintendent at Manitoba Pool at that time?

DP: When I was there?

NP: Yeah.

DP: It was Percy Height.

NP: Okay. Now, we'll move on from there, but before we do, you said you were there from '70 to--?

DP: '75.

NP: '75. Always on the cleaner floor?

DP: Well, yes and no. Cleaning floor, I started. I was already cleaning deck foreman by the time December rolled around in '70. Somewhere in '71, I moved over to Pool 9, because Freddy Kaiser went over there. I was cleaner deck foreman there again. There was times when I was shift foreman. Depending on how busy we are and when layoffs started, I even shovelled grain at Pool 9. So, I was in the car shed as a shoveller. Sometimes I was foreman of the car shed. So, you did pretty much everything depending on what time of year and how busy it was. So, it wasn't always there, no, but I had a pretty broad exposure to all aspects of terminal operations because of the opportunities that I got. Like I said, moved over to Pool 9. When we were at Pool 9, we also were responsible for operating Pool 2 when that facility opened. So, I got exposure to 3, 9, and 2 for the most part.

NP: Now, Pool 9, that's a number I'm not familiar with.

DP: It's between UGG [United Grain Growers] and where Saskatchewan Wheat Pool 4 was in Current River.

NP: Ah, Alberta. It was Alberta.

DP: It's torn down now. It was Alberta Wheat Pool. By the time I was there, Manitoba Pool was operating the facility, but it was an AWP. It was Alberta Wheat Pool 9S.

NP: I'm always pleased to interview somebody who's familiar with more than one elevator on the Thunder Bay waterfront. I believe, actually, that the elevators sort of have the personalities because many times they have certain characteristics. Your three elevators, how would you describe them? Likes, dislikes, advantages, disadvantages?

DP: Pool 3 was the largest of the three that I did work in. I finished in Pool 1, but I wasn't there very long. That was in '75 and that's when I moved to Winnipeg, so I was there just for a very short time. Pool 3 was the biggest of the three that I worked in. The one I enjoyed the most, it was a smaller house, was Pool 9. Again, it was a good exposure because when I was at Pool 3, we handled mostly barley and wheat. When I went over to Pool 9, we handled an awful lot of flax, which is something we hadn't handled any of when I was at 3. Major Campbell was the super at Pool 9 when I started there, and Freddy was his second in command. Like I said, Freddy had taken me under his wing and given me lots of opportunities, so I enjoyed Pool 9. Then Pool 2 was operated as a satellite and usually the crew from Pool 9 worked over there. So, that was Freddy and Major Campbell again, so I worked for them there as well.

It was the smallest of the three. Very different though. The other ones, when a laker came in it pulled up in the slip and you loaded it directly from the house, whereas we had a gallery to load vessels at Pool 2 because it was very small, and the slip wasn't very deep. So, we didn't get any of the very large lakers. There was some smaller ones, then, when I started. By the time I finished, there weren't many of those. But Pool 2 was, like I said, another unique experience because of the gallery. You loaded from there. They all were different. Pool 2, we went back to handling more barley and wheat there, but Pool 9 was a flax house for the most part for Manitoba Pool. They're all a bit different, learned something from every one of them because of those diversities.

NP: Did you say when Pool 9 was demolished?

DP: Pool 9 would have gone, I think--. Nancy, I left in '75, and I used to joke that they sent me to Winnipeg so that they wouldn't close any more elevators because I worked at--. When I went from 3, I went to 9, they closed 9, they closed 2. I would think that 9 probably closed in about '73/'74, and Pool 2 along with it. Now, they didn't start pulling 9 down until after I got to Winnipeg, but they did cease operation before I left. So, both 2 and 9 would've closed before '75.

**[0:20:20]**



NP: I mean, Pool 2, obvious why it would be closed down from what you said about difficulties in loading. Why Pool 9?

DP: The only thing I can think of, Nancy, was despite the fact the volumes were still there, they were starting to fall off a little bit. The other thing is, it was a house where we were still shovelling grain. I think that they had gone to dumpers, and we were starting to get some hopper cars by then, but I think for the most part it was the technology. It was the fact that we were still shovelling cars in Pool 9. It wasn't a very large house as far as capacity goes either, so I think it was just a case of--. For the volume they lost, I think they moved it over—the flax anyways—probably moved to Pool 1, and some of the other crops would have moved to Pool 3. But I think it was just a matter of the volumes and the extra capacity was offering Manitoba Pool, they didn't need it anymore.

NP: You were right beside Pool 4, then, where two explosions occurred. Were there any stories you recall about--?

DP: I knew there had been explosion at Pool 4, but that was prior to my starting. But I will say that I worked with somebody at Pool 3 who had been burnt very badly at one of the explosions at Pool 3. He had a very badly scarred hand still and his face was burnt. So, I was aware of the dangers and that there had been explosions, especially through him. I guess, there weren't any—by the time I started—there was none after '70.

NP: Do you remember his name? Doesn't matter if you can't.

DP: I think it was Murph Sokolowski, but I'm--.

NP: Not sure?

DP: It's awful how your memory goes, but no.

NP: You know, I'm really quite amazed when I interview people about work that they did and who they worked with way back because, I mean, I had a long career too and I can't remember names. [Laughs] So, I'm really amazed that anybody remembers names!

DP: I forget some, there's no doubt. [Laughs]

NP: I'm just very fortunate that a lot of the people I interview have really good memories. Before we take you off to Winnipeg then, any other comments that you would like to make about your time working on the Thunder Bay waterfront?

DP: Kind of being somewhat facetious, but I could hardly wait to get out of the terminals and the dust and the rest of it. It's the old proverb, "Be careful what you wish for." Didn't take me long sitting in head office in Winnipeg going, "Oh, I wish I was still back in the terminals!" You know what? I look back and I probably progressed in my career because of the opportunities and the exposure I had in Thunder Bay, knowing how the terminals work, knowing about grains. Well, even at Manitoba Pool, but especially once I went to the Wheat Board, I probably had an experience that was very unique. I probably was the only person that I can remember that came from an actual terminal background. I think that helped me a lot in my career at the Wheat Board especially. So, in that respect it was time well spent.

As it turned out, I guess it was time to move on because things were starting--. We were still doing big volumes then, but it wasn't that many years after when I started to come off some. They were laying people off and you weren't being called back. Elevators were closing. As far as my career, like I said, I wasn't going to stay, and it turned into my lifelong career. The background and the understanding of the business I got in Thunder Bay was very good. It really helped me in my career, for sure.

NP: Obviously things changed once you came to Winnipeg and even in your initial feelings about, "Gee, I wish I was back there." So, initially, what did you miss?

**[0:24:52]**

DP: I'm not sure I was ready for sitting in an office. At times, it felt unproductive. I spent three years in the head office of Manitoba Pool, and after three years I was so disillusioned about lack of opportunity. I did the same job the whole time I was there. I finally, on my own, I said, "I can't do this any longer. I'm quitting. I've had enough of the grain industry." So, I was bound and determined I was not going to work in the grain industry again. [Laughs] I left Manitoba Pool in the fall of '78. My wife and I, who also was having a hard time with her job, we had no children, didn't own a house. We said, "Well, we're going to live in Maui for a winter." So, we went to Maui at the end of September and stayed there until May of '79. When we went there, we both knew that when we came back, we wouldn't be doing the same thing.

I think I sort of poked around looking at jobs for about a week. Went to the Wheat Board and asked them if they had any jobs because I didn't know what else I was going to do. Oh, I looked at a bus driver. I looked at fireman. I applied at the Wheat Board. Before I got home from applying, they'd already called and asked if I wanted a job, and I said, "Well, give me a week or so because I'm just starting to look." Once you knew you had a job out there, I ended up at the Wheat Board. I must say, there's days when we all don't like our jobs, but that was probably--. I enjoyed my career at the Wheat Board. I did. I enjoyed the people I worked with. I enjoyed what I did. If I hadn't got some of the opportunities that I had—I would like to think I earned them—but if I hadn't had

those opportunities, maybe I would've got disillusioned there as well. But once I got into the terminal side, I was more comfortable there. I got opportunities there. I really enjoyed those years that I worked.

NP: How did you make the transition from Thunder Bay to head office with Manitoba Pool elevators? What was the job opportunity there?

DP: I think through Freddy Kaiser—again, the fellow I'd talked about—knew that they were going to have to do something to keep me. I wasn't actively saying, "Freddy--." I didn't hold his toes to the fire saying, "I've got a university degree. This isn't good enough!" But I think they recognized that I wanted to do more than I was doing. The opportunities in Thunder Bay to move beyond a foreman position really weren't there. I think Johnny Mallon was heading up all of Manitoba Pool at the time, and there was quite a number of people obviously way ahead of me before I was ever going to reach those kind of jobs. I think they wanted to keep me in the organization. So, periodically, Fred Beaudry—he managed the terminals from Thunder Bay—he would come down from time to time. I think Freddy was the one who put the word in his ear. They offered me a position, assistant to--. What was the title? I can't think of what the title was, but I came in and worked in the transportation area, in the rail transportation area.

I was responsible for deciding where the cars would be loaded in Manitoba Pool's elevator system, and then that grain was moved to Thunder Bay, working very closely with the Wheat Board. That was my first real exposure to the Wheat Board because they were the ones telling us, "Okay, these are the grains we need. This is how many railcars you get. You decide where they're going to come from." So, I worked in that job. It was good at first, but it didn't take long before it wasn't enough to keep me busy for a whole week at a time because it worked in week cycles. I was hoping that I would get opportunities there. I was hoping that I'd end up in their terminal area in Winnipeg, so that someday maybe I'd get to oversee the terminal operations. That never happened. Nothing changed in the three years I was in head office. It wasn't a challenge. It wasn't stimulating. I got very down about my job is what I did. I said, "I can't do this anymore." It was a lack of opportunity in Winnipeg once I got here, but it was thinking that it was going to open doors and give me opportunities when I got here that I took it. Because it was kind of stifling, that was kind of the reason I went, "Eh, I'd rather be in the terminals." At least there was more variety, more steady work. It seemed like a bit of a challenge compared to what I was doing.

**[0:30:00]**

NP: Almost any job, when you're starting new, presents some challenges, and you begin to recognize what the problems or glitches are in that work. So, even though you caught on pretty quickly, what did you learn about the rail transportation system? What problems were regular, usual problems?

