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Company Affiliations: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC), Canada Malting, McCabe's Elevator, Public Service Alliance of Canada

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Summary: In this two-part interview, Canadian Grain Commission inspector Steven Sidorski describes his involvement in Thunder Bay's grain trade first as a summer student employee and eventually as a full-time government grain inspector and local union president. In the first audio part, he discusses his seasonal summer employment at Canada Malting and describes their specialized malting process. Sidorski goes on to discuss his return to Thunder Bay as a grain inspector assistant, and details the tasks involved at that level. He describes all the points where grain is sampled within the national system, the kinds of tests performed on samples, new digital inspection technology, and the kinds of grains that most frequently came through the port. In the second audio, Sidorski focuses on the changes to the Thunder Bay grain industry and the CGC, including computerization, automation, consolidation of Prairie elevators, loss of Russia as a major buyer, dust control regulations, downsizing, and the introduction of women into the workforce. Other topics discussed include recent federal programs of deregulation and their potential effects on the CGC's operations, his involvement with the union and work stoppages, alcohol use in the elevators, war veterans on the workforce, and his pride in the CGC's mandate.

Keywords: Canadian Grain Commission; Grain inspection; Grain sampling; Grain cleaning; Protein testing; Moisture testing; Grain grades; Visual grain inspection; Chemical grain inspection; Wheat varieties; Thunder Bay terminal grain elevators; Canada Malting Elevator; McCabe's Grain Elevator (UGG M); Boxcar shovelling; Boxcar unloading; Bobcat unloading; Boxcars; Hopper cars; Grain transportation—rail; Grain transportation—ships; Outward inspection; Inward inspection; Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); Country elevators; Grain farmers/producers; Grain laws and legislation; Deregulation; Labour unions; Labour organization; Public Service Alliance of Canada; Dust control; Women in the workplace; Employment equity; Alcohol and drug use; Labour strikes

Audio Part One

Time, Speaker, Narrative

EE: Well, it's a pleasure to be here with you this afternoon, Steve. Perhaps we can start by my asking you to give us your name and then describe how you came to work in the grain industry.

SS: Ok. I'd be more than pleased to do that. My name is Steven Sidorski. I've lived all my life in Thunder Bay, born here in 1950, and I always wondered what those big, big, gray things on the waterfront were all about, eh? I spent lots of time in my youth—because I lived on Cumberland Street in Thunder Bay—going down to the waterfront, chasing with my buddies. We were crossing the tracks and chasing pigeons and just fooling around. But you would always do it on the weekend when the elevators were always shut, and nothing was happening. So I pursued my education, went to Lakeview high school, which overlooked the Current River elevators, and I used to daydream out the window looking at them again, wondering what they were all about. And seeing always big clouds of dust coming out of them and boats coming in. All those—I guess either exciting or not—exciting things happening.

My first summer job was actually through my uncle who was more or less a mechanical superintendent for Canada Malting, which is one of the elevators in Thunder Bay. He lived in Winnipeg, and we would spend most of our time—because my mom was very close to him—travelling to Winnipeg to visit him in the summertime. Him coming back and visiting us. And so, when I looked for my first job when I was 16, he, I guess, recommended or offered me a chance to work at Canada Malting in Thunder Bay. I took that opportunity working there in the summertime for three years—16, 17, and 18—for the summertime while I was going to high school.

It was different, challenging work. Very hard work. I was involved in very mechanical stuff there, which was shovelling boxcars out using a board, bagging in their malting house. So they bag up malt there, and you carry 110-pound bags of malt and load them in boxcars. So basically, it was very mechanical and not really something that I thought that I was going to pursue the rest of my life doing. However, I did enjoy it, and number one, they pay was good. After I graduated from high school, I came to Lakehead University here and continued working at another plant, at that time it was called McCabe's Grain Elevator. It was in the process of being sold at that time, so that would be roughly around 1970-73. It was in the process of being sold to United Grain Growers, which was taking over a couple of the plants in Thunder Bay.

I worked there, again, driving--. A little different trade there. I was driving a bobcat, which was on an elevated platform. It was an electrical bobcat. Very fast moving. They were used to unload the boxcars there. So you would break down the door with the bobcat, go and empty out the contents, get inside the boxcar. Very dusty, dirty, hot job, and seasonal work, again, because I was going to university at the time. [In] 1973, I took a break. I had graduated and was offered a position with Revenue Canada in Vancouver, went there for approximately a year. Decided at that time that I wanted to come back home. My mom was—my father had passed away—and my mom was not in the best of health, so came back to Thunder Bay. I was offered two or three different

positions because I worked for the government, federal government, at the time in British Columbia. I was offered a job with the Canadian Grain Commission [CGC] here, the RCMP locally here, and also with Revenue Canada.

So I decided the RCMP was maybe not what I wanted to do. It involved a lot of chance for relocation. That's why I was coming back to Thunder Bay, so I basically decided that the best thing for me at the time was to join the CGC as an assistant inspector, which I did in 1976, and have since then progressed through the ranks. I've been with them for almost 34 years. Oh, actually, 34 years. On February the 13th it would be my 34th year. I finished, so.

I've seen many, many, many changes over the years in the grain trade, and many different, exciting things happening. The biggest event for, I guess, everybody in Thunder Bay is the change of losing Russia as one of our big customers. That involved a big switch in the grain movement from 60 to 70 percent of it going east to now 60 to 70 percent of it going west, and with that the downsizing over the years in Thunder Bay.

[0:05:07]

EE: When did that occur, this--?

SS: Early 1980-81 timeframe. Russia at the time was undergoing changes in breaking up itself, and they owed us at the time over $600 million for grain that we had shipped to them over the years. Basically, everything pretty well went to Russia. That was our biggest customer out of Thunder Bay. That was a devastating hit for not only the grain elevator companies, but also for a lot of men that worked in the industry. At the same time, mixed with that, was the technological computer change that was going about. That also resulted in huge downsizing of jobs because everything was becoming more, I guess you could say, computer run.

EE: Yes. Was there any sense of political factors being involved in the Russian disappearance from the market?

SS: From my perspective, not so much in Canada that would affect us here. I think that in Russia, it was more or less with the break-up of the country. The economy was suffering. They just didn't have the money it seemed, at the time, if I recollect from my perspective.

EE: Of course, the collapse of the Soviet Union is circa 1990, isn't it?

SS: Yeah.

EE: So then this is, you're describing, '81 or '2.

SS: Yeah.

EE: So it must have been economic difficulties in Russia itself.

SS: It was difficulties of the time.

EE: They didn't have the foreign exchange, perhaps, to keep continuing buying from Canada the way they had. Well, that's been a great sketch you've given us of your career already. To go back to those summer jobs for just a few moments, the work that you did in Canada Malting in unloading the grain and then loading the malt afterwards was all, as you were saying, pretty mechanical. It was physical labour that you were carrying out. There really wasn't much in the way of equipment there at all through those years.

SS: No. It was a self-contained plant. Canada Malting was basically a company that more or less deal in barley, and they were not really under the CGC–or the Canadian Wheat Board [CWB]. We oversaw some of the—in later years—we oversaw their shipments of grain, barley out, if they did that, but usually they processed it in Thunder Bay. They processed it from a barley into a malt, and they sold the malt. They had their own buyers, et cetera.

EE: What is malt? What's done to the barley to turn it into malt?

SS: It's heated, and the barley turns from a starch into a sugar through the heating process. Actually, they were one of the big reasons natural gas came to Thunder Bay, because the amount of gas that they used to heat the--.

EE: The amount of heat that they needed.

SS: Yeah. To heat the barley and dry it out, to turn it almost from starch to sugars. Like the whole process I'm not 100 percent aware of. But then what they do is they just, I guess, more or less pulverize the barley kernel into almost a flour and add ingredients to it and that. The malt is one of the ingredients used in the production of beer, as we all know.

EE: The stuff in the bags--.

[*… audio skips*]

SS: Substance that they would load off, put it into cargo bags of--.

EE: 110 pounds you said. [Laughs]

SS: 110 pounds. Load them in boxcars. It was one way, otherwise, they were loaded aboard ships, eh? Foreign ships.

EE: How large is a bag of malt at 110 pounds? Can you pick it up easily?

SS: What we would do is we would load them in a certain part of the upstairs facility in Canada Malting, sew the bags shut, put it down a conveyor belt into the boxcar. If you were in the boxcar, you would catch–stop it coming off the conveyor belt–load it on your shoulder, and then just stack them up. So it was more or less a very mechanical--.

EE: Yeah. Physical work.

SS: Physical.

EE: I have quite keen memories of unloading Portland Cement bags at 87 and a half pounds. I don't know that they were much more than—here I am going Imperial—would they be 15 to 18 inches? Oh, maybe, yeah something like that. Astonishing. **[…*audio skips*]** Depending a little bit on the bulk of it, but still, it's 110 pounds, and if you had any quantity of that to handle, you'd be nice and tired.

SS: We were nice and tired.

EE: By the end of the day, no doubt. [Laughs]

SS: Yeah.

EE: And then the McCabe Elevator, the--. In both cases, the boxcars, the grain came in, in boxcars.

[0:10:06]

SS: Yes.

EE: And wooden boxcars, I guess. And so, the unloading was fairly straightforward in one sense.

SS: Right.

EE: The bobcat, of course, was a great advance on what you had to do in Canada Malting.

SS: Oh, for sure. Yeah. There was also different, depending on what plant you worked at, it had different devices for unloading. At McCabe's they used to unload by using the board, and they found the cheapest way for them to change from using the board—to make it more user friendly for the person unloading—would be to go to the bobcat. Other plants went into dumpers. Most of the mechanical dumpers would pick the car up and tilt it either way.

EE: Yes. These were where they rocked the car or whatever.

