

Narrator: William Stewart (WS)

Company Affiliations: McCabe Grain Company, United Grain Growers (UGG)

Interview Date: 7 September 2012

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Summary: Retired grain handler for McCabe Elevator and United Grain Growers Elevator A William Stewart discusses his long career on the Thunder Bay waterfront. He first describes growing up on a Manitoba farm before moving to Thunder Bay during the Depression, then getting his first job at McCabe’s as a grain sampler during navigation and a grain bagger in the winter. He lists some of his other roles in the elevator, and he recalls working during two major events—the explosion at Pool 4B and the collapse of UGG A’s annex. He discusses his move to UGG A elevator, working at various times on the boxcar dumpers, the grain dryers, and the cleaners. Stewart describes some changes over his career, like the introduction of dust control, computerization, automation, safety equipment improvements, and increased wages gained through union strikes. Other topics discussed include the ethnic diversity of elevator workers, war veterans in the workforce and guarding the elevators during the war, dangerous work conditions, workplace accidents, boxcar shovelling, the elevator baseball league, and his interactions with the Canadian Grain Commission learning about grain grades. At the end of the interview, Stewart runs through a historic seniority list from McCabe’s Elevator, recalling some of his coworkers from his early years.

Keywords: McCabe Grain Company; United Grain Growers; McCabe’s Elevator (UGG M); UGG Elevator A; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Grain elevators—Equipment and supplies; Grain handlers; Grain elevator disasters; Grain elevator explosions; Pool 4B explosion (1945); UGG A collapse; Workplace accidents; Workplace fatalities; Dust control; Grain cleaning; Grain drying; Boxcar dumpers; Boxcar shovelling; Health and safety; Moisture testing; Labour unions; Labour strikes; Automation; Computerization; Grain sampling; Grain transportation—rail; Grain transportation—ships; Thunder Bay Elevator; SWP Pool 4A and 4B; Grain farmers/producers; Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Grain grades

Content Warning: *This interview contains descriptions of workplace accidents that some readers may find disturbing.*

Time, Speaker, Narrative

WS: I'm William Stewart on 283 Dewe Avenue, Thunder Bay, Ontario.

NP: Great. Now, thank you very much Mr. Stewart for taking part in this project. I know that we met at the display that was down at the waterfront, and at that point, we were talking a little bit about your history, but we didn't go right back to the beginning. So I should probably also say that this interview is taking place on September 7, 2012, because 100 years from now when somebody is listening to it, they may want to know when we were doing the interview. [Laughs] Now, I understand from what we talked about just before we started the recording that you were born in Manitoba. Tell me a little bit about your history in Manitoba before you moved to Thunder Bay.

SW: Well, my parents were farmers. [Laughs] I knew a bit about grain out there too. Then I went to school there in Virden for a while, then I went to Foxwarren, and I went to school there for a while, and then we come down here.

NP: And what year did you move to Thunder Bay? And what brought you here?

SW: My dad was looking for a job, for some pay. The farm he worked on he rented, and all the wells went dry on him.

NP: This was during the '30s?

SW: Yessir.

NP: So you were born in 19--?

SW: 1928.

NP: So you came here when you were 11?

SW: 11, yeah.

NP: Yeah. So you were fairly young, but when you were in Manitoba, even though you were young, were you working on the farm? Did you have chores?

SW: Well, we had wood to bring in, ashes to take out, and then we quit farming. My dad was in Foxwarren. I went on the harvest.

NP: At 11 years old?

SW: 10, 11 years old, yeah.

NP: That must have been hard work.

SW: No, it was just--. It was easy because I was keeping that grain from spilling out of the wagons to haul the grain to town. His son drove the horses and would bring one wagon into town, get it dumped. They'd come back with the empty one put there, and he took the full one back. That's how we worked.

NP: Hm. And when he came to Thunder Bay, at that time it was Port Arthur and Fort William.

SW: You're right.

NP: And where did he settle in town?