DP: Well, again, it was a good learning experience. It just wasn't something that kept my interest forever. When I came from Thunder Bay, the understanding especially at my level--. I'd only worked there five years. It wasn't like I was in the upper management. You knew the Wheat Board was out there, but I didn't know how it fit in. You knew the railcars arrived everyday in Thunder Bay. You didn't know how that process worked. So, the one good thing I did learn how we interacted with the Wheat Board, how Manitoba Pool's weekly car supply originated. Working with the railways, you learned how service, at times, was good, how it wasn't good, the problems they had spotting railcars in the country, and the problems that it created when cars didn't get spotted in time. It gave me that whole feel for the Wheat Board, the grain companies, and the railway, how that group of three work together. I had no exposure to that before. So, that gave me the other side I didn't have working with the terminals. I mean, I was quite familiar with the Clearance Association in Thunder Bay and how the vessels arrived at the terminals on that end of it, but I didn't know how grain ended up on the track in Thunder Bay. So, that three years gave me all of that experience working with the Board, as I say, working with the railways, and the problems and the issues that that presented.

NP: Were there perennial issues? You can almost guarantee what the next phone call was going to be about?

DP: It was always about shortfall. It was always about your managers in your primary elevators not having enough cars to accommodate all the grain that they thought they could attract from the farmers across Manitoba. So, the perennial problems were how many cars you had to work with or how much capacity you had to ship grain on a weekly basis. Then the problems that the railways often ran into, especially when it got colder in the falls and the winter. The shortfalls even though you've told managers they're getting railcars, they don't show up. All of those issues became your regular headache, your roadblocks, and the things you had to deal with on a weekly basis to try to work around.

NP: So, you had your Maui vacation.

DP: [Laughing] Yes!

NP: What job did you apply for at the Wheat Board?

DP: Because I worked mostly with the transportation area at the Wheat Board, that's what I was familiar with. My first stop when I walked into the Wheat Board was on the fifth floor. That's where transportation was at the time. I stopped and talked to a fellow by the name of Mike Martin. He headed up the transportation at that time and asked if he had any jobs. He kind of said, "Well, we don't have anything going right now, but you should go up to talk to Art Macklin." He was head of Human Resources at the time. So, I went up and said, "I've worked in the grain industry. I'm out of work. I would like a job." He took my information down and said, "Well, if we have anything, we'll give you a call." As I said, by the time I got home I'd gotten a call, and I think that was

because I'd stopped and talked to Mike Martin first. So, I didn't apply for a particular job, but I applied knowing that I'd probably end up in the transportation area because that's the area that I'd been most familiar with over the past three years.

NP: So, what did you do? What was your first job there?

DP: I started, just for a very short time, they had an area that was responsible for actually dividing up the car supply at that time with respect to non-boards—the grains that weren't Wheat Board grains. I worked in there. The grain companies would tell us on a weekly basis what they needed to meet their vessel needs at the port positions for the non-board grains, and we would work that. But I only spent, oh I don't know, five or six weeks there. It was more Mike giving me a feel for what went on in the department because I hadn't worked with them quite as closely when I was at Manitoba Pool.

But then shortly after that, I went into--. We used to divide car supply up by blocks, rail blocks, then, so he put me over as a block operator. At that time there was four areas. There was a Manitoba area that managed both the CN [Canadian National Railway] and CP [Canadian Pacific Railway] car supply for Manitoba. Saskatchewan, because of the volumes, had two areas—one for CN and one for CP. Alberta was one area again for both CN and CP. I moved into CN Saskatchewan from there. So, my first exposure once I got into a job where I spent some time at, not just a learning experience as I did in the non-boards, I spent probably, I don't know, three or four years as a block operator in CN Saskatchewan before he made me a block supervisor.

**[0:35:50]**

NP: And what is a block?

DP: A block was a number of rail lines that are operated out of one central switching area for a railway. So, a block would be four, five, or six train runs operated out of say Saskatoon or out of Prince Albert, whatever. We managed the car supply between the various grain companies that operated along that group of train runs. It was called a block, that group of train runs. So, I was a block operator. I managed car supply into those groups of train runs.

NP: So, this was the early '80s?

DP: This was the early '80s. That's correct. I think I started July the 2nd of '79, so that's '79/'80. Yes.

NP: Am I correct—and I could not be—am I correct that this was the timeframe where they were starting to rationalize the railways?

DP: That would have been just the very beginning, Nancy. There wasn't a lot of pressure, but the railways were starting. I would say that took, for any real rationalization to happen, that took a while. There were some changes starting by then. Rather than dividing the car supply up by block, which I had referred to, they started to make the process more finite. We started to do it by train run, as opposed to a group of train runs. So, that was happening. They were already starting to look at, yes, the rationalization of some of the lines where large volumes weren't being originated. So, there was some of that just starting. That was very early in the stages, but, yes, it would be starting then.

NP: Was that too early for the real shift from shipping east to west, as opposed to--?

DP: Not so much because the Russians were still in it. The Poles were still in it, and a lot of the Russian and the Polish grain came off the East Coast. I would say that probably lasted, Nancy, until the later '80s when we started to probably push more west. But my first 10 years we were still doing large volumes through Thunder Bay.

NP: You stayed with the rail shipping allocation during what years? 19--?

DP: Until '90.

NP: Until '90, so you were there for the whole--.

DP: I was there from, yes, from '79 'til '90. So, 11 years I spent my career in the rail transportation area.

NP: So, starting to see the shift with the decline of the Russian and other markets to the east and increases to the west. How did that play out in everyday logistics? Could you actually almost see a time where the split occurred? Was there a fairly long period of uncertainty of which way to send stuff?

DP: It was all driven by sales, of course. If I look back, I suppose you kind of know when it happened, but it's kind of like watching your child grow up. If you're with them everyday, you don't notice the change, but somebody that hadn't seen them for six months walk in and say, "Oh, gee! What a change!" "What do you mean what a change?" It was starting through the late '80s. The Russians were getting smaller. They were taking probably more out of the--. The push started to go west, and you could see it by then. You knew what was happening. We were starting to see changes in the lake fleets. We were starting to lose some elevators in Thunder Bay. It wasn't only a matter of just doing a direct shift. It was gradual with respect to how the railways handled it, the car supply they had available, the capacity they had available, especially to move into Vancouver. So, it was a gradual process as we all

learned how it was done. But yeah, by the end of the '80s, by the time I got the Seaboard operations—that was in '90—the volumes were starting to shift west fairly significantly.

**[0:40:55]**

NP: What would you say in the work you did there were the major challenges and changes other than us talking about it being more drilled down with the deliveries?

DP: Well, the biggest challenge—and this is probably, you asked the question about rail, about rationalization of the system—I would say the biggest issue we had to deal with on an ongoing basis was transportation capacity, how much the railways could move with respect to the sales requirements. It all hinged around what they could do for us. Of course, from year to year the crop was always a challenge because it's not like a manufacturer where you know what product you're going to have. It's just a matter of gearing up your manufacturing. We had farmers manufacturing grain, but the problem is you never knew what the product was going to be. So, it was always that slow period in the summer while the crop was maturing and then while it was being harvested.

Then it was a matter of, "Okay, now we can go out to sell it." So, those were challenges that we dealt with in the Board. In some ways, in transportation our job was fairly easy. We waited for the salespeople to tell us what we had and what they needed and when they needed it, and then we put that into a transportation plan. We made it work as best we could. Working around the restrictions that we all had—not just the Wheat Board, but the grain companies as well—the restrictions on capacity that the railways had to deal with. So, that was the biggest one, is the transportation capacity.

NP: When were the hopper cars, the big hopper car push where the different provinces--?

DP: Early '70s. I remember seeing there was a big—television cameras and everything were there—I remember seeing one of the first large groups of hopper cars get pushed into a UGG. They had Canadian flags on the hopper cars and the whole works. So, we were already starting to get a few in the early '70s. That's when they realized that we had to do something about capacity. I was speaking to rail capacity and one of the things they said, "Well, we can pull this many cars or this many trains a day through the Rockies to the West Coast. If that's all the trains we can move, how do we increase capacity? By increasing the tonnage that you're moving per car." So, there was a big push. By the mid '70s, the cars were coming onstream—the hopper cars—and the big push was to try to move as many of those hopper cars as we could to the West Coast.

NP: Did politics play a part at all in any of this? Or was it strictly markets?

DP: From where I sat, it was markets. Well, if you listen to the senior management in the trade, there was politics. I guess one of the things that changed, and it was political pressure, when I first moved over to the Wheat Board, the railways gave the car supply to the Wheat Board and the Wheat Board split it up between the various players. The Grain Transportation [Agency], the GTA, I think, was legislated by the Liberals in '84 when they took over the responsibility of dividing the car supply up between the Wheat Board and the various grain companies. So, there was political will then that took that responsibility away from the Wheat Board.

NP: What was the reason for taking it away from the Wheat Board? I mean, you still had the same number of cars and the same two rail companies.

**[0:45:00]**

DP: Well, the difference was—whether it was perception or not—the perception from the trade was in those times when the number of railcars you had available was restricted, you probably would have had no argument from the grain trade saying, “You know, the Wheat Board looks after their own sales first and then--.” Am I sitting too close to it? “The Wheat Board’s going to make sure they’re going to meet their sales first and we’re always getting the residual.” Whether that was true or not, that was the feeling. It was because of those pressures from the grain companies that motivated the government to say, “Okay, you know what? We need an independent agency to manage that car supply so that, whether it’s there or not, that doesn’t exist any longer.” So, the GTA I think came in in '84, and that really changed the way things were done with respect to your rail capacity on a weekly basis.

NP: What would you describe as the big changes there?

DP: Well, the thing is there was no longer a feeling that we would take care of ourselves first—I’m talking about the Wheat Board. We all had to submit to the GTA on a weekly basis what our sales requirements are. We would have to say, “Okay, here’s what we have. Here’s our sales. Here’s what we’ve got moving in railcars. Here’s what we need to meet those sales going into the future.” So, now we all had to do that as equal players, the Wheat Board and the Manitoba Pools, the Sask Wheat Pools, the UGGs of the world. We all had to meet the same criteria with respect to the plans that we were submitting to the GTA. It took that appearance of bias away from the Wheat Board.

NP: In practical everyday application, did it make any difference to how you operated?

DP: I don’t think it did. I don’t think it did, no. No.

NP: Except you wouldn’t have to be responsible for it anymore, so.



DP: That's correct. If things didn't go well, we didn't take the heat for it. In some ways, it was actually better for--. That I think made it easier for the Wheat Board to justify what we were doing.

NP: Am I correct in saying that eventually the GTA disappeared?