SS: That era was the advent of the tanker car, where they would unload the bottom of the tanker. The tanker increased the amount of capacity that they could bring here per car from approximately 60 metric tonnes to 90 metric tonnes would be the average tanker. Very easy to unload. Initially, they would have men with bars unloading a slide at the bottom of the tankers to empty out into a hopper. Now it's done by a mechanical device that attaches to that hopper opener and opens automatically, eh? So.

EE: Less and less muscle work, and less and less—fewer—people all the time.

SS: A lot less. Initially at one of the bigger plants here, Sask Wheat Pool, they would have roughly 40 men per shift unloading approximately 110 to 120 boxcars of grain. That is down to 110 or 115 tankers of grain with 3 to 5 men doing that. So it's a huge change.

EE: Enormous reduction in labour.

SS: The labour--.

EE: And that was happening already through--.

SS: That was happening--. **[…** ***audio skips*****]** to the tanker in Thunder Bay, and I'm thinking that was about the same time, near the '80s. It was like a 10-year cycle there from the early '80s to the very early '80s that it switched over completely to taking boxcars out of service and putting tankers in.

EE: Because some of this was, I guess, economic development money.

SS: Mmhmm. It was.

EE: Many of those cars were built, where, in Cape Breton in Nova Scotia, I think.

SS: In Nova Scotia, yeah.

EE: Federal funding. And then of course, the provinces were involved, and every resident of Thunder Bay has seen those hopper cars with various logos on them, names indicating who owns these cars.

SS: Very conducive to Thunder Bay because when you come from the Prairies here, it's strictly downhill. So two engines can haul 70 to 90 cars downhill no problem at all at a high rate of speed, so that's a lot more volume coming here, a lot less expense to the railroad. And then when they go back, they go back light, so it can haul 90 cars back with a couple locomotives. Different story out west that they've got to through the Rogers Pass there.

EE: Yes. And of course, in the--.

SS: It's very expensive.

EE: Late '80s, CP--. **[…** ***audio skips*****]** Through the mountain. They tunneled through the mountain in order to make it easier to carry the grain, move the trains through that area. Well, moving from after the year with Revenue Canada and coming back to the Grain Commission was quite a significant change in the work that you did. You weren't involved in any of that brute labour any longer. Back to the McCabe, actually, for a moment. You mentioned an electric bobcat. I guess it would not be advisable to have a gasoline or whatever powered bobcat working those cars with all the dust.

SS: Yeah. Because even though for a third of the time while you're unloading the actual boxcar, you're on an elevated grate platform, very narrow, in the air at the level at the bottom of the door of the boxcar. So once you get the door open and you can get the bobcat into the boxcar, now you have to unload both ends of it. So you would be in there with diesel fumes, et cetera. Gas fumes. It was--. **[…** ***audio skips*****]** considering all the dust that was in there already. I can remember the days that I would go in there, and after doing one car, your mask and goggles, you couldn't see out of your goggles. In fact, most of the time, you were unloading blind because you were causing so much dust from the grain that you were handling in there. It was so dirty coming from

the Prairies you couldn't see what you were doing anyways. It was more or less just knowing what you were doing inside the boxcar yourself.

EE: Was the dust inevitable? Did all grain produce dust? I'm a farmer's son, so when you talk about dirty grain, I get a little defensive immediately, but was it all dusty fairly uniformly?

SS: Well, oh yeah. Dust. And in that dust, there's a huge amount of insecticides at the time, different naturally occurring fungicides in the grain. All of that was not necessarily cleaned out by the early combines that they had.

[0:15:05]

EE: No.

SS: And so basically, farmers would just clean the fields—dockage and excess straw and stuff was knocked out—but they would ship it here dirty. There was no cleaning elevators on the Prairies--.

[… *audio skips*]

EE: Tasking the terminal elevators here to clean that grain.

SS: To clean the grain and ship it. Prepare it for shipping either domestically or overseas.

EE: When you began working for the Grain Commission, were there typical days? Was there a rhythm to the day that you could describe?

SS: Well, initially when we started, again, it was the early stages of the process here, and there was a lot of mechanical stuff involved. So my day would be—as an assistant—I would either be collecting information from the tankers or boxcars to process into the system. Helping inspectors clean and prepare the grain for grading. I would spend a lot of time initially working on boats sampling by hand. We would use a handheld device to sample from the big spouts that load the grain into the different vessels. We would also do hand sampling for cars that we loaded out. If we were shipping them--. **[… *audio skips*]**. We also did a lot of sampling in the car shed. The sampling was set up to collect the sample automatically, but there was no pneumatic system to bring it into our offices. So we would more or less do that kind of rudimentary--.

EE: You'd be running it back and forth.

SS: Yeah, running back and forth, doing jobs, different jobs. Depending on the plant too—if they were a little more ahead of times or if they were financially more viable—they were moving forward with more new techniques, et cetera.

EE: And this was the work that you did at whichever elevator you were sent to through the day?

SS: With every site, and there were many sites at the time too. In Current River there was United Grain Growers A, there was Pool 4A—which was Saskatchewan—Pool 4A and Saskatchewan Pool 4B. There was also JRI had a big plant which--. James Richardson Terminals.

EE: Yes.

SS: Downtown Port Arthur, Sask Wheat Pool 6 had a plant. There were half a dozen plants at Intercity, starting with Manitoba--. **[…** ***audio skips*****]** Elevator 7B, Saskatchewan Elevator &A, which were sisters. Beside that was United Grain Growers M Elevator, which was McCabe's formerly, and beside that was Manitoba Pool Elevator 1, and then a small little elevator called Parrish & Heimbecker [P&H]. At Chippewa area there was two elevators at the time: Sask Wheat Pool 5, which became 15, and Cargill, which is an American company, had a plant there also. On the river, there was three or four elevators. There was Paterson had a small plant there, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool had an elevator 5 A and E there, and Western Grain had a plant at the time there. So there was quite a few elevators for quite a while until the early '80s when we started to lose Russia. These plants all started to shut down.

EE: Well, I have keen memories of Paterson's coming down in the summer of '78 as I was moving to town. That was a painful thing to see. My father--. **[…** ***audio skips*****]** Elevator that had handled it all those years was gone. Yeah. If we were to take the grain in one boxcar and just sort of follow it through, how often—at how many stages—would that grain be sampled?

SS: Well, it would be sampled--. Initially, it would be sampled when it was loaded out west at the country elevator. The elevator manager or his assistant would take a sample of the grain--.

EE: The local agent.

SS: As they were loading it into that particular boxcar for its destination to Thunder Bay or wherever it was going—Vancouver or even Montreal, Quebec City if it was bypassing Thunder Bay, which very seldom it did. And then it would be sampled at unload in

Thunder Bay. We would automatically--. We had a sampling system set up on the belt as it was unloaded. Sampling devices would take a representative sample from usually about roughly a kilogram from each boxcar. And--.

[… *audio skips*]

EE: Loading I suppose.

SS: Yeah.

EE: To assure yourself, first of all, that it was a homogeneous load.

SS: Right. As it's unloaded, it's unloaded into a pit, and then when they decided which bin they're going to put it into, they release it from the pit onto a belt, and then we sample it from the belt. And so, for the amount of time it takes to run out, that's the sample we're going to be getting.

EE: So if we were to go back to that country point for a moment, when the agent is sampling and, I guess, he himself—I guess they'd all be men in those days—would have to have the knowledge of the quality of each farmer's load because he would be dumping depending on quality into different bins in the elevator, wouldn't he?

[0:20:20]

SS: Mmhmm.

EE: Because you'd want the boxcar when it came in to be No. 1 or No. 2 or whatever it was throughout no matter where that grain had been loaded.

SS: Canadian Wheat Board would put out a call to the particular country elevator to load X number of cars for Thunder Bay in a particular grade. So the elevator manager would have to be aware of what particular grade he would be calling for from the farmer if he didn't already have it in his stock, and for a particular type of grain to be sent to Thunder Bay in order for it to be here in time for the vessels to load.

While we're talking about that, I will make a--. Significant changes happened here. When we used to ship to Russia, we would just ship, ship, ship, ship, ship. There would be no--. They would call for X number of millions of tonnes at the beginning of the year.

Since we lost them, we now come up with roughly 70 different customers that we ship grain to. And because of the world economic crunch over the years, some of these countries can't take the grain until they pay for it, and sometimes that involves--. Like, we have to get the grain from wherever we're going to ship it from here and shipped to that country within a month, and then when the boat gets there, wait until the cheque clears the bank more or less until we unload it. So it's really changed a lot that way. So marketing wise, the Canadian Wheat Board is a huge advantage for us nowadays, I think, for the farmer.

EE: And so, the Canadian Wheat Board will be--. And so, the skip or the crew of the saltie waits there until they're told to unload it?

SS: Yeah. They're given direction of when to load it and when to unload it. If they're here too early, they just wait until they're assigned the time to pick the grain up. They pick the grain up, they deliver it, and they have to wait basically until the country can take receipt or until their company releases it. **[Telephone rings]**

EE: So that's one of the reasons the saltie may sit in harbour for a day or two whereas the lakers are just moving it down the system, I guess, and they arrive, they pull in, they get loaded, and it's sent off.

SS: The lakers are taking--. The lakers, which we have fewer of every year, are basically transferring it to another elevator for further pickup down the end of the St. Lawrence. Quebec City, Montreal, Port Cartier, Baie Comeau—those are all points we ship domestically to--. **[… *audio skips*]** Goderich, areas like that that take the particular grain and use it in that area. If it's going to be held in a transfer elevator, we ship it—if we can—by laker. Salties that come here to pick up grain for direct export can arrive here early, can be here a week early, can be here and the grain isn't here, and we find them waiting out.