SW: We were on Rita Street right down the end of the street there.

NP: So close to here.

SW: Yeah. It was 448 Rita Street.

NP: Did he have--. Sorry.

SW: They tore that old house down and moved it, and now they built a new house there. Then we moved to Merrill Street where I was living when I got a job in the elevator.

NP: So what about your dad? Did he have any luck getting a job when he moved here?

SW: Yeah. He got a job in the shipyards.

NP: Ah. So what was he doing there, do you remember?

SW: Oh, he was a driller or something, reamer and all that stuff.

NP: So it was easier, obviously, to get work here. And by that time, it was--.

SW: Well, the war was on, so it was pretty easy. So I went and started my own job. I took an apprenticeship plumbing and heating from Dominion Plumbing, but they wouldn't give me a raise, and then they wouldn't sign the paper because I got my station engineer's papers. So I think it was 11 or 13, I was quit. Then a couple of days later, I got the job at McCabe's sampling on the boats.

NP: So you were 11 when you came to Thunder Bay.

SW: Just about 11.

NP: And then when did you start with the plumbing?

SW: It was before the war ended. It was '43 or something like that.

NP: So were you at school here then for a few years?

SW: Oh, yeah. I went to Current River School.

NP: Okay, yeah. And then you moved out to a job. Everybody started young in those days.

[0:05:04]

SW: Oh, yeah. They were wanting anybody.

NP: And you were too young to sign up, so they--.

SW: Yeah. The war ended when I was just about six months short of getting in the Army or conscripts. [Laughs]

NP: So why did you go to the elevators to work? I mean, I know why you left the--.

SW: Well, I went to the elevators because I went to the unemployment office, and that's where they sent me. You go where they told you if you've got no employment or nothing. So they told me to go to McCabe's, so I went to McCabe's, and I stayed there until-- '45 I quit, and then I went out for this lumber outfit for a while, and they laid me off. So I phoned Old Meyers, and he says, "Come back to work. Your punch number's the same, 36."

NP: I want to go back to those very early days when you first started at the elevator. Now, you grew up in Current River—or I shouldn't say you grew up—but you spent a few years in Current River going to school, so did you know anything about the elevators before you went to get a job there?

SW: Oh, I knew a little bit about the country elevators. I knew a little bit about grain because it come off the farm. [Laughs]

NP: Were you surprised to see the size of the elevators here when you got here?

SW: No, no. I wasn't surprised. Just kind of a little bit surprised at how they dumped at different elevators.

NP: Ah. And how was that?

SW: Well, Grain Growers had dumpers. McCabe's had the old sweat board. I operated them for a little while too.

NP: So when you first started, when you first were hired, what did you do? What was your job first day when you went? Can you remember that day when you went there for the first day to work?

SW: On the first day I went to work, they had a boat there, and I had to go sample on the boat. I got to catch the sample, put it in a bag, and throw it to the window of the office for the grain inspector for McCabe's.

NP: Any challenges there, or was that pretty easy to do?

SW: No, I don't think it was--. The only thing was getting dust in your eyes if it got windy. Then the fall when it started to freeze up, it was cold.

NP: The wind off the lake.

SW: The wind off the lake, you want to believe it. [Laughs] Then the whole deck was steel, you got your feet cold on that too. One time they used to let you go in for a coffee break, but then after a while, no more coffee breaks.

NP: Why no more coffee breaks?

SW: I don't know.

NP: So you had to make sure you had the right clothing.

SW: Oh, yeah. So I always snuck down on the boat there down to their--.

NP: Into their quarters?

SW: Into the kitchen on the boat and get a coffee. [Laughs] They'd give you coffee.

NP: So that was your first job, sampling. Then what?

SW: In the wintertime, I stuffed the bags for the baggers gang.

NP: Now what were the bags for?

SW: They were bagging ground oats, ground wheat, and all that stuff to put in boxcars.

NP: Ah.