DP: Yes.

NP: Then did it fall back to the Wheat Board?

DP: No, it fell to the railways. We all had to submit to the railways in the end. So, we all had to make our case to CN and CP and then they divided the car supply up.

NP: Separately?

DP: Separately, correct. Yes.

NP: Okay, so there's twice as much work.

DP: Yep.

NP: Was that during your time? Or that was beyond your time on the--?

DP: Those three changes all happened during my time. When I first started it was the Wheat Board. In '84 it was the GTA, and before I left it was all of us dealing directly with the railways for our car supply.

NP: Am I also correct in assuming that the same issues of available supply at the proper location has been a perennial issue?

DP: Yes, yes.

NP: And regardless of who was in charge, it's still--?

DP: Still the same issues today. It was an issue when I first started at the Manitoba Pool head office in '75 and it's still an issue today.

NP: Okay! Let's move along, 19--.

DP: '90 I went to the Seaboard operations.

NP: You decided time to move on.

DP: Well, it was decided for me. [Laughs]

NP: How did that opportunity arise?

DP: Do you want to turn that off for a second?

**[Audio pauses]**

NP: We'll go back, and you can say how the opportunity presented itself. So, we were just offline there a bit talking about the background for the move from the rail to the portside do you call it?

DP: To Seaboard operations, yes.

NP: Seaboard operations. So, how did that come about?

DP: I started in the rail transportation—I'm going to go back just a little bit—in '79. I met my wife at the Wheat Board. She started in the transportation area in '84. We weren't husband and wife at that time. We met there. By 1990 we were getting very serious, in fact, real serious because we got married in the summer of '90. It was felt that for both our sakes, for appearance's sakes, that it would be best that we didn't work in the same area anymore. I was given an opportunity to move to Seaboard operations, which dealt with the terminal side of our business. Having come from a terminal background, I thought that was a great opportunity, so I moved across I think in December of '90. I saw it as an opportunity, and it was best for Margie and I as well.

**[0:50:06]**

NP: When you talk about the terminal side and the Seaboard side, were you dealing specifically with the terminals in the grain going in and out or just the grain going out?

DP: When I first started, I was still--. [Phone chimes] Oh, sorry.

**[Audio pauses]**

NP: Go on a sec. Stopped for the usual telephone interruption. [Laughing] It just wouldn't be an interview if we didn't get these interruptions! I think my question was did your new job deal with both the incoming grain and the loading the ships? Or was it strictly--?

DP: When I first moved over, my responsibility still fell with determining the kind of car supply we needed in the terminals to meet our sales. What made that different was when I was in transportation eastern—that was on the rail side—it was a matter of coordinating the cars you had coming out of the country. When I moved over to Seaboard, it took it one level up where we were telling transportation eastern what our requirements were. So, we were analyzing sales, analyzing the stock we had in store, looking at what grain we had moving, and determining what our requirements were. So, it took it up to another level. That was my initial job there, but as far as Seaboard operations goes, it was everything from saying what we needed in the terminal to having the grain come out of the end of the spout onto a boat. So, all of that fell under Seaboard operations.

NP: You talked about having meetings where you determined what your needs were, what your sales were, and trying to do the coordination. So, just tell me a bit about those kind of planning meetings. Who was pulled in in order for you to get your job done in supplying the cars and the right kinds of--?

DP: From the very beginning, we were meeting with salespeople, with the rail companies—CN and CP, the big players—with the grain companies, knowing what their requirements were and, of course, analyzing our requirements. We didn't meet with them on a weekly basis. But the other thing we did was we had to meet regularly—at least for Thunder Bay side—with the laker companies as well to determine the capacity to move grain that they had available for the Wheat Board. So, that was something I hadn't worked on that side, but we were working with all of those groups once I got to Seaboard operations.

NP: So, what other departments within the Wheat Board were involved in those planning sessions?

DP: To a degree, country operations. They were the ones working with farmers directly, determining what farmers were signing up, what the volumes of grain were in the country, what the grains and grades were. So, not only quantity but also quality. We had a

weather and crop area who did as much analysis on the crop as early as they could. So, they were advising us, “Well, these are the volumes out there, but this is going to be the quality of it.” So, even met with them, certainly with sales. We had a group. We still do—I’m still talking *we* like I work at the Wheat Board—but we also had a group of--. We had staff that worked in the country that worked very closely with the grain elevators. We called them area reps at the time. So, those groups were brought in too. They made a weekly report, so those reports were brought into the whole picture as well. All that analysis was going on on a weekly basis for the most part.

NP: You were mentioning the weather and--?

DP: Crop.

NP: Crop. Did that group also do what predictions were for crops around the world?

DP: Yes, yes.

NP: So, that’s pretty sophisticated stuff.

DP: It was. I didn’t work that closely with them, so I wouldn’t be the one to tell you everything that was involved there. I saw it grow into an area far more significant than when I first started there. Their piece of the puzzle, or their analysis, was relied on more and more as they got more sophisticated. Their abilities to tap weather reports worldwide as that increased, the satellite information they were getting. The significance of their role increased over the years that I worked there for sure.

**[0:55:19]**

NP: Is anyone retired from that group that you know is still around that we might be--?

DP: Bruce Burnett, he would be the most knowledgeable if you could get a hold of him. The other one that’s still around the city who actually headed up that before Bruce took over was John--. Oh god, I hate that. Oh! John Benci. B-E-N-C-I. John Benci. John is very knowledgeable, and he started in that area. He didn’t finish there, but John started there. If you could get a hold of one of them, they could probably fill you in on their role and how it developed, Nancy.

NP: Great! So, were unit trains developing during that time as well, and the ones that would bypass Thunder Bay down to the east?

DP: I'm trying to think, Nancy, when the first unit trains--. That was, of course, the pressures on the railways to be more efficient. Or they insisted that was necessary to be more efficient. That was probably towards the end of the '90s before we were seeing a lot of that. So, that wasn't early, but by the time that I was dealing more directly with the terminals, we were starting to see some of the unit trains. As we got the larger facilities, the inland terminals, those were a product of the ability to clean grain in western Canada, and that came with the rationalization of the system—pushed very hard by the railways, of course. So, that would have been the later years. We didn't see a lot of that in probably up to the first half of the '90s because the facilities that could clean grain to export standards, that was quite limited. But certainly, by the time I left in '07, we were seeing more and more of that, yes.

NP: You mentioned the lakers. Who were the big players when you started out and were there any changes in ships, ship sizes, number of companies?

DP: Now, I wouldn't be able to rattle them all off because when I was in the terminals, they were just a vessel pulled up, and you loaded it. There was far more laker companies then. One of the things that I did see, I mean, there was still a number of smaller lakers when I first was working in Thunder Bay, and those would have been lakers that hold 10 or 12,000 tonnes. By the time I was finished in '07, you weren't seeing anything smaller than 25,000 tonnes plus. When I first worked in Thunder Bay, I can remember the Misener Line, the Hall Line. Upper Lakes was there then. Algoma Central was there. Paterson was there. Parrish & Heimbecker [P&H] had boats. There's a number that I'm sure I'm missing because by the time I got involved, the number of vessel owners had decreased significantly.

By the time I got involved it was Upper Lakes and Algoma, CSL [Canada Steamship Lines], P&H, Paterson—probably those five were the major players then. Oh, Desgagnes used to bring the small ships. In fact, they still were right to the end when I was working. By the time I was done, Algoma and Upper Lakes had combined as Seaway Bulk Carriers, so we were really dealing basically with--. And Paterson was gone by the time I was done. Parrish was gone by the time I was done. We were down to probably CSL and Seaway Bulk Carriers. We were down to basically dealing with two of them. When I'd started, they were probably dealing with five or six at least.

NP: What about the salties? Was that part of your--?

**[1:00:02]**

DP: Yes. That was part of our responsibility as well. That was, for the most part, Nancy, driven by our sales department. If one of the buyers wanted to secure a vessel and load in Thunder Bay, certainly we managed that loading. We were responsible for that. But that was always a fairly small area of our business. Thunder Bay never was a huge direct-export port. I think it was because of the

restrictions of the canal system. You can only bring boats in so large. Lakers, of course, were designed to maximize the size of the locks. So, you had great big bathtubs going as far as Port Cartier, whereas a saltie came in and the hulls were far more veed to handle the open seas. So, the capacity on the lakers you could get through the system--. I mean the capacity on the salties that you could get through the system was, for the most part, quite a bit less than the lakers. So, it wasn't nearly as efficient. But if there was a small saltie around—certainly if there was sales—we were responsible for that side of it as well, yes.

NP: That would be quite different on the West Coast.

DP: That would, yes.

NP: And were you responsible for the West Coast as well?

DP: We were responsible for all the grain that loaded on the West Coast as well, yes. I believe there has been some move in the last five years to change that some, but for the most part, our sales off the West Coast, it was a buyer that chartered the vessels, but we were responsible for the grain coming out the end of the spout to make sure those vessels did get loaded. So, while we didn't negotiate the contracts with the saltie companies like we did the laker companies, we still were responsible for that loading off the West Coast as well, yes.

NP: What were the challenges then with the lake shipping—or lake or even ocean shipping?

DP: With the laker, for the most part, Nancy, it was trying to balance the restrictions you had on your transportation on your rail side. I should go back further. Everything we did was driven by sales. So, you needed to secure enough lake capacity to fill your sales. Sometimes sales were driven by what your capacity was. It was sales, then capacity, and that also tied, again, to the one thing we talked about early is what rail capacity you had available to you, because you didn't want to go and charter lakers and not be able to load them when they come in. That was the challenge, making sure that you could tie the movement out of the country with the lakers in and out of Thunder Bay with the salties in and out of the St. Lawrence River. It was, again, it was a capacity issue. So, that was always ongoing. That was probably my favourite part of the job was managing that aspect—working with the laker companies, working with the terminal operators in the St. Lawrence, working with the terminal operators in Thunder Bay. So, that coordination was going on daily.

NP: Couple of questions come to mind. So, this is also where you would have been coordinating with the Ports Clearance?

DP: Lake Shippers Clearance Association. We worked very closely with them. They had a Clearance Association on the West Coast that was mainly there to manage the warehouse receipts, to manage the paper, the ownership of the grain. Thunder Bay, we worked very closely with them. They made our jobs so much easier in that for Wheat Board grains, we basically would tell them what we needed to load on--. The laker company would tell us, "We've got this vessel coming in." We would sit down and say, "Okay, this is what we need in the St. Lawrence to meet our sales." So, we would communicate with Lake Shippers what our requirements were saying, "We need 25,000 tonnes of this." They would manage all the loading of that vessel at the port. So, we worked very closely with them.