Demurrage charges can occur if they are here on time and the grain isn't here on time. So you're looking at roughly, to have a saltie sitting in the harbour--. You see a lot more of that in Vancouver than you do here because they only have so many plants there to load the grain, and salties come in, and because of the different factors involved weather wise—shipping through Rogers Pass et cetera—can cost the Canadian government a lot of money in demurrage charges. Demurrage can run up to about $25,000 a day for a saltie to sit waiting on top of what their charter is.

EE: These are expenses for the Canadian Wheat Board as owners of the--.

SS: They would have to pay, yeah.

[… *audio skips*]

EE: Partly it's charged against—

SS: Out of their profit.

EE: Against their returns. To return to the matter of the sampling then, so it's sampled as it comes off out of the car into the elevator. How many more times then is it sampled inside the terminal elevator?

SS: The sample then we take to the--. The elevator company takes a sample for their own records too, you know, just in case they have a request to have somebody within their own organization look at it further if they have a complaint. We take a sample, and we process it further for many different criteria. Some of the criteria that I can give you just would be moisture test–make sure that the grain is not overly wet or damp. It has to be furtherly dried in Thunder Bay because there's charge occurred to that. We sample it for bugs. So we take another sample from that, we send it to our entomology lab, and they check for insects and other infestation. And if we think that—on perusal by the inspector—if we think that there's anything that we think that might have any kind of insects or anything to that effect in it, we ask the elevator company to hold it in a separate bin until further review downtown in our central office. We also check it for protein level if it is a wheat and durum because we bin those very specifically according to the level of protein in the wheat. So there's different processes for taking from the main sample little samples for other purposes.

[0:25:33]

EE: This is all on the way to storing it appropriately in preparation for the shipping?

SS: Yes.

EE: And so then the third sampling would occur in the loading of the ship then? Or are there other steps?

SS: Then we also sample it, yes, like we've said, as we load it out. We keep a big sample for that. We may also at that time--. **[…** ***audio skips*****]** The elevator company may come to us and ask us for a sample, and we will process a sample for them. It can also be--. If they think that there's a problem, it can also be sampled wherever it is unloaded, whatever foreign port. And that has happened quite frequently in the last little while because of different concerns by different countries from previous shipments have led them to have a little less trust in our system. So that's a new occurrence.

EE: The sense that the layperson who has some knowledge of the industry or wheat growing in Canada—particularly of wheat—is that quality is very, very important to the Canadian industry. Grains of a particular protein value--. In fact, I gather that visual identification is one of the features that seeds have to meet. When the grain is harvested out there in the field, you need to--.

[*… audio skips*]

SS: They're moving away from actual visual identification of the grain varieties. It's more to a process where the companies or the end user requires a certain specific level of protein, moisture, whatever they want it for, so we're now producing particular wheats and barleys, et cetera, end use mostly. They've developed different machines, which they haven't perfected yet, for what we call black box identification where you can put the grain in there—it's like a whole grain analyzer—and it will tell you what it is. So they're getting away from the actual visual identification process. There are things now that are so hard for the human eye to detect that only either a chemical process, electronic process can identify those things. And so, it's getting quite technical.

EE: Are there any particular places where this research to achieve this kind of inspection is taking place?

SS: All around the world. In fact, we have right now the latest occurrence is that all our flax out of Thunder Bay—we had 850,000 metric tonnes that was going to be shipped out of Thunder Bay to Europe—has now been stopped because the European Union has decided that they found what they believe to be a genetically modified or altered ingredient in the flax. Has stopped—in fact, Germany discovered it—until the further process is done. So now what we have had to do is we've had to divert shipments of grain, of flax here, to British Columbia so it goes out the West Coast. Last year that happened with our canola. They found genetically altered canola mixed in with some of our canola, and so we couldn't detect that through visual inspection. It has to be done end-use, usually by the company that's receiving the product. Have enough technical expertise to be able to see what they're looking for. And if they see something they don't want, they'll reveal it at that time.

EE: I don't know, how much discussion has there been in regard to this flax matter, how the adulteration may have occurred? I've seen a newspaper story or two that I found rather shocking in its way, but the central feature being the plant scientist at the University of Saskatchewan. Now, I didn't go down to the basement to check my library, but I think I have a book by him on modification of grains, this kind of genetic experimentation. But the part that astounded me was that he achieved this—it was a matter of producing a flax that would be able to handle sprays, so herbicide not immune but resistant—herbicide resistant flax that he had produced. And I gather that he gave samples of this, just handed them out to people, which strikes me as incredibly irresponsible given what the world thinks, or what Europeans particularly think about genetic modification. I don't know, do you have any further comment on that?

[0:30:11]

SS: Well, sure. Definitely. That's--.

EE: In a way that you can talk about it, that is to say.

SS: Yeah. Yeah. Oh, definitely. Over the years, you know, you wonder sometimes whether scientists or even farmers what they're thinking or doing. I've worked in the trade here for so many years where a farmer--. Most of the seed that you plant in the ground has been treated with mercury in order for it to get through the germination stage. Insects don't attack it. So all that seed has got a mercury component to it, so some farmers have got all this seed left after they plant, they throw it in with their product! And so, we get it here, and we've got a boxcar full of grain or a tanker full of grain, and it's got mercury kernels in it. And so, the only way it can get in there is through poor handling or inept handling. And it makes you wonder, are they thinking when they're doing these things? Is the scientist thinking when he gives samples of this? He may have done it out of goodwill thinking that this is something that's going to be beneficial because it will allow the flaxseed to grow and not be affected, again, by--. So they're getting away from using mercury. They're using other strains resistant--.

EE: Forms of treatment.

SS: Genetically altered seed in order for it to come through the process without using mercury compounds, et cetera. So the whole process behind it, I think, is a good idea, but the end result is what scares people. And when you say "genetically altered" that just scares people and scares--. You know?

EE: Well, the canola instance has involved the lawsuit that is Mr. Schmeiser the farmer--.

SS: Yes.

EE: Who was accused of planting genetically modified, when I think his business was organic farming, or as best he could do it. And so, he was certainly--. And the company sued him for using their seeds without paying them when it would seem that, in fact, it had been intrusion into his fields from neighbouring fields. And that, of course, is the worst part of this genetic modification. It's like Pandora's box. You open it and the stuff begins to spread. It spreads quite naturally. And I guess, well, this obviously impacts your work. [Laughs]

SS: It does. A huge impact on a lot of jobs, and not only that, but the reputation of the Canadian grain industry is at risk when that happens because people are fearful of, "This gets by the system which is supposed to be so good." because basically we sell our grain based on the fact that it is cleaned and guaranteed.

EE: Yes.

SS: We can't compete against United States, Australia, other big countries that produce way more product than we do, but we can compete because they know that our product is a higher quality and is government-backed.

EE: Yes. It makes Canadian grain a little bit at least, I suppose, a niche product as the jargon of industries has it.

SS: And more so today than ever before.

EE: Yes. In the case of wheat—which is used in, let's say, flour production for making bread and other purposes—is it true that countries, the buyers may end up taking our grain, some of our grain, mixing it with other grains?

SS: Just from the natural fact that our growing conditions here produce a quality that can't be done anywhere else in the world. We can produce hard Red Spring wheat with a protein content of up to 16 percent or higher. So a country like the United States produces winter wheat or a wheat of a softer quality, they'll mix that off with ours, and it ends up they get a product that generates like a 13 percent protein level. So you know, they use it to offset some of their poorer quality stuff, yeah.

EE: How low would the percentage of protein in their wheats be, the winter wheats?

SS: It can be--. We have here in Canada as low as ten percent, ten to 11 percent. So I can imagine it would be in the nine to ten percent, but it's consistently a bigger volume of the nine to ten to 11 percent, and we have a bigger volume of the 13 percent and higher here. So genetically, ours--. So it can be mixed to make their stuff better.

EE: Can you suggest sort of proportions amongst the various grains that flow through Thunder Bay? What proportion of it would be wheat over the years?

SS: It changes every year depending on the sales, eh? But characteristically, we've tried to do different products, your end-use products, but mostly most of our product here is either durum wheat, okay, which is used for, you know, different forms of spaghetti.

EE: Pastas.

[0:35:02]

SS: Pasta, et cetera. That's a big product through here. Flax is a huge product through here. It was going to Egypt. Different countries would use that for paint, other oils.

EE: So it's really an industrial raw material?

SS: Industrial. Industrial use. A lot of canola. A lot of canola goes through Thunder Bay. We sell a lot of canola here. We also do a lot of Red Spring, hard Red Spring wheat here. And those are the big products. Barley, most of the barley that comes through here goes to the United States. We ship it down to Milwaukee, and it's used for the beer process down there. We do a lot of oats through here, but the oats also go to the United States. We ship it from Thunder Bay to Duluth, Chicago area, Milwaukee. It's used in the racehorse industry down there.

EE: Oh, it's the feed?

SS: And also some for health-food product like cereals, et cetera.

EE: Yes.

SS: We've got some little niches for specialty crops such as human-consumption peas. We do some different lentils. But more or less, those are the big products through here. The most volume are hard Red Spring wheat, canola, flax, and durum.

EE: Is there specialization on the waterfront in the elevators? Do certain companies tend to lean towards one, or are all the companies prepared to handle whatever of each?

SS: Yeah. Because there's so much downsizing that has gone on--. So when Viterra bought out--. Viterra, one of the bigger companies, now has since, in the last little while, changed its name from Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. They've bought out United Grain Growers. So they've shut down many of the plants. In fact, Viterra would like to run all of their products out of one plant, which was formerly 7A and 7B, and have nothing else in Thunder Bay. Presently they have a plant in Current River, you know. United Grain Growers A is still open, but they are looking toward, I think, running everything through one plant. Both of these

plants that they have now are not running at peak capacity, and so I think that in the very near future you could see another plant shutting and them running out of one plant there. **[… *audio skips*]** New player on the scene is Mission Terminal. They're the old Saskatchewan 15 plant in beside Cargill out in the Chippewa area. They handle a lot of CWB grain. And they handle a lot of it under contract because they underbid all of the other companies here on unloading, storing, cleaning, et cetera. So they're a non-unionized plant, and they're in fierce competition against all the other companies in order to survive and move ahead in the Thunder Bay area here. Little player like P&H is still there, but they're more or less self-contained. They own Butterball Turkey, and they more of less use their plant to produce feed, et cetera, for their turkey production.