SW: Some of the cars had 600 bags were ordered, some had 680. Double cleaned oats for racehorses, they did that and had to put it in special bags, new bags. Not second-hand bags, they had to be new bags.

NP: Where were the racehorses that they were sending this to?

SW: Oh, I don't know where they were sending, but they were for the racehorses anyway.

NP: They were fussy.

SW: Yeah. They had to be cleaned good and all the pin oats was taken out of there and everything.

NP: All the what was taken out?

SW: The pin oats. The little fine, short, small oats had to be taken out of there. We took it out by wind.

NP: And how did that work?

SW: They done that on the monitors [*Note: a type of cleaning machine. Editor*]. They'd make sure you didn't take any good oats out of there.

[0:10:01]

NP: So how did you use wind though? How did that work?

SW: Well, they had fans in them, and they could for the fan to get opened up more, and so it would suck more grain out, or if it was too much, you cut it down a little bit.

NP: So was there a bagging house then? Was there a special part of the elevator that did the bagging?

SW: Oh, yeah. It was in one corner of the work shed. There would be a spout out to the car shed on one track and had a little belt on the side track out the front for loading screenings and that, load screenings. That would plug up sometimes, and you had to go out and dig it out. [Laughs] The bags pile up, and they just get jammed.

NP: So were there a lot of people working in the bagging part of it?

SW: There was four of us.

NP: Do you remember some of the people you were working with then?

SW: Cec Fellino was one. Andy somebody. I forget his last name. Warwick. Then when I started the bagger, I was working--.

NP: Someone on the seniority list you're thinking of?

SW: Yeah, yeah. But he's gone now. He's died a while ago here. Tony Warwick he was.

NP: I was just interviewing someone the other day who came over and started work in the late '50s. So he started work about, well, 15 years after you, but where he worked, there were a lot of people who had come over from Europe and weren't able to speak English.

SW: Oh, yeah.

NP: Was that the case at McCabe's too?

SW: Oh, yeah. Italians. They weren't bad, but they could speak English some of them. One Italian there, Caesario, and this little, short guy coming back in was Italian. He said, "Why don't you stick up for Italians?" He says, "You're not Italian. You're--." What the heck. I forget.

NP: You're--.

SW: You're--. What's that little country beside there?

NP: Calabria?

SW: No, no.

NP: Or Sicily?

SW: No.

NP: I'm not helping you here, am I? [Laughs] It doesn't matter. Did the fact that a lot of people had difficulty with English, did that--?

SW: No.

[Person]: When did you get here?

[Audio pauses]

NP: I'll come back in. We paused for a moment there. We had a visitor. We were talking about the people, whether it was any problem at all when people had difficulty with speaking English because there were a lot of immigrants that found work at the elevators as well.

SW: Well, one old fellow there—I don't know if he was Polish or Ukrainian—he'd have everything all backwards. [Laughs] But we understood what he was saying anyway.

NP: So people tended to get along, did they?

SW: Oh, yeah. We got along pretty good. Some were good guys, and some were lazy guys.

NP: The typical workplace.

SW: Yeah. There was one little Italian that was there, he died with a heart attack or something. I don't know what happened. That's my understanding. Sugar diabetic and that. Me and him used to have lots of fun together. I used to make him laugh. [Laughs]

NP: What was it like to get to work? How did you get to work in those days, because I don't imagine many people had cars?

SW: Oh. I rode the old streetcar. I caught the Hodder Avenue streetcar, went down there, then I went down and got a transfer onto the mainline. The loop was at the bottom of the hill there where you come up, and then it went all the way over there to Second Avenue, got off there, and walked all the way in there, about a mile. Cold. The wintertime, anyway, was so cold those days, but it's not so cold now.

[0:15:03]

NP: And lots of snow.

SW: Yeah. [Laughs] There was lots of snow too. I'd get to the elevator, and then you had to dig out the tracks and dig out some of the cars to get them moving.

NP: What were the hours? How early did you have to be there?