NP: And it would mean that, yeah, they would be going perhaps to two or three elevators and--?

DP: It's funny you say that. When I first started, we probably for the most part loaded entire vessel loads. By the time I was done, they were going to three, probably averaging at least three terminals to get their load. Yeah.

NP: I'm on the hunt for some information—it goes way back beyond your time [laughs]—but I have been told by one person that Ports Clearance Association used to actually use flags. At some spot, I think near the Empire Elevator—if I've got my facts right, which I may not—and they would actually use flags to signal to the ships that came which elevator they should go to and that they had these flags, but nobody could tell me exactly what they looked like. The flags have disappeared.

**[1:05:32]**

DP: That's too bad! I'd never even heard that part of it.

NP: And they had a little signalling shop where the people sort of sat while they waited for the ships. Hm! Anyway, what could go wrong with the Seaboard side? Just like we knew with the rails--.

DP: We always knew what we wanted. I shouldn't say we always knew what we wanted. We did a lot of analysis to make sure we had the grain in the right place when the laker or the saltie arrived. The thing we wrestled with the most was whether or not, when we ordered from the country, that's how it would arrive in the terminal. Two problems we could have there was how up to date the railways were, whether there were shortfalls, where they were drawing grain from, say on a particular day what was arriving at the port. The other thing that we had to deal with, and I don't want to make this sound like they were always shipping whatever they felt like, but the issue that we dealt with—just like the grain companies did with their managers—they might order a particular grain in a railcar. When that railcar unloads, it might not be the grain or grade that we needed. So, some of that went on. We were dealing with that all the time. The biggest issue we had, especially--.

You know what? It's funny, or maybe it makes good sense. When we were shipping large volumes in the '70s, we would load whole vessels no problem at all. Where it got tougher was towards the end of my career where the volumes were far smaller, so you didn't have the grain to draw on in Thunder Bay like you did. Before you had 15 terminals that were full, all of sudden you're down to 5 terminals. The most difficulty we had was making sure we got the right grains and grades on those lakers so that we could meet our sales in the river. When you're shipping larger volumes, that's not an issue because you've got lots of everything sitting, but when you don't, the coordination gets that much more necessary and more difficult. So, that was the biggest one we had was making sure that we got the right grains in the St. Lawrence to put on the salties when they arrived.

NP: When you were working in that area then, were there ever any really big cock ups that actually made their way through to the customer? Or, surprisingly, given the amount of grain that went--.

DP: Surprisingly, there was very few, but that was probably the one that was most difficult to work with was that very thing. If you ordered 1 Red 13.5 on a vessel and that's what your sale was for, and at the end of the day when the Commission graded it at a 2 13.5, the most difficult situation was going to your customer saying, "Well, here's the alternative. Can we make a deal on what's sitting on that vessel as opposed to what you wanted on that vessel?" Those didn't come up that often, but they were the biggest headache when they did. So, the biggest problem we had was around the quality with respect to the requirements that were called in the contract.

NP: What was the usual resolution of a situation like that?

DP: Now, our sales department never liked to go with hat in hand to a buyer. Most often they were able to work something out where the buyer would accept it because it was never a case of it was so off that they couldn't take it, but it wasn't what was in the contract. So, those are always the most difficult for our sales and for us to handle because my understanding was years ago—that would have been before me—that if you put the wrong grain on a vessel in Thunder Bay, you could unload it. There was just no ability to do that as the years went on. That kind of equipment was lost as elevators closed. It was always you're pulling your hair out when you did get a problem at a terminal because you had to move that problem into the St. Lawrence, because you couldn't correct it in Thunder Bay.

**[1:10:10]**

Sometimes what you had, you'd have half a hold of grain in Thunder Bay that wasn't making grade from one particular terminal. It wouldn't be off by a lot, but then you'd have to go to the next terminal or go to another terminal and say, "Okay, here's the problem



we got. Can you really sweeten this up and fix this hold for us? Because when we take it off it will all get mixed back together.” There was always stick handling like that that had to be done. Fortunately, it didn’t happen very often. When you ask a terminal for grain, normally they nailed it. But in those situations where you had an issue with quality, it was always dicey dealing in fixing those problems.

NP: That could be one a year?

DP: Oh, there’s probably more than that, but it wasn’t huge. I wouldn’t want a buyer to think we were always fixing problems, but those did come up occasionally. Yeah, they were difficult. Probably more than one a year, but it wasn’t something that happened on a regular basis.

NP: Something had come to my mind and then flitted out again, thinking about the West Coast. So, with the West Coast, my understanding is that as capacity was reduced in Thunder Bay—because markets heading in that direction were also reducing—that there was a ratcheting up of capacity on the West Coast and changing in markets, or at least increasing in the amount coming from the previous markets. The problems, then, shipping out of the West Coast, were they the same? And shipping out of Churchill, I guess.

DP: The West Coast was probably the most difficult, where you could get the biggest hang ups and cost the system the most money. During the winter months, the one thing that-- In the St. Lawrence, we had the ability to store a million tonnes. At the West Coast, you were always working hand to mouth. It was always a case of you needed the grain coming in because we were pushing that. We were pushing the system to the West Coast as close to on-time as we could. So, if you had any severe weather in the winters, or you had a derailment, or you had—not that they happened very often—you had a strike, the biggest problem we had was making sure that as the salties arrived that we had the grain available. Because if not, the demurrage on a saltie could add up very quickly.

There were winters where we incurred very large demurrage bills because there was times when—and again, it’s not something that happened often—but there was periods where weather really worked against us. Other factors played into it where we may have vessels sitting for a month before we put grain on it at the West Coast. Those situations got very expensive, but from time to time those things did happen. The coordination of the movement was far more critical at the West Coast because of the larger volumes and the smaller storage capacities, handling capacities you had at the West Coast, especially Vancouver.

NP: Now, the storage capacity’s increasing. Was it increasing at that time on the West Coast?

DP: No.

NP: Or this was just recent?

DP: The only thing that's increased at the West Coast--. Well, the West Coast did some upgrades, I shouldn't say that. They did some upgrades to increase their throughput, but they weren't able to increase their physical capacity. But they increased their ability, their capacity to move grain. So, they did upgrades in that respect, but one of the things you still suffer with--. Now, it's not economical to store grain, to let it sit there, so it is better if it's just on time. As it moves in, it moves out. That's the ideal, but it's nice to have a buffer at times when you do hit snags in the system. That's one thing the West Coast doesn't have that luxury. So, the coordination is far more critical at the West Coast than it was because you had a little capacity to play with in the eastern system, both at Thunder Bay and in the river.

NP: How many terminals were operating in Vancouver?

DP: Five.

NP: Five. And then Rupert's, Prince Rupert?

DP: Prince Rupert, when I first started, there was the old terminal. Once they got the new terminal--. There's one there, but it's capacity--. It's probably the most efficient facility we have in Canada, so that increased the ability. CN had extra capacity on that line to Prince Rupert, so that helped as well.

**[1:15:11]**

NP: Did you have a preference just because of logistical advantages for whether it went out of Prince Rupert or Vancouver?

DP: That's a two-sided sword. Yes and no. Yes, because the capacity was there on the rail line, because it was a very efficient terminal. The only issue was, though, that we could only draw grain from CN. The reason I'm saying that was issue is CN tended to, for the most part, be the line through the northern part of the Prairie provinces and CP mostly was in the south. Depending on the weather during the growing season and the harvest season, the quality along the CN lines wasn't necessarily always the same as the CP. So, they weren't interchangeable. There was time you had the capacity at Prince Rupert, but you didn't always have every grain and grade that you needed available along the CN train runs. That was an issue. So yes, it worked well, the capacity was there, but there was some coordination that had to go on because of the fact that you didn't have unlimited--. It's not like phoning

up the manufacturer and saying, “Well, start producing this.” The quality of the grain sometimes gives you issues that you had to work around.

NP: So, that added just an extra bit of complexity to the West Coast because you had to--.

DP: Yes, yes. Yeah.

NP: Who kept track of the stocks in the various elevators there, then? Because I know the Ports Clearance Association in Thunder Bay was doing the--.

DP: Right. Prince Rupert, they did it for us, and there was a Clearance Association in Vancouver as well doing similar to what they did in Thunder Bay. So, we got official paper every day on what was available to us.

NP: What about Churchill?

DP: Churchill, the Commission obviously worked there, and we got our stocks through their system.

NP: It’s really fairly small volume. Was it pretty simple then because of the small volume or did it have special challenges as well?

DP: The special challenges were getting the grains you needed in that very narrow window. If you had a vessel coming in late in the season, you couldn’t afford not to have the grain there because two things could happen. You’d end up with a ship stuck in the ice all winter, which never happened, or you’d have a ship that would have to sail without the cargo. Churchill did present unique problems. The advantage, again, was that it was only CN that went there. Not the advantage, but that there was nothing else along the line, so you had basically 100 percent of CP’s ability to move grain along that line.

NP: Or CN’s ability?

DP: CN’s, CN’s. I said CP. Yeah, CN. So, there was not a lot of other traffic moving along the CN line into Churchill. So, whatever capacity it had available basically went to the Wheat Board 100 percent. So, it was again getting the right grains and grades because, again, you’ve only got CN lines to draw from. The other thing that we sometimes suffered from on a sales side at Churchill, Nancy, was if you had had a crop the previous year that wasn’t extraordinarily large, you usually had it all sold by the time June and July came along. Churchill was just opening up about the end of July, early August. So, you had some grain in the

system, but for the most part you were waiting to see what you had coming off the new harvest before you could sell large volumes out of Churchill.

So, that was always—working closely with weather and crop surveillance—that was always a fine line to walk. Determining what you had available, what volume you could get up there because you wanted to probably clear your last laker in Churchill by about—early when I was working—probably about mid-October. We were pushing that to—well, they were trying to push it further—but we were pushing that to say the end of October, early November. But it was always that fine line knowing that at some point that port was going to freeze up and you had to execute. You could not afford to hang up a vessel there, like you could--. Not that you wanted to, but it went way beyond demurrage if a vessel didn't get out of Churchill.

NP: Who serviced Churchill from the water? Were they all ocean-going?

DP: Yes. Yes, yeah.

NP: And were there special ones who specialized in the north?