EE: Which is where, in southern Ontario?

SS: Southern Ontario.

EE: I see. I'd not seen much of P&H on the Prairies until I was driving from Montana--. **[… *audio skips*]** Suddenly there were this--.

End of Audio Part One.

Audio Part Two

Time, Speaker Narrative
EE: [inaudible] of P&H Elevator--. OM: What time? EE: I've got six after 5:00. So it's just short of an hour. Well, no, it's about 45 minutes since we got started. **[… *audio skips*]** OM: Overview it but--. SS: Sure.

OM: Okay. Well, we'll do the three, two, one.

EE: We were just talking about P&H, the small self-contained company, and you were saying what their business was.

SS: They're more or less an in-house business where they buy on the Prairies in order to service their plants in southern Ontario that handle their Butterball turkey production there. Very small plant, very limited. Managed to make money, managed to stay open here, but how much longer, I'm not sure. So then we're going to be faced with—more or less—we're going to be faced with five companies left in Thunder Bay with probably five facilities.

EE: With these big ones. The--. **[… *audio skips*]** moved into. It would be interesting to explore some of that history. In fact--.

SS: Well, P&H is Parrish & Heimbecker, two gentlemen that got together and formed a company in the grain trade, were very prolific in the Prairies, had a lot of small places, but because the bigger companies went with throughput elevators, closed down a lot of country elevators, basically that did in a lot of the Paterson elevators, did in a lot of Parrish & Heimbecker. Lot of the smaller plants were shut down. The--.

EE: Well, I was interested to see this--.

SS: The railroad companies didn't want to service all those small places, and so it became more efficient for the farmer to bring the grain to a bigger elevator that they could ship a lot quicker.

EE: I wouldn't want to say categorically how many there were or how many of them were operating, but driving up from Shelby, Montana to Lethbridge early July '08, I was interested to see suddenly this number of P&H **[… *audio skips*]** To the Lakehead, and on it goes to feed turkeys in southern Ontario. [Laughs] And of course, for them then, if the turkey production may well be the main business by now, so that here's a matter of acquiring the feed that is required, having their own suppliers in house, and they can price things accordingly and so on. The closure of all these elevators, of course, suggests that we might consider getting someone from the tax department of the city to give us an interview sometime about commercial and industrial taxation. The tax base of the city, which must be powerfully impacted by the closure of all of these elevators.

SS: Well, I've heard, Ernie, just in the comparison between Duluth and Thunder Bay, the cost factor for taxes for a plant here are upwards of $1 million a year, and I've heard as low as $50,000 a year for the same plant in--. Cargill has a plant in Duluth and has

a plant here, and I think the difference is $50,000 to $100,000 compared to $1 million here. So a company has to really look at that and say, you know, like how--.

EE: There has to be real value here.

SS: Yeah. **[*… audio skips*]** Were plugged in Thunder Bay. There are no sales, no boats coming. I think we've had one saltie here in the last month, and so when you have those fixed costs and you don't have the turnover, the ability to unload and ship grain—which these companies depend on—it really is detrimental.

EE: Sure. We were examining stages of the business, the various grains. What about your own progress up through the ranks, so to speak, in the Grain Commission? You began as an assistant inspector. How did your work change over the years as you advanced in the Commission?

SS: Well, with everything else in the grain industry, computers. CGC used to do everything mechanically, everything was done by hand. We would record all of the different grades on long sheets and add the weights of each boxcar to the sheets and then submit the sheets at the end of the day. Now that is all changed. We do that electronically. We use computers for nearly all of our work. All our input data is done at a computer in our central office, which is on Archibald Street in Thunder Bay. So it's a huge, huge change in the ability and how we do our work and much more efficient. And definitely with that efficiency, less staff is required in order to do that. So, you know, it's just evolved.

EE: So this would change the character of the work quite clearly for you.

SS: Computer age. Yeah, computer age has changed drastically the--.

EE: Did the kind of work you were required to do change otherwise as you--. At some point you became no longer an assistant but a full-fledged grain inspector, I suppose.

SS: Well, you do that through writing different exams and promotions. In order to become a grain inspector, I had to serve roughly five years as an assistant and become familiar with all the different end products. And they're ever-changing end products, eh? Because of the different requests from different buyers. Like you had said, niche markets. So for all the different varieties--. It's almost like an apprenticeship. So I basically served my apprenticeship, went through that cycle. As promotions became available—meaning competitions in order to become an inspector—I successfully completed that process and with it became an inspector. And my job changed from what I did as an assistant to what I do as an inspector.

[0:05:49]

EE: Right. Which then qualified you to, what, to certify things, to assert things, to sign to things that you couldn't do earlier?

SS: Yeah. So now as an inspector what I can do is I certify the grade at unload. So when it's unloaded, I examine it. We do other tests. I have assistants that help me do other tests on it. I apply a grade to it. That grade can still be reviewed by the chief inspector of Canada at the request of the farmer or the agent. He can have that looked at or reviewed if they're not happy with the particular grade that I have given it. I also do vessel loading. I load--. [… *audio skips*] Approval of any grains that are discharged into either tankers for shipment domestically, for export to the United States by rail, or overseas or domestically via boat. So I am able to do that. On my job, I've travelled to Quebec City in the wintertime to help them. When we bypass grain from Thunder Bay, it goes directly from the Prairies to Quebec City.

EE: The northern rail line.

SS: We load boats there. As I mentioned before, 70 countries that require grain require it all year-round now, and so a country like Algeria does not have the money to pay for it, so they'll require 30 days in advance for a boat to be loaded for arrival in the port to be discharged. I've worked in Vancouver with the Canadian Grain Commission. When they're busy, we've gone there and helped in the wintertime there. So I've travelled quite a bit, extensively across Canada. And I'm able to load and supervise the loading of grain across Canada. That's basically my job.

EE: Right. And are there gradations with--. **[… *audio skips*]** The experience that you've had?

SS: You'd like to think that seniority would play a factor, but it doesn't. The federal government is merit. Merit has always been the criteria for advancement in civil service. It always will be.

EE: But are there just the two assistant and then grain--. Well, the chief inspector, as you said, at the top of it all.

SS: Right.

EE: But as inspectors, you're one group, or are there gradations within that?

SS: Right. We work under the Public Service Alliance of Canada [PSAC]. We are in the technical trade group, TC group they call it. I'm a PI, primary products inspector—we're the last primary product inspectors in Canada left. All the other ones have been moved from primary product inspectors such as plant and animal inspectors. Egg, dairy inspectors, meat inspectors have all been moved into the engineering group, and we're the actual last group in the primary products inspection bunch. And so that group involves inspectors, it involves assistant inspectors, and we're now moving towards a cross-based system between the weighing staff and the inspection, so that we can be more fully integrated and able to do the total process.

EE: Yes. Right. You mention a farmer's complaint. Of course, I grew up on a small 240-acre farm—and I don't suppose our crop would ever have filled a car—but farmers who were working several sections who produce a great deal of grain will certainly be shipping a car of their own product so that they could have the grade double checked here, I suppose.

SS: Oh, yeah.

EE: Does that happen very often?

SS: Frequently. There's lots of producers now that aren't involved with the Canadian Wheat Board [CWB].

EE: Or are hostile to it.

SS: They're hostile to it or want to work outside the system, and so they ship directly to a company here or they deal with a company in the Prairies that has a terminal in Thunder Bay. So they may deliver to Paterson Elevator, and Paterson may have a grandfather to raise through with James Richardson--. **[*… audio skips*]** involved the producer, who is the farmer, delivering his grain to an agent for Paterson, getting a price from him, getting a grade from him, and at unload here, that changes. So he has--.

[0:10:10]

EE: That's where he gets suspicious.

SS: The option of asking the chief inspector. Usually it's a subordinate in Thunder Bay, meaning my--. What we have now is an inspection specialist in Thunder Bay at our central office who will look at it and decide at that time.

EE: On behalf of the chief inspector?

SS: On behalf of the chief inspector. He will look at it initially, and if he feels that there is warrant for it to be changed, he can move it to the chief inspector. That sample will be taken and shipped to Winnipeg, and the chief inspector will have the final say on that.

EE: Who actually owns the grain at the various stages? Do you have a sense of that as inspector?

SS: Oh, definitely, yeah. Definitely. Aside from the producer, then, who ships by himself--.

EE: Well, after the producer.

SS: It's owned by the--. **[*… audio skips*]** contract to the farmer to grow a certain variety of grain for them. And so when that grain is delivered by the farmer to either the agent who represents the CWB, the agent takes charge of it on behalf of the company. And so he signs a note saying, "Okay, you delivered [No.] 2 Red to me. This is what you're going to be paid." CWB gives him a bonus to that if at the end of the year they make money on it. He'll get an addition to that.

EE: Well, if he delivers it, let's say, to a Viterra throughput elevator somewhere in Saskatchewan or wherever these days on the Prairies and it arrives here, Viterra's providing the service, is it not?

SS: Right.

EE: It isn't actually owning. It's the Wheat Board who does own the--.