SW: 8:00 to 4:00. 8:00 to 5:00. Started 8:00 in the morning, worked until 5:00, and then in the wintertime, they cut it down to 8:00 to 4:00 so you could get home earlier.

NP: While you could still see.

SW: Oh, yeah.

NP: Yeah. We were talking about the bagging operation. How long did that last, until you retired, or did they get out of the bagging business?

SW: It lasted as long as Old A. J. Meyers was the super.

NP: What can you tell me about Old A. J. Meyers?

SW: Well, he was a good old superintendent, I'll tell you that. He had a job for you to in the wintertime. He wouldn't lay nobody off. Say, "I don't like that pile of snow over there." Me and George Phillips, "You go over to that side of the track and get it over there." Next day, "Bring it back and put it over here. [Laughs] Put it over here again." Next day, "Put it back over." It was pretty well all [inaudible] that pile of snow. [Laughing] He didn't like laying anybody off.

NP: So he had a loyal workforce too, then, probably.

SW: Yeah. Me and George used to go sweep these screening bins out, one bin one winter. I was so froze, two of us was down there digging it out. One chair and one rope.

NP: Ah. Tell me about that. But before you do, who was George?

SW: George Phillips was the guy that lived right at the back of Pool 6, Manitoba Pool 6.

NP: And he was one of your coworkers?

SW: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Me and him got along good together. They called us the McCabe Twins. [Laughing]

NP: So tell me about the cleaning out of the bins. How did you--?

SW: Well, you go down with a shovel or a pick or whatever you can get there to dig it out.

NP: You go down from the top?

SW: Yeah, we go down in the chair.

NP: What was that like?

SW: Just like a swing. [Laughs] You go down there and dig it out and swing and a big chunk falls down. A big cloud of dust flies, and you can't see nothing!

NP: Doesn't sound like a very nice job.

SW: No, it wasn't, but somebody had to do it.

NP: And you and George did.

SW: Yeah. Then you know Pool 4 over here what happened to them, eh?

NP: Well, you started in—according to some information your stepson sent me—you started in April of 1945, and then in August, there was the explosion at Pool 4. So where were you on that day, and what was it like working in an elevator that day when you found out what was happening at Pool 4?

SW: I was down in the basement stashing bags, and at just about five minutes to 12:00, I started to come up and go for dinner, lunchbreak. Out goes the power. "What the heck happened now?" So I went up the stairs, and then the guy said, "Pool 4 blew up!" Then we went upstairs on top of McCabe Elevator and looked across. We could see the flames flying and everything. I had a Model A then, too, at that time. So 5:00, got off, and my chum I went to school with, he worked at Pool 4 too. Oh, boy. There were some guys there I knew. Holy, boy. I said, "I hope he didn't get it." He was home that day. He was 4:00 to 12:00. Then I was going down

this Cumberland Street there and the tar, paper, everything, it was still flying at 5:00. They wouldn't let anybody go near there really, kept everybody away.

NP: And what did you learn about the situation sort of after a few days went by?

[0:20:04]

SW: After the explosion?

NP: Mmhmm.

SW: Well, then they started to think. You could see they were loading screenings, and what happened, I guess they never transferred and turned it over once in a while, like we did at McCabe's. It just got air in between there, and it come down there like an atomic bomb, the gas in there, and blew up.

NP: And did you know any of the people who were injured or--?

SW: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I knew some of them.

NP: Did it make you worry about where you worked?

SW: No. Didn't bother me at all.

NP: No?

SW: No.

NP: Why not?

SW: Well, it didn't bother me very much. I was a young guy then. [Laughing] All the guys at McCabe, they never worried. There was a couple of guys there they couldn't find, and they still haven't found them.

NP: The bodies at Pool 4?

SW: Yeah. Maybe they blew in the lake.

NP: Hm.