**[1:20:04]**

DP: There was some that had hulls that were more suited or built to manage the ice, the issues with ice. But for the most part—that's why it was so important to get the coordination right—for the most part there weren't a lot of ice-class bulkers out there. So, it was a case of you're getting the same saltie that was going into Thunder Bay or going into the St. Lawrence in the summertime is the same saltie going into Churchill for the most part. Like I said, not many ice-class, so it was a matter of getting them in and loaded as quickly as you could and getting them back out.

NP: Speaking of that and icebergs and things like that, did you ever lose a shipment in transit?

DP: Never lost one, but we had some vessels were damaged significantly coming in. We had other vessels damaged going out, enough that I remember one on the way out ended up going to Halifax and unloading there because it wasn't seaworthy. But I don't recall, at least not in my time, where we actually lost a cargo. Vessel damage? Yes, but not losing a cargo. The closest we come wasn't even ice. The closest we come to losing 25,000 tonnes was when the *Windoc* hit the bridge going down the Seaway. But no, out of Churchill we never lost a cargo.

NP: You were in the Seaboard operations at that time?

DP: I was in Seaboard operations. I was managing Seaboard operations. Yeah, I was acting VP of logistics when that happened. I was on holiday, so that was a lot of stick handling getting that one all fixed up.

NP: Did you have to come back from holidays to deal with it?

DP: I was involved from the day it happened, yes.

NP: So, we've interviewed Robert Paterson and Alexander Paterson and Don Paterson about their situations.

DP: I'm interested to hear what they said, but anyways.

NP: I'm interested in hearing from the Wheat Board's perspective, then, what—a disaster like that—what did you have to do?

DP: Well from our side, I guess the lucky part was that there was no damage to the cargo. Unfortunately, there was significant damage to their vessel. It created no end of problems for them. The biggest problem we had at the time was we needed the grain for sales in the St. Lawrence. It probably took us six weeks by the time we worked out all the logistics between Paterson and ourselves, the insurance company, to get that grain transferred to another vessel, and get it moved into the St. Lawrence. Probably the first three or four weeks was working together on a carrier that was suitable to us and to Paterson and to the insurance company so that we could transfer off of the *Wind*—I think it was the *Windoc*—transfer the cargo from the *Windoc* onto another laker and get it into the St. Lawrence.

NP: And how does it get transferred in those circumstances?

DP: With great difficulty. [Laughing] The reason I'm saying that, there isn't a lot of equipment to do that. Which company did we work with? They had to get an evacuator and basically a very slow process. It took I forget how many days to move the cargo from the *Windoc* onto the laker that was taking it. It's on the tip of my tongue too. I hate this.

NP: That's okay.

DP: Keel? I think it was Keel that we used. Anyways, it was a case of us trying to agree with Paterson and the---. [Clatter] Sorry about that. Us dealing with Paterson and the insurance company to see the vessel or the operation that would be suitable for all three of us.

NP: And what's the legal fallout of something like that?

DP: Well, I guess the thing that I learned was the fact that when an accident that happens like that—despite the fact that we have insurance and they have insurance—my initial thought on it was, “They’re carrying our grain. We’re paying them. If there’s any cost involved, it should be theirs and their insurance company.” But in Maritime Law, that’s not the case. It’s up to not only the transporter or the shipper, it’s also up to the owner of the cargo to pay half of all costs, to save the cargo as well as the ship. Those are just things that is right in the Act, so there wasn’t anything we could do about it, but it was something I wasn’t aware of until we had a major situation like that. That’s the only one that I remember we had like that. But yeah, Maritime Law was unique in that respect. I compared it to if we had grain in a rail—not if, it happens fairly regular—if CN or CP is transporting grain in railcars for us and it wrecks, they make us whole as far as the cost of the accident, as far as the loss of grain. Not so in Maritime Law. We share the cost of salvaging the boat and the cargo.

**[1:25:29]**

NP: I’m going back to the rails, then. Obviously if the shipment is derailed and wrecked and not salvageable, then it’s pretty straightforward how to make you whole. Was that part of your responsibility when you were in the rail area to deal with those problematic shipments that were coming by rail? So, a car showed up half full or it was not the--.

DP: Yes, yes.

NP: Was there a special procedure for that, a special group that met? How was that handled?

DP: Between the grain company and the Wheat Board, you’d determine what was in it. Because their manager, he had to show his loading draft, so you knew what was in it. You knew the quality in it. It was a matter of the grain company and the Wheat Board going to the railways and saying, “Okay, you lost this car. This is what was in it.” Our sales department would give us a value for that grain, and we would make settlement that way.

NP: That’s pretty routine then.

DP: Yeah. It was something that happened often enough that there was a process, whereas the situation with Paterson was a one-off. The whole time I was there, that’s the only time we did it. So, of course it was a difficult situation simply because it wasn’t something we dealt with very often, or that was the only time we ever dealt with it.

NP: The Panama Canal, any comments about it and did it have any impact on the work you did?

DP: No, no. Not--.

NP: Is that a usual route out of--?

DP: No, no. I'm trying to think Nancy, if--. There may have been the odd cargo that would come off the West Coast and maybe go through the Panama to a port on the Atlantic. It would only be a case of they were repositioning a saltie. They wanted to move it from, say, the Pacific trade into the Atlantic, or opposite. You might get that kind of a cargo. I'm trying to remember if we had. We may have loaded one Chinese cargo out of the St. Lawrence that would have gone through the Panama, but those were truly exceptions. Those weren't something that we were aware of for the most part. Like I said, it would be a case of an owner wanting to reposition a ship, so he might take a cargo from one coast and move it into the other through the Panama. It's not something that happened with any frequency.

NP: Just a general question about the other major players in the industry. You've already commented on many of these as we went through your various jobs, so you may just say, "Pass. I've already said." So, any comments that you think would be worth recording related to the interconnectedness of CWB at the time you worked with it and the grain companies?

DP: We worked very closely with the companies. Obviously, they handled grain on our behalf. We depended on them to not only bring the correct grains and grades into the system and pay farmers on our behalf, they were also critical to making sure that the grains and grades we required in the port position went into railcars in their facilities. We worked with them on a daily basis, so we were in constant contact with them.

NP: The fact that you were in constant contact with them, did the companies normally have a person who was in charge of communication with the Wheat Board? Was that a designated position or was a certain senior manager most companies that was responsible for that?

DP: They had departments that were working with the railways very closely, working with their country people similar to what we were doing. So, they had departments that mirrored ours with respect to the rail transportation and coordination.

NP: And when you had a high-level meeting, who would from the companies--?

DP: They had supervisors. Tom Kassis (sp?), who you said you had on your list. Murdoch McKay, George Archibald, had mentioned. All the companies had a senior person that we dealt with at a higher level than the day to day saying, “I want three cars here, two cars there,” or whatever.

**[1:30:07]**

NP: More of the policy and logistics planning.

DP: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Was it a happy interaction? It was a necessary one, and that sometimes creates good working relationships.

DP: You know what? I would say yes. The reason I kind of qualify that a little bit, I think at the operational level we worked very well with the trade just like they worked very well with us. Now, you couldn't have been close to the grain industry in the last 20 years and realized that there hasn't been some animosity, criticism of what we did at the Wheat Board—an awful lot of politics and that was never pleasant, but that was always at the higher level. At the operational level where we had a job to do, I think we worked very well as a group. I'm not taking credit for the Wheat Board. I'm saying as a group. If we had a problem, we got the players in—the supervisors on the operational level—and said, “Okay. This is the issue we've got to face. What can we do about it?” Those types of meetings happen on a regular basis. Operationally, I think, we worked very well together. I really do, Nancy.

NP: I know there's a super tight connection between the CWB and the producers, but in the jobs that you held—the ones that you covered—what interconnectedness did you have on a more operational level with producers? Any? Or was that--.

DP: Yes, it tended to happen especially at year end, Nancy. We would get an awful lot of calls that would come to transportation saying, “You know what? I haven't had the opportunity to deliver my grain, and now you're cutting off quotas.” We brought in grain, when I first started, with quotas, and then by the time I was done it was on a contracting basis. But it was drawn in. We called grain as we thought we needed to meet sales, which if you were a farmer sitting with a bin full of grain for a quality that we weren't looking for, your opportunities to deliver could be restricted. When we did call it, maybe there was situations or reasons that you couldn't always meet our requirements. You couldn't meet the deadlines. We got an awful lot of calls from producers saying, “I lost my opportunity. You've got to give me an exception here so I can deliver my grain.” Especially at the end of a crop year when they wanted to empty their bins out and get ready for the new harvest. So, we had a lot of that kind of contact.



The other place we had that, once you got to say a supervisor level, you got quite a bit of opportunity to talk to farmers. We did meetings in the early spring with producer groups in western Canada, and we would have to go out and sit on the panel. An awful lot of the questions you get from producers were around delivery opportunities. So, we did get that kind of interaction with them on a regular basis. They often were mad at us, but we did the best we could to try to explain to them why things were the way they were and try to help them manage their situation.

NP: You talked a lot about the carriers, the rail and water—reasonably so, given the jobs you had—anything to add there about the cooperation?

DP: Again, for the laker carriers, we were a very large part of their business as far as the grain side goes. They did move some milling grain and some non-board grains, but for the most part we were the biggest player by far. So, we had a very good working relationship with the laker operators to the point where--. This is just an afterthought, but I think the Wheat Board was, I think they have a partnership with CSL that probably still is out there that they're building a laker or two together. So, yeah. That cooperation was always there. We worked well with them.

NP: The grain handlers. Were they just sort of they were there, and you were glad they were, but really no connection?

DP: Grain handlers, you're speaking to--?

NP: In the terminals, essentially.

DP: Right.

NP: What you started out as. [Laughs]

DP: Yes! Yes, yes, yeah. They were just there, and I say that facetiously. But we did work closely with the superintendents of the terminals at my level. The people day-to-day didn't have much contact with the terminal operators, but once you got into the logistics side of terminals, we were dealing with the superintendents on a regular basis.

**[1:35:20]**

NP: And what would be the kinds of issues that would come up there then?

DP: Again, telling them what kind of issues we're having, what we're going to need. If you can get this grain ready, get that grain ready. Have you got any grain that we don't have paper for that we can figure out a way to get our hands on because we have a shortage right now?" The one thing that we started to do probably when Garth Gasperty took over, we started to meet with them on a fairly regular basis. We would go down there and say, "Okay. This is what we're going to do for the next three months." They had indicated to us that it helped not only to know the kinds and grade of grain that we were looking at, but the volumes we were going to be putting through. It helped them with planning their staffing. So, we were going down to Thunder Bay on a pretty regular basis trying to keep them as informed as we could. Of course, that translated into making our job easier and working better as well.