SS: No. The companies that handle the grain are paid by the CWB/the farmer for handling the grain. So that means they get paid roughly $1,600 a tanker to unload it. Clean the grain, they get paid for that. If they have to dry the grain, they get paid for that. They also get a percentage of dockage out of the grain. When they clean it, they get to keep that. And they also get paid for shipping the grain to a vessel. So for every function that they do, they get paid. Now, if they can streamline their functions, if they can have less staff there, if they can make a product better by adding things to get the volume up to keep the same product, that's where they make their money. We're there—as the CGC—we're there to police the fact that these companies--.

EE: That they're not cutting corners in the quality?

SS: Well, yeah. Nowadays, you don't really have to worry about that because if a company ships a non-board grain, which they ship a lot of—canola's a non-board grain, it's not handled by the CWB—then if they ship that to a customer, and the customer says, "Well, this isn't what I--. It's not what I'm--." **[… *audio skips*]** There.

EE: Mindful of these potential problems.

SS: They're there to keep--. Yeah.

EE: Yes. Yes, I guess that's a good reminder that the Wheat Board is concerned with wheat and barley and oats as well.

SS: They're a marketing agency.

EE: The barley, of course, has been one of the grains in dispute on the Prairies, hasn't it, whether the Wheat Board should have it?

SS: Don't see much barley anymore though, eh? It's basically lost it's--. Any barley that's produced is used right on the Prairies for hog plants there, for feed out there. Any specialty barley is grown under contract to--. I'm thinking of Budweiser or one of the big American brewing companies. They'll contract right out to the farmer to get that grain handled by them.

EE: And that, of course, is one of the arguments for the Western Grain Transportation Act and a further reduction to the subsidy to the railways that the grain would be used on the Prairies--.

SS: The CWB is a huge advantage to the Canadian farmer as far as I'm concerned. It's a marketing tool. They can market to 70 countries--. **[… *audio skips*]** rely on a company. Viterra's a big company, and they could do it, but I mean, it's--.

EE: Well, Viterra is presumably aiming to be a competitor with the Cargill and the several other huge companies in the US who are [inaudible] in the world grain industry. Anyway, we won't pursue the politics of that. I'm completely onside with you. The Wheat Board's a great advantage, but we don't want to debate that this--.

SS: Americans tell us that all the time. [Laughing]

EE: The Americans tell you that?

SS: That's for sure.

EE: Well, I'm pleased to hear that. What would you like people to know about the work that you do and the places you worked?

SS: Well, I think that--. That's a good one because basically, we're undergoing--. I'm not sure if you gentlemen are familiar with the fact that we're undergoing a review right now in Parliament—its second level—to disband the CGC and a lot of the functions that we do. So we've been under--.

EE: Well, I understand that my member of parliament put a shaft into the spokes on that, moved by the government.

[0:15:05]

SS: So, yeah. They did hoist the amendment on that. So we're in the process right now of it being--. **[…** ***audio skips*****]** lengthy two-hour discussion on it at second level, second reading. So basically, I'm thinking that in the near future, they're going to move forward with trying to disband the service that we do in relation to the CGC's inward inspection and inward weighing, and only inspect vessels that are for foreign destinations.

EE: What's the argument that they have for that? Is there any sense to that?

SS: I guess they feel—the politicians et cetera, the party in power—feels that what we do now is not warranted anymore, that the industry itself can police itself. The industry actually tells the farmer what they want them to grow for them and provides them with necessary payment for that based on world prices or market value and handles it all and gets their own customer and sells it and that. So the free trade or the ability to trade, to handle their own business, is what I think that--. Deregulation is the word I'm looking for.

EE: Well, of course, deregulation has gone on in so many areas since the '80s. There's quite a history to all of that. And of course, the view that industry should take care of itself, that's always the question. Whom are they actually taking care of? Where's--.

SS: Are they able to do that? That's the good one because basically, the CEOs in places that we don't talk about feel that they can do it, and the rank and file here in Thunder Bay rely on the Canadian Grain Commission for not only documentation, for our expertise, for our help. They look at us as cheap insurance. A third-party cheap insurance that they're going to have to provide somebody to help them. If we're disbanded, they're going to have to look at a provider such as SGS [Société Générale de Surveillance] or Intertek, another company that does sampling services to come in there to be a third party because they know that somewhere down the road somebody's going to say to them, "Well, that isn't what you shipped. I put certain grain in it, and then it

went over the P&H. They put another grain in it. Their grain's no good. My grain's good." So we're cheap third party insurance, and I think that we do a realistically good job with our accuracy levels, our ability to distinguish any problems that are happening. I think in the end, in hindsight, it's going to be a mistake, but in the meantime, it's making its way through Parliament and the political will is to do that, to try it. And so--.

EE: Do you have any sense that Cargill, as the main American interest in the Canadian grain industry, is unhappy about the activities of the Grain Commission? Would they prefer to do it themselves?

SS: I don't think--. I can't really say that that's the case. I think the case is more or less the same theory as the CGC, that it's strictly Canadian politically driven, that the party in power feels that their deregulation, that they can do it themselves. I'm sure we hear from the Americans that we have a big advantage because we have the CWB. We have that in place where the American farmer doesn't have that. But we're not really so much in competition with the Americans as I think that some American farmers think we are. We sell a certain amount to the States, we sell a lot more to Mexico.

EE: A complement, if you will, to the American industry.

SS: So I think it's more or less just something that's just a situation where--.

EE: Well, that's pure ideology. The conviction that government should provide opportunity for private enterprise, if you will, in the marketplace rather than provide the service through unionized, well-trained, well-paid workers in the government ranks, I think, covers an awful lot of activity in the last 30 years, I'm inclined to say, in a lot of various areas.

SS: The cost of our services to a bushel of grain is a very small percentage.

EE: Yes. Oh, yes. Infinitesimal.

SS: So whether that's going to be to the benefit or detriment of the farmer, time will tell. In the meantime, that process is going through--. And that process has been going through since we lost Russia. The CGC employees have been through many, many, many tough times with the attempt at downsizing our rank and file. The losing of a huge customer like that, then we lost a lot of our--. We became more of a seasonal port evermore so than we were before because even when we were shut down here in the wintertime through the ice, we would still ship grain via tanker, via boxcar to Quebec City, to Montreal for further export out to Russia. So we've gone through a lot of--. I've been laid off, attempted to be laid off, all kinds of stuff over the years. Year after year after year. Basically, this is now the culmination of trying to do totally away with the position, with the job.

[0:20:22]

EE: What might interest or surprise people most about the work that you do?

SS: Huh. I don't think there's much anymore that there may have been prior to food scares that we've had out in the--. Like Maple Leaf Foods, they know that now agricultural inspectors—CFIA, Canadian Food Inspection Agency—was overseeing the work of the plant workers for Maple Leaf Foods in different places. I think the Canadian public is aware that there is government inspection in these products. I think that maybe years ago that a lot of people wouldn't have known what an inspector did, a Canadian agricultural inspector did. I think that people are more knowledgeable nowadays. Whether they thought we do as much as we do involved in the process, doing as many checks--.

EE: Whether there's enough done, I think. to oversee is a lovely verb, but the great danger, it seems to be, is that those who are responsible for overseeing may end up overlooking things.

SS: So, yeah. And so--.

EE: Because there aren't enough of them, and that this is actually the policy that government takes to overlooking.

SS: That's a good point, Ernie, because we don't oversee, we actually do different tests, okay? We're not overseeing anybody else doing these tests. We do the tests for the farmer. We do the tests for the buyer. We do the tests for the elevator company that's requiring where to bin this grain and what to do with it. They come to us for our level of expertise. So we do a lot of hands on, a lot of hands on work. And we provide a lot of documentation, which the CWB, Lake Shipper's Clearance Association, all these other agencies rely on this documentation that we do, because it's such a niche-friendly market now that they have to have a lot of documentation for each level of grain that's handled.

EE: Yeah. The odd thing is that from the '30s when the CWB was created—or recreated since there had been one something like that during the Great War—the Pools, which had been established to try to establish farmers' power in the marketplace which could conceivably establish all of these functions within their own, the Wheat Board really has taken that over. The Grain Commission, of course, has earlier roots, but has developed and so on and so forth. With Viterra now having become the kind of company it is—so it isn't really a pool any longer—one wonders whether the capacity is there on behalf of the farmers. But anyway, that I'm sort of speculating on.

SS: Yeah, there's a huge change. Yes. We used to be the Board of Grain Commissioners. We used to be a very powerful entity in the picture. We became part of the agricultural component, and with that we became less of an instrument to decide the fate of the grain rather than just an agency that oversees part of the function. So there's been a change in our level of, I'm going to say, policing. The level of--. When I first started the job, whatever an inspector in charge of a plant said, he was like God, and the elevator company manager listened to every word he said. He was the man they--. Yeah.

EE: Well, the Board was established originally really against the companies on behalf of the farmers, weren't' they?

SS: That has changed. Now we're service providers almost to not only the--. Less to the farmer and more to the elevator company. Helping them--.

EE: Although it is--.

SS: It's a good process. It helps. I mean, it helps the final process of moving the grain through the system to the satisfaction of the customer. But that's been a huge change where we've gone from real policemen to more of a helper to get this through the system.

EE: Sure. What are you most proud of in this work?

SS: I guess my level of expertise. I feel that I'm a professional in what I do. I try to do the best I can for everybody. It's been hard times to do that because we have changed a lot over the years. I'm proud of the fact that I have been with my employer for 34 years.

EE: Through thick and thin. [Laughs]

SS: Through thick and thin. And I've done to the best of my ability the best job that I could possibly do, eh? Not have been disciplined or criticized for my work, the work that I have achieved for them, so--.

[0:25:05]

EE: Is there recognition within the Commission, awards or--?

SS: No more or--. Yes, there is. We have what we call a "Bravo Award." It's an award that fellow recognition from your fellow, you know, workers. We have that once a year. The federal government has a recognition of years of service, so 25 years, 35 years,

stuff like that. So there is recognition that way. If you come up with some new ideas, there's recognition. So there's different reasons to be, I guess, recognized as you go through your career.