SW: There was a couple of guys they did find. They were in the bin. Then one guy, the treasurer for the union, he got his face all burnt, his ears burnt, and his hands burnt. What the heck was his name now? [Tisley (sp?)], he got all his ears burnt and that. He was an annex man. He came to and his helper was laid across his knees, dead. That's all I know about it.

NP: And then in 1952, another explosion.

SW: Same one.

NP: Why do you think that was? What was the thinking about why the same elevator?

SW: Well, they didn't clean up, turn the screenings over. I don't know. But, we turned ours over. Every year we turned the bins over. Even grain bins we turned over. If it was getting a little warm, we turned them over to cool them off. But our elevator, we were loading lots of screenings and everything, so it was on the move all the time, eh?

NP: So was there any change at all to work practices after the explosions, or did life just go on as usual?

SW: Just usual. Then they started to put them filters in and everything. I guess you remember all that.

NP: Did that make a difference to working conditions?

SW: It kept the air more cleaner.

NP: Noticeably for you?

SW: Oh, yeah. I noticed it. It kept the air cleaner. Sucked a lot of that dust up and put it in the bin, and then ours, we didn't care. We had it going all the time. It was going out, going into the hammer mill there to get ground up for screenings and some kind of feed, and then they started making pellets out of it. They didn't make it there, but they'd buy it all up, and we'd send it over to Grain Growers. They had a pellet plant there.

NP: So McCabe's didn't have their own pellet plant?

SW: No. I think that's the only elevator was Grain Growers then.

NP: What was it--? There were different elevator companies in town. There were the Manitoba Pool and Saskatchewan Pool, and there was Richardson's and McCabe's and--.

SW: And P&H [Parrish & Heimbecker].

NP: What was the--.

SW: P&H bagged too.

NP: Oh, did they?

SW: Yeah. That's on the little river. That's going to close that one down and build a big--. Supposed to build another elevator down east and move everything down there.

NP: Hm. What was it like for McCabe's versus the other elevators? Was there certain elevators that people liked to work for and others that they didn't?

SW: Well, some of them didn't. I didn't mind McCabe's because they never laid you off. That's one thing. I didn't mind it. The bosses were good there, Old Meyers, and then the general foreman was there. He was a good guy too.

[0:25:11]

NP: Who was he? Do you remember the name?

SW: Bill Ralph. He had a bad knee or something. He always limped. Then he lived out by the Port Arthur General. Then one day he said, "Can you give me a ride?" I said, "Sure." I dropped him off at his house. He said, "Pick me up on the way back for overtime." I said, "Okay." Picked him up and took him back. So we became pretty good friends. He says, "You know, [inaudible]." He says, "Go and hide." [Laughs]

NP: So was there—I'll use the term—was there sort of a pecking order of elevators? Like if you--. What was considered the best elevator in Thunder Bay to work at?

SW: Well, Grain Growers was good when I first started there. Everybody had their own job, and when I went to--. Grain Growers bought them out. I went to Grain Growers. I was a door man. All I had to do was open that side door and put a latch in there to keep them because it was on a dumper, eh? They nailed them together so they wouldn't fall out.

NP: So explain that process. So when you went to UGG or--. When did you actually move over to UGG [United Grain Growers]?

SW: '48, I think it was.

NP: To which--?

SW: No. '68.

NP: '68. And which UGG elevator did you go to?

SW: The one at Current River there at the mouth of the river.

NP: Ah, okay. So it was a newer elevator.

SW: Yeah. That fell in the lake too, the tanks. [Laughs]

NP: What happened there?

SW: The piling let go. [Whistles] Away she went!

NP: That must have made for some good stories.

SW: It put the water right up in the shipyard! [Laughs]

NP: Did it? Like a tidal wave?

SW: Yeah. I thought McCabe's was going to go in there too, the workhouse. It was moving away from the car shed. You could see it getting a little wider year after year.

NP: So you were a little worried about the foundation?

SW: Yeah. Then they got Thunder Bay Harbour Improvements to put new piling in there, and then they put rods right through the elevator out the side and put big blocks in it to anchor it so it wouldn't go any farther.