NP: Did you have any interaction with the Port Authority?

DP: Not a whole bunch. Not a whole bunch. Every now and then there would be a meeting that they would--. Again, more about trying to get from us forecasts of volumes, things like that. So, we did some of that, but not a whole bunch, Nancy, no.

NP: Was there any leeway in choosing between east and west for shipping?

DP: There was some, but it was mostly, again, driven by capacity. Somebody from our sales department would address it better than me, but it was a case of we worked with them closely. We knew we had a capacity off the West Coast, for example, especially as the volumes moved that way. If they had the ability to do more sales than what we thought our capacity was—I mean, they would try to push us of course, but we knew there was a limit at some point—we would say, "Okay. We've got capacity at the East Coast, but we can't get you any more at the West Coast." They would look at the customer base they had and try to determine whether some of that they could move off the East Coast. So, some of that did go on, yes.

NP: This question just comes out of the air, but given that you've worked in the terminals and then you were working with largely the superintendents of the terminals, would you say that?

DP: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

NP: What do you think makes a good superintendent?

DP: Oh, gosh! [Laughs] Good question! I mean, it's all the things you say about a good boss, right? Now, if I answer a good superintendent, I know who I liked when I was at the management level in logistics: somebody that I could work well with. But as far as when I worked there, I was lucky. I worked with good superintendents. I'm not sure it was me, but you could--.

NP: What does a good superintendent have to be able to do in order to get Canadian grain delivered as it should be at least cost? What abilities do they have to have? And if you think of some that are, “Oh, god! This guy again,” versus “Well, I’m not going to have any trouble with so-and-so.” What--?

DP: Right. As far as I’m concerned, there was some of them--. Now, speaking as management and logistics, there were some, I’ll be honest, that I preferred working with more than others. Having said that, you understand why somebody gave you a harder time than somebody else, somebody pushed you harder than somebody else, because you always look at it from your own point of view. It was always, “I’m the Wheat Board. I put most of the grain through there. You guys should be giving me whatever I want.” Well, if you put yourself in their shoes, they’re working for a grain company and trying to be successful as well. There’s only one way we can both be successful and that’s working together. Some of them pushed us harder than others, some of them I didn’t feel cooperated as much as I thought I would like, but again that’s personal. “I’m trying to run my business and I don’t care about yours” sort of thing.

**[1:40:06]**

So, there was some that I liked, worked better, but most of them--. I must confess, once I got at that level—and maybe because I had a little bit more credibility simply because I had worked in the terminals—I found the cooperation was really good. We didn’t have a lot of issues. We always had fights, but in the end, we usually made it work.

The biggest issues we had around working with other terminal managers was on costs, on tariffs. That was always you bumped heads on that, but that was negotiations. As far as when I worked in the terminal, most of the superintendents I worked with engaged with the workers. They would talk to anybody, make you understand the importance of the job—why you’re doing it as opposed to telling me what I have to do—explaining to me why that’s the way it would be done and why it would work best. I was lucky with the supers that I worked with.

NP: So, is it fair to say just about everyone, if not all of the superintendents that were in the system throughout your career, they had the basic skills necessary to do it right?

DP: Yep! Yep.

NP: That’s pretty impressive, I would say.

DP: No, it is.

NP: Canadian Grain Commission [CGC], what was your connection with them if any?

DP: We, again, worked closely somewhat on the upper level, but I had to work with them on a regular basis if we had any issues around grains and grades. We would go in one way, and they'd say, "Well, you can't ship it out that way. Come on guys." They were there. We sold basis on what they did for us. When we went out into the market and said, "This is what we're selling you," we didn't have to negotiate—at least from how I perceived it to be. In the US, you went out and you sold a bunch of specs on a contract. We never had to spell specs. All you had to do is say, "Take the Grain Commission export standards. You know you're going to get that." And they guaranteed that all the time. It made it a lot easier for the Wheat Board to do our job in the export markets because of our working relationship, because of what the Commission did for us. Now, some of those things are changing, but they had--.

NP: We'll come to changes of that sort in a moment.

DP: Yeah, well! [Laughs]

NP: Any connection between the jobs you had and researchers?

DP: My immediate response is no, only in that if we were doing any kind of pilot project, not necessarily the research, but once it went from research to "Now we have grain," there were extra things we had to do to maintain the identity of that grain all through the system. So, only on the transportation, Nancy, was the only area that I had anything to do with researchers, not very much on the science, just on the transportation.

NP: Customers, and you really didn't have any competitors, other than I was commenting upon the competing elevators when you were working on the waterfront. But did your jobs—any of them—put you in touch with customers directly?

DP: Some, but not a lot. I guess the most exposure I would have had to customers--. Well, I say not a lot, but then I'll back up. We used to get a lot of buyers come through and tour the Wheat Board, and often we would speak to them and tell them what it was that we did, where we fit into the whole system, where we fit into them ending up with the grain and grades in their facilities—wherever they were. So, we spoke to Russians. We spoke to Chinese. We spoke to Japanese. The one group that we used to get in fairly often because they were so quality conscious was a group of millers from the UK, Warburton's. We'd get them in every now and then. They were very specific about the grains and grades that they were taking. **[Audio pauses]** I mean it was worth it obviously.

NP: Okay. So, I don't know if you recall where you left off.

DP: Yeah, sort of. We often had Algerian buyers in, especially the large buyers or markets that were country-driven as opposed to individual buyers. So, we talked to Chinese officials quite often. We talked to Japanese officials quite often, Algeria, the millers in Great Britain. So, there was a fair amount of—not on a day-to-day basis—but there was a fair amount of general discussion with customers, trying to keep them informed of how we did what we did and how we could service their markets. So, there was a fair amount of that went on, Nancy.

**[1:45:33]**

NP: Did customers have complaints and compliments?

DP: Yeah, for the most part. It's like anywhere else. You didn't get a lot of compliments. I mean, the biggest compliment was you never heard from them if everything went the way it should. From time to time, you got complaints on quality that they might have received on the other end, or perceived quality. The one thing—we just talked about them—the backup we always had was the Grain Commission, who kept samples of all cargos that went across. We could always draw on that. From time to time though there was issues. I remember one with deer excreta off the West Coast. It was a huge issue for the Wheat Board and we worked very closely with the Grain Commission because I think it was—was it Japanese or Chinese?—I think it was Japanese cargo. I could be wrong. It could be the other way around. They got a couple cargos with what they thought was deer excreta. We sent officials over from the Wheat Board, from the Commission, watched the grain unload, went through it, and tried to work out a solution on those sorts of things. We got complaints from time to time, but not a lot. Not a lot, again, because we had the Commission making sure those things didn't happen.

NP: What was the result of the deer excreta?

DP: You know, there was a settlement, Nancy, but that was at a higher level than me. I'm not sure what the bottom line on the resolution was, but there was a cargo or two that we did have issues with. Every now and then we'd get a problem saying, "There's too much foreign material in the cargo." We'd say, "Well, the Commission says there isn't," but we had problems to resolve from time to time.

NP: Now, my question is—given my understanding of the system—how did that even happen? Because things come in--.

DP: There was a sampling system--. There was a whole analysis done on the sampling systems, which are directed by the Commission, and why some of this stuff wasn't picked up. It wasn't very often that something got missed, but there was this one occasion off the West Coast. It was difficult for the Commission to determine how exactly it happened, but some did get over. Some got into a vessel and ended up on the other side. That was quite a long process to resolve that issue.

NP: Because, when you think about it, that it comes with a shipment that size it's not coming from one farmer.

DP: No.

NP: It's likely not even coming from one Prairie elevator. If it gets to a terminal elevator, then it's mixed in with--.

DP: It's supposed to be cleaned out. Should be all cleaned off.

NP: Well, opportunities for cleaning because you were cleaning it on the cleaning floor. So, weird.

DP: Yeah, yeah. Those weren't things that come up very often fortunately, but there was an issue. Like I said, more complaints than compliments, but fortunately those were few and far between, because we had an agency that was not in our pocket managing quality.

NP: Did Canada ever lose a customer for other than competitive reasons? You know what I'm saying there?

DP: I'm not aware of it, Nancy, if we did. Now, again, I wasn't at the upper levels so I--. We might be shipping to one country today and next year we don't. I may not be aware of all the reasons why we might not be shipping. It might not be a lost customer. It could be any number of reasons: they found other places, or now they're self-sufficient. I'm not aware of.

NP: What is your sense of the role that you personally and the CWB played in Canada's success as an international grain trader? So, let me draw back and just say that what we're getting at here is not every country in the world is a successful grain trader.

DP: No.

NP: And Canada's right up there with the, what, top five? So, what piece did your group and you—even as the guy on the cleaning floor—have in making us successful?

**[1:50:18]**

DP: I think our industry is probably unique. The closest one that probably was there for a while was Australia. You're going to get grain companies on the other side that'll argue they can do the same. And you know what? The system is going to work or it's not going to work because the system has changed. But I worked in the industry when all export wheat, durum, and barley went through the CWB. I think that gave us the ability to—and I'm saying I, but again it's the industry, working closely with the grain companies—we were always assured of the volumes and the quality. We could guarantee that because of all the various players from the cleaner floor in the terminal to the terminal manager who's driving everything that's happening there to working closely with the CGC to assure that quality.

We were the biggest player as far as the laker companies, so we always were able to secure the capacity to move the grain into the St. Lawrence. We, for the most part, were the only game in town—with respect to the volumes that moved through the St. Lawrence—so we worked very closely with them. I think the fact that all of the supply was concentrated by one agency, for me at least, that made it work very well. Now, that's not going to be the case, and we'll see where that goes. But I think the farmers are well served by the system, by the industry, the way it was set up. So, the Wheat Board, from my side, was for the most part in transportation, so we were able to coordinate all of it because we were the only exporter. I think that worked very well. Terminals worked very closely with us. Now, they're going to do the same thing whether the Wheat Board is shipping the grain or their own company is, so that part's not going to change. They're still going to do the job because if you don't, you're not going to make the sale. Those things are going to continue. I think having one player coordinating was probably the biggest role that we served and the role that I was a small player in. If you want to turn it just for a second.

**[Audio pauses]**

NP: Okay, there. What would you like people to know most about the work you did? So, if you think that we're recording it here for history--.

DP: What would I like people to know the most of what *I* did?

NP: About what you did, yeah! Just your work. Only you did that, especially your own unique career.