EE: And protecting the workers, of course, if the function of the union, the Public Service Alliance.

SS: Yeah.

EE: Can you say anything about that?

SS: Yeah, I've been the president of our local here for several years. I've been involved on the executive of our local here for probably 10 to 12 years. I've been sent to Ottawa for training for union matters. I've done a lot of court cases. I've done representation for grievances up to and including the deputy chief. So I'm very involved in the union, and I have been for many years. And different--.

EE: And you're pleased with that, if not even proud of that, I'm sure?

SS: Yeah, I have no problem with that. Yeah. Whether my management does or not, that's a different matter. But the union is recognized. Your rights as an employee are recognized by the federal government, and so I feel comfortable with that. I've enjoyed doing that over the years. Whether it's been detrimental to my career or not it's hard to say.

EE: You're given time off, I guess, from the inspection to do it, or does it have to be mostly done after?

SS: We try to do it during--. I mean, if I have to go to represent somebody, to Winnipeg or wherever our head office is, you're paid to do that. It's covered under your regular wage. You get travel expenses. If I have to take time off for a hearing in Thunder Bay, that's done usually under working hours. So basically, yeah. Everything is--. You're compensated for doing that. If I take time off to go to Ottawa where the PSAC head office is, then I take leave time for that, and I'm reimbursed by the PSAC for that.

EE: By the union, right. Well, I hardly have to ask whether you think that the work that you've done has contributed to Canada's success as an international grain trader. [Laughs] The answer is an enthusiastic "Yes" I'm sure.

SS: Oh, for sure. You know, I've worked coast to coast and met many people. I feel comfortable that Canada probably has one of the best systems in place right now to protect people from around the world that are buying our grain.

EE: And on the other side, connections between your work and the work of farmers growing the grain, well, you've sketched that in terms of the concerns they sometimes feel about the grading and so on and so forth and the insurance.

SS: I work well with--. **[… *audio skips*]** with farmers that come to our offices over the years. And you know, I think that they, of any person, probably a lot of the farmers didn't realize how much we do in regards to their concerns.

EE: Do farmers appear in groups or as individuals? Do they get in touch with you?

SS: They come as individuals, usually as tourists. They come here and--.

EE: Can you sketch one of those, your encounter with a farmer who is visiting the Lakehead? Do they come here deliberately to see something of the--?

SS: Well, I had a farmer here that actually farmed right next door to the chief commissioner of the CGC—who was a lady at the time—and he was a farmer agent. So basically, what he did was he grew lentils, and he and another group of farmers decided that they would try to run a shipment of lentils through Thunder Bay. And so basically, he acted as a farmer because it was his grain, but he also acted as an agent. So I met with him. He came to my office at the time, and he was very--. **[… *audio skips*]** It was interesting. It was interesting. He enjoyed it. And whether he was successfully able to keep doing that or not, I'm not sure, because I haven't run into him since then. But it's interesting when you talk to the farmers. They're businessmen too, and they would like to make sure that their product is well-represented, and they get the best bang for their buck. And so definitely you have to treat them as a client almost, and that you're here to represent them and try to make sure that they get a fair shake.

EE: I'm going to move into the changes area. You've mentioned some of the changes. Would you want to do a--. Or add to the list perhaps?

SS: Yeah. Biggest change has been just the advent of computers and technological changes in the unloading and handling. Tankers from boxcar, a huge change. Automation in the plants themselves where when Viterra got fully automated, I laugh because the engineer that was, I guess, there would be a tech-y engineer--. **[… *audio skips*]** That's how technical the plant has become. Everything is automated. It runs on electronics and computers and that. And the computers used to be as big as this room, and now they're as small as this little desktop here, eh?

[0:30:24]

EE: A laptop size?

SS: A laptop, yeah. So basically, huge changes there. With that, unfortunately, comes the downsizing. Automation means--.

EE: You mean in labour?

SS: A lot less labour. A lot less labour. The other big change has been the volume of grain coming through Thunder Bay. We used to run--. Plants here were running at full capacity for eight to nine months of the year, and then at half-capacity in the wintertime. Now our big plants are hardly running at all. Hardly running at all.

EE: Yes. Well, I well remember that in politics in '84. Frank Mazur moved my nomination—the president of the lodge 650 of the grain handlers—and I think he had probably 1,800 members along the waterfront. And these days if there are 180 working--.

SS: That's right. Niche markets compared to, you know, shipping to Russia all our product, all [No.] 1 Red Spring, [No.] 2 Red Spring wheat--. **[…** ***audio skips*****]** Certain markets for certain reasons. A lot of that. So the level of expertise, the level of quality of oversight of the grain inspection has to be a lot more able to change on a yearly basis.

EE: When you mention 70 countries buying, are there dominant ones amongst them or is it really a great diversity?

SS: The United States. We ship a lot of--.

EE: To the United States?

SS: We ship a lot of grain that used to have to come through Thunder Bay in order for it to be exported to the United States. Now it just crosses the Prairies, eh? So we ship a lot of grain to the United States. We ship a lot of grain to Britain, a lot of grain to Germany, lot of grain to China, Japan. Then all the little countries accordingly there they all take different--. Yeah.

EE: Sure. So there's three major, well, continental--. A couple on the Atlantic market and a couple on the Pacific market, then, are the major ones.

SS: I'll give you an example. A country like Liberia, like that, would look at a certain flatbread, so they'll take a specific grain which would be like [No.] 3 Red which would be a lower quality. Again, niche markets. They'll take maybe one boatload a year, two boatloads a year. So basically, that's what we're looking at.

EE: Yeah. Right. The impact of these changes, of course, you've already indicted during the reduction of employment and so on and so forth. The work becomes a lot easier.

SS: Oh, definitely. Yeah.

EE: There's a lot less of it to be done as well in terms of the people.

SS: Sure. I mean, the work especially for the grain handler himself is a lot easier on your body to say anything else. There's not that much--. Occasionally they get a spill there where they have to do a little--. But now spills aren't held up. They'll call in a vacuum truck company and they'll vacuum it all up, so there's none of that hand plowing, unless you get a little spill at the end of a belt or something like that. We just had a big spill at one of the elevators where roughly seven boxcars—so that would be about 670 or 600 tonnes of grain—broke open a little hole in the elevator bin, and so that created a--. Well, they called in, like I say, they called in--. **[… *audio skips*]** hoses and recycle it into the plant again. So not much labour involved there. Stuff like that is just the mechanical fact that things have changes so much and made it so much easier for everybody. Even in my job now, all those samples are pneumatically delivered into our office, and they come in a pneumatic tube into the office, and then they're released into a bucket. We dump them on our bench. It's just a lot easier for everybody that way.

EE: Yes. Pollution control, dust control, was one of the things that went on, what, through the 1970s primarily?

SS: Starting initially, but the big push on that was in the '80s to '90s.

EE: That recent?

SS: Yeah. Ever since--. And even then, with the environmental concerns, the dust factor is huge. Environmental--. It releases into the lake. All those factors have been carefully monitored, and so therefore the plants are a lot cleaner to work in. You still have your dust and that, but they're a lot cleaner. Rodent control--. **[… *audio skips*]** wouldn't be uncommon to find a bin on fire inside the plant, and nowadays, you know, you don't see anything like that at all.

EE: This would be damp grain, I suppose, was it?

SS: Well, just out of condition grain, eh? Left in--. Not turned, not sold. Left in condition, it doesn't take long. If the grain level and the dampness in the grain is high—canola being one of the worst ones—if it's over nine to ten percent moisture content, if you

leave that all year it will start to get out of condition. It will heat within the core, and it'll actually blacken the core. It will burn within the core of the grain there. So you'll go to remove it, you can't. It's been burnt. Basically, the elevator companies have gotten smarter. The product is very expensive. It's $400 to $500 a tonne. If you lose 270 tonnes, you're talking a lot of money, so basically, the plant superintendents—whether they like it or not—have to monitor their plants very closely, very carefully.

[0:35:35]

EE: Keep things moving, eh?

SS: Huge loss of money, and they're responsible for that. So they have to be very careful.

EE: Yeah. I can see that. **[… *audio skips*]** These various changes. Have there been other challenges on the job that you might--?

SS: Well, if you're talking for the CGC employees, just challenges of surviving the downsizing, eh? Surviving to try to keep work level and the amount of volume here and sustain the workforce. Changes within the regulatory process is ongoing. That's a big challenge for our staff here, for future staff. We're going through a transition now. When I first came on, it was war vets. Then I was the new guy on the block. Now I'm leaving and new people are coming on. It's a challenge to keep younger staff on because of the uncertainty. Challenges for management because they're caught in a bad spot. They want to maintain--. We're running down a track with two rails there—one rail may lead to deregulation, but in the meantime, they have to maintain a level of expertise to satisfy the industry. It's tough. I feel for our managers because--. **[… *audio skips*]** deputy head who has to do the will of the chief commissioner, who is a political appointment. So it's tough. It's a tough situation for them to be in right now.

EE: And ultimately, our best thoughts may be contradicted by political will at the very top. That, it seems to me, having enjoyed the freedom that an academic has—study, teaching, and so on and so forth—that seems to be one of the worst parts of the system. You are subjected in those ways. The industry is federally controlled, I guess, is it? Entirely.

SS: Yes.

EE: So that in the dust control, the pollution control, that's all federal regulations as well or does the province come into it?

SS: The provinces can be involved. So if we have a discharge into the lake or somebody looks and sees a big dust cloud over the elevator, they'll call the Ministry of the Environment. It can even go down to a municipal situation. We've had concerns in the

plant and called by-law officers in. Health and safety regulations usually is federally-run. So different--. **[… *audio skips*]** can go possibly wrong, eh, in an environment like that.