NP: And did all of this happen because of what happened at UGG? They started to look at the other elevators?

SW: Oh, yeah. They wanted to see what they were like. I think Pool 1 was about ready to go too. The one end of the dock was like this. It was about two feet out in the water.

NP: Hm. They look so stable!

SW: Yeah. Then one time we were working, and my partner, Bud Cliff, he says, "Did you feel that shock?" I said, "No." "Yeah, it was an earthquake." He says, "I got a shock." He's at the desk, and he slid up against the wall, the board there.

NP: He was where?

SW: He was at the desk. He was checking what we've got to do, eh? It was only two 4:00 to 12:00, you know, downstairs. He says he flew right over to the door where you come into the office. "No, I didn't feel nothing," I said. [Laughs]

NP: You were in a different part of the elevator?

SW: Yeah. I was in the workhouse. I was in there too, but I didn't feel it.

NP: Now, when you--. We're sort of—and my fault—we're sort of jumping around here. You started at McCabe's working as a sampler, and then you moved on into the bagging area, and that you did during the winter.

SW: Yeah. And then in the summertime, afterwards, the boss says, "You've got seniority. You go on the cleaners."

NP: And what did that require you to do?

SW: Well, I got more money per hour.

NP: That's nice.

SW: Then that was all. Learned to run the cleaners, how to do it. I was with a good guy too, Old Bud Cliff. Me and him got along good together, like two peas in a pod, me and him.

[0:30:02]

NP: He was older than you?

SW: Oh, yeah. He was in the Army. He had one finger missing so he was patrolling on the West Coast. So the Germans would come and--. And some down the east too. If they weren't in shape to go overseas, they kept them here as guards.

NP: Yes, I understand they had guards on the elevators during the war.

SW: Yeah. You know who they were? My uncle was one of them.

NP: Was he?

SW: He used to march up and down the dam over there. He had to make sure nobody come to blow it up and flood half the elevators down at the waterfront there and the shipyard. They were called veteran guards. They were First World War soldiers.

NP: Ah.

SW: Then I had an uncle, and his brother was gassed in the First World War. Germans used it. He lasted to 38, and he died. He was running back to Winnipeg and all over.

NP: That gas a really horrible thing to--.

SW: Oh, yeah. And my Uncle Henry, he had a German working for him on the farm after the war. [Laughs] I wouldn't use the words he used. He said, "You Germans, the only good ones are the dead ones." He said that German went out of his farm, and he'd never seen him since.

NP: And they did have German immigrants come to Canada. Some of the people who were here as war prisoners came back.

SW: Yeah. They said, "We want to stay in Canada. We don't want to go back there." "You've got to go back and then immigrate." They come back. My neighbour, he was a German guy too. Schulz. No. Yeah. He was the guy that run the garage. I worked part time in the garage for him in the evening. Paul Schulz. There was quite a few of them from the First World War, the immigrants.

NP: Now, the cleaning floor, did you like--?

SW: There were five sections.

NP: Did you--?

SW: I didn't mind it. There was five sections. When we were 4:00 to 12:00, I had three sections to look after, and the guy who was in the office, he had two sections to look after. One night the power went off all the way down the other end out towards the lake, and he was a hollering. I said, "What the hell happened to him?" He had no flashlight, but I had one. "I hear you. Wait a minute." I'm shutting off everything so we don't get spills, eh? "You took too long." "Yeah. Do you want to shovel some spills? Because I don't." I got down and got him off the cleaner. He was up in the top there. I don't know if he was changing the slides or something up there.

NP: Yes, I would imagine it would be tough to get out of the work areas if you didn't have any light because they didn't have any windows.

SW: Oh, they had windows.

NP: Did they? But it was night.

SW: Yeah. But they didn't make any difference. It got dark anyway. [Laughs] Just like the day that elevator blew up. "How am I going to get out of here?" I gave him a little light and I--. Up the stairs I went for lunch. "What happened to the power here?" "Pool 4 blew up." I says, "Yeah? Holy cow." I says, "I wonder if my chum was working there."