DP: Yeah, I mean like I said, I was a smaller player. But I guess I look back on my career and I did enjoy it. It's funny that I spent 37 or 38 years—whatever it is, I guess 37—in the industry thinking that it was a fluke that I went to a grain elevator. I went into, I think it was called unemployment insurance then, but I went into the office and got sent over. I guess there's not many people that

started at the lowest job in Thunder Bay and ended up in a senior position in the industry in Winnipeg. The only other one I can think of that even has done that more is Murdoch McKay. I mean, he started in the elevator just about the same time I did in Thunder Bay, and he ended up here in head office too. I guess it's the fact that I pretty much saw it from all aspects and there's not many players out there—there's others—but not many have had the experience that I've been lucky enough to have to be involved in practically every side of the business.

**[1:55:08]**

NP: It interests me particularly when I think of you working on the cleaner deck, and I wondered whether it would have made any difference to the other people that you were working with then to know what you eventually came to know. Or would their jobs have pretty much remained the same anyway as far as how they did and their understanding of their--?

DP: You just have to look at how many elevators are left and how many superintendents there are. I mean, one per elevator. We sometimes talked about the fact that I went from the cleaner deck to coming back on a regular basis and sitting down with the managers and explaining to them what the Wheat Board requirements were, what we needed out of them, what they could do for us. So, that was unique. But for the most part, they would be the only ones that would realize that it had gone the full circle. I went from starting there to back there to saying, "Well, this is what we require out of you guys." There was a few people, but not many people would know that that was the whole journey to where I ended up.

NP: What are you most proud of?

DP: What am I most proud of? That's always a tough question. I'm proud of the fact that I walked into a terminal September the 15th at 4:00 in 1970 not knowing a kernel of wheat from a kernel of flax, and I was given lots of opportunities. I had people that saw something in me, that had faith in me. I'm proud that I got where I did considering where I came from. I was VP of logistics at the Wheat Board by the time I was done, and that's quite a journey from walking in there the first day. So, yeah, I'm proud of my career. I enjoyed it. That's probably why you can take some pride in it because you enjoyed what you were doing. But I take a fair amount of pride in that aspect.

NP: Interesting too, don't you think, that two guys from Kenora—you and Dennis Wallace--.

DP: [Laughing] Yeah! He had a different career, but we went to high school together, yeah.

NP: Yeah, and he ended up at the head of the Grain Commission for a while.



DP: Yes, yes, he did. Pretty significant. His journey's even more incredible than mine because I'm not sure he--. Like, Dennis and I probably never talked since we left high school because we went different ways, but I suspect he never worked in the grain industry. But to head up an organization like the Commission, that's pretty impressive.

NP: One of the major changes that was starting to occur, or at least discussion of it was starting to occur, just as you were getting ready to retire was the dismantling of the Wheat Board. From your position now as a retired person—and we're not even a year into the changes—what are your predictions? Positive and negative.

DP: Let me start by saying I always thought—and perhaps I'm naïve—I always thought farmers were very well served by the Wheat Board as an organization. I always thought, and I would do presentations to the farmers who would question us on “What place do you have in the industry? We would be better off with the grain companies.” I always used to challenge them and say, “If you had one person selling all of your grain or you've got eight or ten companies selling your grain, do you think you're going to be better off with one seller or multi-sellers?” And they would always say, “Well, no, no, you're wrong. I'm now going to have instead of one agency buying my grain, the Wheat Board, I'm now going to have seven or eight people competing to buy my grain.” My response to them always was, “They're not competing to buy your grain, really, they're not, because they're not using it. They're competing to sell your grain. If you've got several people competing to sell the same product, what do you think that's going to do to price?” I think farmers were well served.

**[2:00:19]**

Now, as a prediction, the Wheat Board's gone, and it won't be back under legislation. That can't happen. I think, in some ways, history is going to repeat itself. There was a reason why the Wheat Board was legislated and that was because farmers felt they were getting abused by the system. That was before I was ever born. I'm afraid that grain companies only have their bottom line and their shareholders that they have to answer to. I think the group that may suffer in the long run is the farmers of western Canada. I'm not sure they'll do better. They're convinced they will—some may, depending on where you grow grain, where it ships to. But I think the fact that we were able to guarantee an average price as opposed to some farmers are going to get the high but other farmers are going to get beat up by it because they just don't have the information, or they don't have the transportation available to them, or the crop that they're growing, where they grow it. I heard farmers say, “Well, I have a computer. I can sell my grain now. I don't need the Wheat Board.” It's pretty hard to put cargos of 25,000 or 50 or 100,000 tonnes together into one unit. The grain companies can do all that. The grain will still get sold, but will farmers be better for it? I'm not certain they will.

NP: Now, from the perspective of let's say rail shipping, the absence of the Wheat Board then in any of that coordination, will that also sort of get worked out?

DP: It'll get worked out. I guess for the most part it already has. I guess the one question that I had—I was going to say we have, but Marge is not in the interview—one of the issues that we fought, and I talked about this all through this today, was restrictions on capacity. The ability for railways to move the grain. I'm picking on the railways, but it was always about railway efficiency because there was only so much capacity there. We went from 1,500 elevators down to 200 elevators in western Canada now. I'm not sure we move grain much better than we used to despite the railways saying, "If we can load larger groups of trains," and that makes sense, "we come from fewer and fewer places, we'll be more efficient." Well, you're down to almost mainline elevators right across western Canada, which means there's a great deal more expense for farmers to move grain into a country facility. There are a lot more costs involved. Farmers are bearing all of that cost, and I'm still not convinced that grain moves into the port a whole lot better than it used to.

NP: Now, moving it into the port and moving it out onto ships is another two issues. Because there is no big purchaser and supplier to the terminals—being the Wheat Board—what does that do to what's stored there and how it matches up? You mentioned in you talking about some of the challenges you had and making sure they matched up so you could service, is that going to be impacted at all by not having a big seller? Even just filling ships?

DP: It shouldn't. I mean, Sask Wheat Pool are going to ship their grain through their facility to customers that they sold the grain to. They've been doing that forever with their canola, their non-board grains. Have they got the ability to do it? Sure. They'll continue to do it. I suspect they'll still have to, at times, cooperate with other grain companies to make sure a ship gets loaded expeditiously. I suspect there might be a cost to that, but it'll still get done. Those restrictions weren't there when it was just the Wheat Board. Obviously, they will. They won't be successful if they don't. Grain will get shipped. They'll meet sales. Like I say, it'll be Sask Wheat Pool shipping to their sales. They should be able to do that.

**[2:05:03]**

NP: The different ports that we talked about, then, any impacts on them?

DP: Just speculating.

NP: That's all this is. All we can do is speculate.

DP: I can't imagine there's a future for Churchill. They wouldn't want to hear me say that. The government's tried to--.

NP: They have the five-year--.

DP: Yeah, make that a little easier by subsidizing grain for the next five years. But after that, if I'm Sask Wheat Pool and I own a facility in Thunder Bay, if I'm Sask Wheat Pool and I own a facility in Vancouver—I think they may operate the terminal in Montreal now, I'm not positive that was something they were looking at—if I already own facilities in all the other port positions, I'm not sure what the incentive is for me to put grain through Churchill. The incentive for the Board was the cost to put grain into Churchill as opposed to say the river was considerably less because it would be going into the same markets because there was that transportation from Thunder Bay to the river. So, there were certain advantages cost-wise that Churchill had. I'm not so sure those advantages are there to Sask Wheat Pool if they have their own facility that they've got in Thunder Bay and the river. If I have to pay somebody to handle my grain in Churchill at the expense of the lack of throughput at my own facility, I'm not so sure those same incentives are there. I can't see—and this is just me—I can't see Churchill surviving on that basis.

NP: Prince Rupert and Vancouver, will they pretty much just continue as is? Or will Prince Rupert be less or more at an advantage?

DP: As long as the volumes don't change—and who knows if farmers will continue to produce the same volumes of wheat and barley, the bigger products—if they continue to produce in those kind of volumes and the markets are still there, I don't think Prince Rupert would see a reduction because of rail capacity. Again, back to rail capacity. CN has a greater ability, or they have more excess capacity, to move grain into Prince Rupert than what they do to Vancouver. As container markets go up and all that traffic increases, that's all going--. I shouldn't say all because now CN is working on a major container facility at Prince Rupert because, again, capacity on the line. The restrictions always have been the volume of grain you can move in and out of the port of Vancouver because of all the other traffic. I don't think Prince Rupert should suffer because it's also owned by a group of operators that also own facilities at Vancouver. So, I think Prince Rupert will certainly be more successful and survive better than say Churchill will. I think it'll be driven by capacity.

NP: Yeah. What will be the impact of shipments heading south? Will that change at all with--?

DP: Is south you mean across the border?

NP: Through the States, yes, and down out Mississippi.

DP: As long as we don't do anything that affects the quality of our grain, I think we'll continue successfully in that market. I'm not suggesting that the CGC moving out of their responsibilities, whether that will change, whether that will get more American. We had talked earlier how I said the one thing that made it easy for the Wheat Board to sell grain was we just had to tell them what the Grain Commission specs are. Will we still be just as successful if the companies are negotiating all the various specs of the contracts? I think we should still be successful in that US market. I mean, we did the coordination, we did the guarantees, but we worked—when Margery was working that area—we worked very closely with the grain companies to make sure that we were successful going into the US market. So yeah, the grain companies were making it happen before, that should still continue I would think.

NP: Have you commented on the most vivid memories of your work life? We talked about what you did and the challenges and so on, but are there sort of if you had to pick two things that just stand out in your mind as accomplishments or disasters that we haven't already talked about? [Laughing] Just vivid memories.

**[2:10:23]**

DP: That's a good question.

NP: You know, I think, for example in my own career, my first contract as an independent supplier as opposed to working as a government worker still sticks in my mind. Probably people listening to it think, "Well, that's pretty lame." But to me it was a highlight.

DP: There's a couple. I mean one of the highlights was also one of the lowest times I had. I don't want get morbid here, but probably my most significant promotion in Seaboard operations came as a result of one of my coworkers, and very good friend, passing away from cancer. I mean, so while that was a highlight as far as the promotion goes, how it happened was [laughs] one of the lowest times that I had in my working career. But having said that, once I got used to the idea that now I was going to be taking over, I guess one of the things that probably was a highlight was the very first time that--. At the beginning of the season, we would determine how much lake freight we needed, and we would have to go out and deal with the lake companies. The first time I could look at the end of the year and say, "You know, that's the first time that I was responsible for making sure that we had all the lake capacity that we were looking at." That was a highlight, working well with them and making sure that the volumes we needed to move into the St. Lawrence, we had the laker capacity to move. Certainly, that was a highlight.