EE: You were referring to the workforce a few moments ago, your colleagues. The force used to be male and then women entered in as well along the way, I suppose.

SS: When I started, there was basically no women.

EE: So 1975, did you say? It was all male?

SS: No women at all on the job. When I was hired on, I was hired on with approximately four or five females. There was about 20 of us hired on locally here to do succession planning more or less. It was very tough because you were entering into a male-dominated worksite where you could go into a lunchroom and there'd be Playboy pictures that were posted up there. So women started to come into that worksite.

EE: And it was at that time in '75, was it?

SS: '75. When they came into those worksites, and because our function, even though we were not grain handlers, we worked--. **[… *audio skips*]** lot of our young women moving into that because they were subjected to a very tough time. Very trying times for them.

EE: A certain amount of harassment, I guess, pure and simple?

SS: Harassment. There was a lot of harassment. There was at the time up until I started and even after I started. There was a lot of drinking involved in that particular trade.

EE: Inspectors too?

SS: Inspectors, grain handlers. It was just everybody had a bottle it seemed. [Laughing] And it was just one of those things.

EE: Alcoholism was a--.

SS: Alcohol was rampant.

EE: Endemic. Rampant.

SS: Yeah, it was rampant, eh?

EE: We've heard that from many. Yours is not the first comment by any means.

SS: I don't know how--. Grain handlers, grain trimmers, government staff—it was just everybody was--. Whether it was--.

EE: Was there any attempt to counter the alcohol consumption to any extent?

SS: Not at all. Not at all.

EE: No?

SS: Not at all.

EE: No one was encouraged to go to AA or--?

SS: No. There was no reason for it because the bosses were just as heavily involved in that factor as everybody else, eh? What brought it to the head of safety concerns where we actually lost--. **[…** ***audio skips*****]** grain handlers. And so the actual companies themselves made the first move to ban alcohol from their plants.

[0:40:13]

EE: When did that occur?

SS: Ah. I'm going to say mid-'80s.

EE: Mid-'80s?

SS: Mid-'80s. We had a death, and then we had a couple of near-deaths, and so that brought about--. And the times were changing. The new people were moving in and some of the older people were moving out, and I think with that, better habits, to say the least. Smoking. Guys would be smoking in a dust environment there, cigarettes all over the place.

EE: In the elevators?

SS: Yeah. And so that all--.

EE: And it didn't ignite the dust?

SS: No. So basically, what happened then was that all sort of came about with the changes in people. New people coming in, more professional managers coming in, that brought about--. It was just a change, I think, not only in the grain industry, but in a lot of other industries that was happening too. Now I can actually say you can't even smoke in front of a plant now, let alone have any alcohol--. **[…** ***audio skips*****]** So.

EE: I wonder if alcohol was always a part of work at the Lakehead or used as--. I hesitate within a week of Remembrance Day to wonder whether the veterans coming back if alcohol can be part of military life, I fear.

SS: Yeah. We had a lot of military vets, eh? They went through a lot of traumatic experiences, I'm sure, in the war, and so whether that was post-traumatic stress disorder or any of those other factors that were involved in that. The Lakehead being a very blue-collar town at the time with all the industries that we had. Part of that frustration, you know, all those things, those factors. You end up with 30, 35 years in the same job doing the same thing still. All those factors, eh?

EE: Yes. I don't know whether to ask what major challenges do you think the grain industry faced over the years. You may have sketched everything you'd want to say in that regard.

SS: Well, to sum it up, I would say for the grain industry--. Or the CGC?

EE: Yes.

SS: For the grain--.

EE: Well, for the--.

[… *audio skips*]

SS: Has been the value, the sense of the worth of the value that we do to the industry. Meaning that do we do something that's going to be beneficial to the trade, and is there a requirement for that? As regards the industry itself, you know, how else can you mass move grain in Canada in an effective manner if you don't have a properly functioning industry such as the grain elevator companies that do it? And I think they do a marvellous job, you know?

EE: I suppose it's the market that would pose--. I mean, there are other challenges. Parasites, what have you, rust, the need to develop a new variety of wheat and whatnot for the farmers. There are all kinds of challenges. But I suppose at this point it would be the appearance of--. The importance of Russia for a time and its disappearance. The opening of the Chinese market back around 1960, well Elmond Hamilton forged those links to the Conservative--. **[… *audio skips*]** So those would be some of the biggest changes, certainly.

SS: Big changes, but I think--. You know what? I think we should be proud in Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario that we have adapted to those changes, and we've done a good job. We move a lot of grain efficiently. We move it with all the parties working together, whether it's the grain trimmers doing an excellent job, the grain handlers, the railway companies, the inspection, the weighing staffs, the elevator management, our management. They all work together. They've all adapted to huge changes, and they have been huge changes, you know? The loss of a market, changes of requirements, more government regulation, scares in the market we've had over the years for different products. You know, we've done a good job. I'm pretty proud that everybody has pitched in when they had to and enabled us to maintain that good. We went through things that the forestry industry are going through now—downsizing, changing of--. We went through all of that and managed to survive and create our own niche, I guess, to service all these other countries.

EE: Sure. When one thinks of the Northern Ontario over the past 30 or so years—maybe a bit more—I think of Sudbury and the impact on the mining industry there when, I guess, it was mechanization in part that much reduced the number of miners required. Where the pulp and paper industry had some downsizing in employment in the late '70s when there was significant investment, but you're suggesting the same thing of course for the grain handlers and so on and so forth. These have been really body blows to some extent to the prosperity of Northern Ontario, and we continue to struggle with them these days.

SS: And you know what? On any given day if the market was to change and volume was to pick up, staff would have all been kept up in all the different organizations. To pick up enough extra labour out of the labour pool to meet the challenges that the future

could present to us, eh? So what more can you say about the effectiveness of a system than the fact is that they can rise to those occasions if they show up again?

[0:45:38]

EE: Sure. Yeah. Well put. What are your most vivid memories of the job?

SS: Just the people that I worked with, the challenges, you know? The different places that I've been, the different people that I've met over the years. In particular, any particular memories? No, just a whole bunch of good ones, I guess, basically. I can't really say that I can say that I've had--. 35 years have gone with the CGC and prior to that have gone by quickly. And health wise, my health is still good from all of that. Because of the job I do, I've been able to travel and meet different people and, working with the government, had lots of training and kept up my training and feel current. So what more can you ask for? Been well rewarded, well paid for the work I've done. Have done a good job, I feel, and feel that I can move onto something else no problem.

EE: Yes. [Laughs] You have some retirement plans?

SS: Well. [Laughs] I don't know if I ever want to retire. I enjoy working, eh? I mean, that's something that--. I want to retire to something else. As I speak to two gentlemen who have probably done that here already. [Laughing]

EE: Well, certainly one of the happiest--.

SS: Found their own niches in life there.

EE: Happiest lot in life is to retire from the work that you did to continue doing most parts in it that you really enjoy.

SS: Oh, for sure, yeah. I laugh because most of my fellow workers that have retired have gone on to other jobs for industry or other jobs in the grain.

EE: Have they now?

SS: Oh, yeah. For sure. So.

EE: Are there most important events that you'd want to spotlight in terms of happening in the workplace that affected your career? I begin to feel some of these questions are a bit repetitious, actually.

SS: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Because you've been very skillfully focussing such things as changes, challenges, and so on.

SS: Big challenge for me was whether to get involved with the union or not. For me it was a big challenge.

EE: Yeah, I guess it would be.

SS: It was a big challenge because even though under the Charter of Rights that you have the right to be a member of a union and freedom to speech and that, it's sometimes perceived a career-ending move. I don't know if that's the case or not, but that was a big challenge for me to get involved. Once I got involved, I never looked back. I enjoyed it, eh? I had my ups and downs. I would say I had more ups and downs in my union involvement than I ever had in my career with the CGC. So that was probably one of the biggest.

EE: What sorts of things? Challenges simply in serving within the union? The dynamics of the local and so on?

SS: Yeah, serving with the union, making decisions on behalf of the union membership that were perceived to be my decisions and not those of the local. And so with that you're perceived as being black sheep of the family to say the least, okay?

EE: So the issues of sort of democracy in the local would be a challenge?

SS: Well, yeah. Representing people. Representing people in the local. We have people that have gone through a lot of tough times in our particular--. As anybody would in a long-term career in the government or in any industry. Things change, you become part of a family. Where—to give you an example—where you were all right for the longest amount of time, other factors have affected you and changed you as an employee, but you're still part of that family. And so how does your employer adapt to those changes in your life as you move through the system? Is there any leniency? Are you able to maintain your job if you have trouble, that you need help? All those things that can happen in a person's--. Because of the factor that we do have a lot of long-term employees. Most of the people that I work with now are 45 or older and have been with the Commission for 25 to 35 years. So I spend more time with them than I have with my spouse. And so with that in mind, you know, you live with all of their problems and all of the things that occur in a person's life.

EE: Have you faced work stoppage issues?

[0:50:00]

SS: Yes, we have. We've faced many. The government, through no fault of their own, initially wanted to lay--. We're indeterminate full-time employees, all of us. And so basically, the government tried to lay us off. Then we fought that challenge and won, and then they put us on what they call "temporary interruption of employment," which is just another term to lay us off. Basically, because we lost Russia, because the crops failed—we had a couple years where the crops failed—we had very low volume, we had a certain set amount of staff, so basically the government was faced with they have to work within the budget. Every agency now it's not unlimited money. At the end of the year, if you don't use it, you lose it, and you have to project. And all of a sudden, the volume--.