I say I sometimes miss the trade. I looked at where we went originally with how we dealt with the terminals in the river, for example, and the information we gave them. The whole atmosphere, the whole structure was gradual, changed to with how much

information we gave them, how often we would sit down with them and try to explain what our needs were and what we needed from them. I look back on that as being progressive and working very well. It increased our relationship as well as our ability to move grain. I would consider that a highlight.

NP: Were those companies, did they all have representatives here in Winnipeg or did you have to--?

DP: The only one that did for the most part was Bunge for a while, did. It was more just to handle paper. We worked more closely with the individuals in the terminals. The superintendents we dealt with, Bunge for example, Jean-Guy St. Onge, we worked very closely with all those operators, and I think that improved a lot over time. I think that had a lot to do with where Garth started it and where we took it farther. I see that as a highlight.

NP: Good! This is—and you might even think of it as the same question—what were the most significant events that happened?

DP: Well, the most significant events were, I mean--. I wouldn't want somebody to misinterpret this. I saw my allegiance was to the East Coast because I started in Thunder Bay. It was driven by sales. It had nothing to do with me, but I guess one of the most significant impacts on our system was the Russians getting out of the market for Canadian grain. That was huge. It did filter back into the country. It had a huge impact on farmers. Whether it would have developed regardless of that shift, but the dynamics changed when the Russians came out because then we had more grain than we could sell. The canola. The significance of the canola industry grew steadily after that. Whether it was because of it or it was going to happen anyways, I don't know. But the Russians leaving the market had a huge, huge impact on the grain industry in Canada.

**[2:15:15]**

NP: What's the future of Thunder Bay?

DP: I guess there will always be a place for Thunder Bay, but I can't imagine that the volumes are going to change significantly one way or the other. You've got the infrastructure, so I would think that the grain companies would still—the ones that still have facilities, and I think there's only five. One of them is pretty small, and I'm not sure how long it'll continue. But your Sask Wheat Pool, you're selling grain now into the export—I suspect you still want to utilize and get the efficiencies out of that terminal—but I don't see any significant markets that are going to affect Thunder Bay in a positive way. There will still be some market, but unfortunately for Thunder Bay, it is what it is now, I think. It's not going to get any better, which is kind of sad because, like I said, I started there when we were still putting 18 or 19 million tonnes through every year and it's down to 3 or 4. Kind of sad to see that.

NP: Six.

DP: Six! [Laughing] And I was referring more to Wheat Board volumes, but with all the grains going through there, yeah. You're looking at about a third of what it used to do and it's kind of sad. But it's not going to change significantly for the better.

NP: No. [Laughs]

DP: That's why you're doing this project.

NP: Given what's happening with the grain industry, and not just the Wheat Board, most of my expectations are low as opposed to high. [Laughs]

DP: That's probably best.

NP: To hear that it would stay the same is like music to my ears. [Laughing]

DP: And I'm not suggesting it will, I'm just saying it ain't getting any better! [Laughing]

NP: No, that's right. Any questions I should have asked that I didn't?

DP: Not really. I mean some of them I've had difficulty answering—with highlights and lowlights and the rest of it. But, no, Nancy.

NP: Are you aware of any memorabilia including pictures that you feel should be preserved to commemorate the grain trade?

DP: Not in Thunder Bay. Now, there's memorabilia at the Wheat Board with respect to the odd laker—a model of the ships, some of that stuff. There's some at the Wheat Board, and I think—and I'm only speculating from the little bits I've heard—they may be wondering what to do with some of their memorabilia.

NP: You mention that—and we've interviewed Ian White—and now that you mention it, I think he said, "You should come in and have a look and see."

DP: Somebody that I would even mention, Ward Weisensal.

NP: Weisensal?

DP: He's CEO now.

NP: How's Weisensal spelled?

DP: Oh, COO.

NP: Chief operating officer?

DP: Yeah. He's a great guy. Weisensal is W-E-I-S-E-N-S A-L? A-L, I think. Weisensal.

NP: S-A-L? Weisensal?

DP: Weisensal, yeah.

NP: First name?

DP: Ward.

NP: Ward, okay.

DP: He's a very intelligent person, and he's been right at the heart of all of this transition. Ward was in transportation, came down in about, what, '88. Somewhere in there, right? He's been integral to all of the changes that have happened. So, you might even want to talk to him, but you've talked to Ian White. I never worked with Ian.

NP: And Ward's been a long--?

DP: Ward's got far more years than him. Ward has seen the changes, but Ward also would be close to some of the memorabilia that is there. He might be able to help you out in that because there is some stuff there that probably really lends itself to what you're doing. They won't have a place for it all depending on how much longer they're doing what they're doing.

[Unknown]: [Inaudible]

DP: Yes. Yes.

NP: Okay. Good. Well, I hate to be around at the right time given it's, to my mind, the wrong time, but. [Laughs] As you know from our previous conversation that we are hoping to set up a National Historic Site, and if things ever work out that the Feds do interpretive centres anymore across the country. We have just entered negotiations with Maurice Mailhot—Pool 10 you would have known it as. If we were to have a centre, what from your areas of work—keeping in mind that our focus is on the international grain trade because of terminal elevators and their importance in it—what kinds of things or themes do you think would be important to, first of all, even to try to sell the idea to the Feds.

[2:20:52]

DP: When you phoned me, you kind of-- Well, it was sort of out of the blue because we had talked before, but I thought-- And I knew you had talked about some funding from the Wheat Board, and I didn't know where that would go now, but I did wonder about how you were going to keep this going. [Laughing]

NP: You and me both!

DP: Because I know originally that, yeah, you're talking a facility, interpretive. I guess, at least looking back, I was able to see the link right from the farmer—Marge, by the way, she has her brother that still farms—see it right from the farm, right to the table in the exporting country, and being able to tie that all together and where Thunder Bay fit in. As far as the interpretive centre, that connection I think is really important. As far as operating the terminal though, I don't know about that.

NP: Well, actually this particular terminal is still operating.

DP: It's operational?

NP: We had looked at UGG M initially. Poor timing on our part because we started in 2002, starting to look at trying to get a site. Then the whole industry went--.

DP: Just *whoosh*. Almost overnight.



NP: [Laughs] Into complete--. You were talking about getting out of Thunder Bay before they closed down all the elevators, I'm beginning to wonder getting out of this project before we no longer have an industry.

DP: It was huge and then, all of a sudden, they weren't just slowing down. I mean, they were tearing down terminals. It happened relatively quickly when you look at where the industry was and where it is today. Thunder Bay, it was like it happened overnight.

NP: Yep. Yep. Well, this will not be the last time we speak, and if I'm lucky Margery will be another opportunity. [Laughing] Can't say when. I remember I talked about you and Nick Fox and Murdoch being a good sounding board if we try to move forward to the federal government and say, "Listen, this is a really important national story."

DP: Have you talked to Murdoch lately?

NP: I was at the Grain Commission today looking in their library and I put a call out seeing if he was around, but he wasn't. I know he had been talking to Len Seguin. Len is now back in Thunder Bay.

DP: Oh, what's he doing?

NP: He's retired.

DP: Oh, he's retired!

NP: He's retired and he's building a home on the family property in Thunder Bay.

DP: Good for him!

NP: Yeah.

DP: Because I knew he'd been at the Institute for just a bit, but that didn't last very long.

NP: No. So, we still have connections, and my sense is that once our generation is gone, you can forget anybody even having an interest in--.

DP: Oh, I would expect probably you're right.

NP: We're still trying to persuade Maurice and the ins and outs of being a National Historic Site might turn his feet cold, but if it doesn't, then we can actually—within a short period—start moving this forward. It's not going to happen within the next five years, so by the time it would happen, then the deficit should be somewhat under control. Unless the federal government is going to get completely out of National Historic Sites, other than that I think we've got a really good argument for this being a story that's important to tell. Okay! So, thank you very much!

DP: Oh, you're welcome. I'm not sure what--.

NP: Really glad to have this on. As I said, we're now moving into our younger generation. We've moved out from the 80- and 90-year-olds. [Laughing]

DP: Pretty sad when I'm the younger generation.

**[2:25:02]**

NP: [Laughs] So, thank you very much. I don't think--. Oh! Any other people that you feel that I should interview other than the people that you sort of mentioned?

DP: I mean, I'm not sure. You had mentioned one and I'm not sure that he will get back to you.

NP: Mr. Harris?

DP: Yeah.

NP: And then you mentioned a Hamilton.

DP: Bob Hamilton, he would be able to give you background like I'm trying to give you that would go back even further because Bob was in the job long before I was.

NP: He lives here?

DP: He's in Winnipeg, yeah.

NP: Do you know approximately what area of the city he lives in?

[Unknown]: Hammy lives in the Westwood. St. James.

DP: In the Westwood area, St. James area, yeah. Out that way. You've got others. Hmm? Well, I'm sure Nancy would have Adrien's name.

NP: Yes! I'm doing Adrien, actually. I put off doing it because I felt he was in a position where he probably didn't want to speak much. But now I think the dust has cleared.

DP: I'm sure you had his name, and Hamilton. You've got people like Murdoch and Nick and all those guys, so.

NP: Yeah. Is Nick still in Winnipeg?

DP: He might be in Saskatchewan now.

NP: That's what I had heard.

DP: I'm pretty sure he's with--. Well, last time I talked to Murdoch he was with Sask Wheat Pool, and I think he's gone to Regina.

NP: Okay. So, with Viterra and then perhaps with--.

DP: Viterra.

NP: And then perhaps with--?

DP: Oh, yeah! Whoever the new group is. Right. I keep forgetting.

[Unknown]: Oh, Glencore!

NP: Glencore, right.

DP: Glencore. I keep forgetting that they've--. Yeah. I think Nick is still with them.

NP: We could have a display just on changes in letterhead over the one decade.

DP: [Laughing] That's a fact! Yeah. The first how many years? I worked from '70, there was no changes, and then you went from Agricore to--. What? You got Alberta Wheat Pool and the Pool combined—Manitoba Pool—and then they went with UGG. Then Saskatchewan Wheat Pool bought them all out, and yeah, it's just been crazy.

NP: Yeah, that's when I started.

DP: You need a program.

NP: [Laughs] Yeah! Well, thanks again. I'll just shut this off now.

**End of interview.**