We work in an industry where we charge for the services we do, and so if there's no volume there to pay for our costs, we have to go to the Treasury Board to ask for more money. So our managers have to do that. If we take in $30 million, our costs are $50 million, we have to go to the Treasury Boards and say, "Hey, we need $20 million." And they look at my manager, CEO, and say, "Hey, get your affairs in order there, buddy, because you're an agency now that has to provide for itself." So they're faced with those challenges, and so what do you do? Most of our cost factor is the labour pool, so they look at the--. But we said, "If you have to change our distinction from an indeterminate employee to a seasonal employee, then you have to change--." We work under a contract. "You have to change that contract." Well, they weren't prepared to do that, and so you have all those challenges. They try to do different things, we fought. We went to the Supreme Court, we fought these through grievances, et cetera, et cetera. So it was tough.

EE: So it wasn't so much a matter of strike, which--. I was using "work stoppage" rather as a euphemism for that.

SS: Yeah, we've had those. We've had strikes. We've had--.

EE: Because strike and layoffs, lock outs and so on, are obviously different--.

SS: Different factors. But we've had strikes. We were on strike for close to a month and we were ordered back to work under the PC government. We were three years--.

EE: Back in the '80s or early '90s?

SS: That was the ‘90s. That was with Mulroney.

EE: Yeah, the Mulroney Government.

SS: And his treasury board official or his--.

EE: Minister of the--.

SS: Minister of the Treasury Board ordered us back to work and imposed a settlement on us. So we were given zero precent for the first year. I think it was that. Zero percent for the next year, and three percent for the third year and ordered back to work. Well, we felt that you could order us back to work, but you can’t impose a settlement on us.

EE: Yeah. You can’t impose conditions.

SS: But they did, and so all the union members felt that our union hierarchy in Ottawa—which was Daryl Bean at the time—let us down majorly. But that’s another problem. But we’ve been through--.

EE: Another challenge!

SS: So we’ve been through work stoppages. We walked off the job in Thunder Bay here under a right to--. You know, bad conditions we were working under. So we’ve done that. We’ve been through--. And when you go through all of those challenges, and you’re involved in the union hierarchy, you’re identified. You know, so--.

EE: You should also have protection though because you’re working on behalf of the other--.

SS: Your job is kept, okay? But your chances of advancement in the process are going to be limited because, as I say with merit—and if I’m wrong, you can correct me at this time here—Ernie, you like me, we get along really good, okay? I do a good job for you, and I’ve got good merit because you’re the boss. But tomorrow, you retire, and Owen becomes my boss. I’m still the same Steven doing the same work, but Owen and I don’t get along. Now, is my merit going to stay the same? No.

EE: It should. [Laughing]

SS: It should. It should, but it doesn't. So basically, you know, that's the process of merit as far as I'm concerned. With seniority, if management does seniority properly, if I have a problem as an employee and it's corrected along the way—which can be done through letters of reprimand, disciple, more intensive training, any of those factors—then eventually with seniority I'll be able to move through the ranks as long as I'm capable and willing enough to do a higher position. With merit, two years on the job and you're well liked by the boss, you can go to the top of the ladder, and the guy who's been there 15, 20 years doing the consistent job may not get anywhere because he's--.

EE: It sounds as if merit has a particular definition that doesn't resonate with my own experience.

SS: Yeah.

EE: I see. Terminology does develop.

SS: So basically, I know. I know. I've lived that. I realized that myself. I've been a witness to that in things that I've done. And so, you know, that's one of my regrets is the fact that when I made a decision to get involved in the union, did I do the right thing at the time? I feel I have because that's the way I am. I'm a rights-based person. But--.

[0:55:23]

EE: Sure. Well, I'm partial to that view myself and think that the election as president and continuing as president is the final evidence of that kind of quality. That's merit to my mind, if your coworkers continue you in the position.

SS: But I have merit with my coworkers, but do I have merit with my manager?

EE: Yeah, well--.

SS: Especially if I make firm decisions based on union principles for my fellow local members against management's decision. And some of these decisions have been very, very important.

EE: Well, I do understand that to some extent from experiences in my own life years ago, as it happens. But yeah, I do understand that. Do you think it's important for us to be doing this historical work, interviewing you and others?

SS: I think so because I think that it's--. I mean there's a perceived history of the grain trade in Thunder Bay, in Northwestern Ontario, and for that part Manitoba—but it's nice to have it in principle, nice to have an oral presentation. It's nice to have for future generations, the history of it as presented by the people that were involved in that history. I think it's just a great--. That's why I was more than willing when I ran into Owen to partake in this process because I think it's just invaluable. I mean we're a grain town. I mean, sure, we're a forestry town, but we're also a huge grain town.

EE: Oh, yes.

SS: And it's provided a lot of well-paid quality jobs for a lot of people in Thunder Bay over the years and will into the future.

EE: The city was doing this a generation before it really began to produce pulp and paper, so this is an old, old industry in this city. Are there any questions you think we should have asked?

SS: Nope. I think we've covered as--.

EE: The questionnaire covers it, but Owen probably has a query or two. Please.

OM: Thank you, Ernie. Just one question. I know that I was much in the same situation as you were but in a different part of the federal government where I was coming in at the end of the reign of the war veterans and then moving into the new group of people coming in, and we went on our way. When I look back at those days, I can remember people that instilled in me a feeling and a set of principles for the work I was doing, and I still think very fondly of them. Some of them are still here, but many of them passed on. Did you have any specific individuals that kind of acted as mentors for you in the beginning? Because you have very strongly held views about your responsibilities in this particular position.

SS: Yeah, I had one. Most of the gentlemen I worked with at the time were war veterans—in fact, I don't think I can remember any that weren't—that were either at, not at the entry level, they were either inspectors or people that had been moved up into inspector-in-charge. A couple of them was Mr. Roy. When I entered the trade, he was just in the process of retiring. Wilt Belanger, who I worked a lot of years with. I had a lot of respect for him. He was a very, very professional man, a true gentleman. George Adams, another gentleman that I worked years with. We didn't move around as much in those days. We were sort of working in a unit because we were learning. We were usually stuck with people for six, seven months at the time. I worked with a lot of different vets, and I worked with a lot of the older people. Mr. Lamore, you guys have interviewed here. I worked with him. He was working with--.

EE: Roy Lamore?

SS: Yeah. He was working Saskatchewan Wheat Pool 4A in Current River at the time. Yeah, all these I picked up from these gentlemen. A lot of them had good principles, had--. **[… *audio skips*]** were doing. They felt that they were doing something that the job that they were doing definitely had meaning. That was one of the biggest things that I felt that I carried or I picked up from them was the sense that this was about doing something that was a need.

[1:00:04]

OM: Just one more question. You mentioned that you came in when women were just being introduced to the labour market, the force at that time, and you talked very well about some of the challenges they met. When did it become just a natural thing for a woman to work on the job? You started in 1975, but when did things start to--?

SS: You'd probably be able to answer that question because you were involved with Canada Manpower for years. But I'm going to say probably it was well into the late '80s, early '90s when they were--. After the women that I--. **[… *audio skips*]** inspector-in-charge, female promoted. We were getting a lot of people from other origins into Thunder Bay and other nationalities, and so they were coming onto the job. So now the push was not so much against the women, it was more to help other minorities coming on. So women were almost fully accepted. And because now we were the senior people, and so they became well accepted because we accepted them. When we joined with them, when we started working with them, it was natural for us, okay? So it was just a generational thing as far as I'm concerned.

We went through a generation where I can remember when I was a young person, all the dads worked, and all the moms were at home. And so now we're going through where everybody works, okay? Nobody's at home. So that was sort of like what happened with us. When I came on the job it was all men. I came on with some young women. I was a young man, so that was natural for me. Wasn't natural for them. And so when we started moving--. **[… *audio skips*]** J\just like any other industry where it was fully acceptable to have women in the workforce.

EE: Did employment equity have a significant impact?

SS: Yes, it did. It did.

EE: A sort of--.

SS: Federal. The initiative from the federal government was employment equity.

EE: Early ‘80s through ’84 and so on.

SS: Yes. But because it was a blue-collar industry, in order for it to break into the blue-collar industry, it was a little tougher. But it was, the women that were hired, they knew that they had their rights, and they felt comfortable, and they were well opinionated women that they could express their views. We accepted them, so we sort of stuck up for them, and it helped them, being fellow workers, young workers with them. It helped them brave this thing. Because they weren’t only working trying to get into the grain inspection department and weighing department, but they were also trying to get into the grain industry where it was all male dominated.

EE: Yeah. The grain handlers. By employment equity, I was thinking also of visible minorities and so on.

SS: Oh, definitely.

EE: Is--. **[*… audio skips*]** Grain Commission now?

SS: Yes. We have--.

EE: Significant numbers?

SS: We have significant numbers of– more so on the West Coast because of the huge population of visible minorities in the West Coast.

EE: Sikhs, Chinese, and so on.

SS: But even now that’s really happening in Thunder Bay here in the last, I’m going to say, five to ten years. Anybody that we hire—a lot of people that we hire—it’s based on your abilities not your--. [Coughs]

EE: Yeah, your capacity and potential merit, eh? Right. Well, I think we’ve actually covered the basic questionnaire, although there’s the matter of memorabilia. And you’re still actually briefly in the industry. Were there any previous union leaders that inspired you at all? Presidents of the local?

SS: [Coughs] Excuse me.

EE: You murmured Daryl Bean's with a little mixed emotions, I caught, in terms of what they accepted. Any one of the locals seen a--. Leader of your local?

SS: [Coughs] Finally caught up with me my laryngitis.

EE: Maybe we should just--.

SS: I would say probably Frank Mazur.

EE: Grain handlers.

SS: Yeah.

[… ***audio skips*****]**

EE: A splendid interview and you've provided a great narration. We're very pleased you've taken it on, especially with your voice. Your throat was a bit scratchy. So we'll cut it off.

End of interview.