NP: The cleaning area that you worked at, did you ever find unusual things in--?

SW: Grain?

NP: Yeah.

SW: Oh, yeah. I found a watch that somebody stole off me after. It cost me \$11 to get it fixed. Then I got a thing out of there. I found that in the car shed. The guys were too lazy—it was hopper men—and they were too lazy to clean the hoppers off. I was sweeping there. I found this and just cleaned. One day I went down there, I was cleaning the hoppers out. I got ten bucks, two fives. [Laughing]

NP: Doubled your pay for the day!

[0:35:04]

SW: Pay for the day. I said, “Made my day!” So I told the old guy up on the second [inaudible], “That car, you watch. You might get some more money out of there. I got some.” Well, he wouldn’t tell you. He was Ukrainian. He wouldn’t tell you nothing that guy.

NP: Closed mouth.

SW: Yeah.

NP: Yeah. Now--.

SW: He wouldn’t show you anything either.

NP: Wouldn’t show you how to do--?

SW: When I got on the cleaner, he did show you nothing. You had to figure it out yourself.

NP: So other people were better than others at training people and--.

SW: Oh, yeah. Then I got used to the different bins on the floor. I knew where they were. I knew where to get them. Some guys couldn't find them.

NP: It's pretty complicated. I was talking to somebody who worked doing supervising the cleaning area, and I didn't realize that it was pretty complicated all the bins you had to send stuff to.

SW: Yeah. Orders would come from the foreman's office, where to put it. [Inaudible] the scale floor where to go, and away it went, without too much problem. But to find the bins, some bins--. I see the guy looking, "Where's that bin?" It was right there in front of his nose. [Laughing]

NP: Well, I'm remembering because you have to move pretty fast too, I would think, in some cases.

WS: Then they had in the basement-- they got a boat coming. There were five belts—two shippers--. What was it? One shipper, two shipper, four shipper, five shipper, six, and seven. I don't think I got it right either. [Laughs] You sit down there in the basement with the belt, and you wait for the horn to blow, and you've got to shut it off right away, and you have maybe three or four bins running samplers. You had to run and shut them all off. Upstairs you go. The boats--. Or they're changing the grade or something from the other part for the boat.

NP: Were there--? Compared to when you finished--. When did you retire?

WS: 1993.

NP: 1993. So if you think back to 1945 when you started and you were sampling boats and 1993, what kind of changes did you see over that time?

WS: Oh, lots of changes.

NP: Yeah? What ones stick in your mind?

WS: Well, the changes that you don't have to go into the basement to open a bin or nothing. [Laughs]

NP: Why not?

WS: Because they're all automatic computers. The computers. You know the old McCabe's was the most up-to-date elevator in the world? They had all the bins were opened by--. Just push the button, open the bin there. And then they could start the screws and everything all in the foreman's office.

NP: The what in the foreman's office?

WS: The screws, like for taking the dirty grain, the seeds and that away.

NP: Ah, okay. The sort of augers?

WS: Mmhmm. Oh, yeah. There was 11, 12, and 13. That's the way they were numbered. Just push the button and away it went. I used to run down to the basement all the time to start them up. Then one day the foreman says, "Where you think you're going?" "Going to start the screws up." "No," he says. "Let them young guys do it." He says, "You've done enough of that. It's up to them." "Okay." But then you go watch them, and they maybe not start the right one. [Laughs]

NP: So you had to supervise, just keep an eye on them.

WS: I had to supervise sometimes on the cleaner deck. I could run it.

NP: Well, I imagine--.

WS: And you had to check the grain I was cleaning up, and then you tell the scale floor it was okay to bin.

NP: The changes in numbers and types of ships, do you have anything to comment on there?

WS: No. Just hatch two, three, four. That's up to the grain trimmers.

NP: And what about the ships themselves? Did you notice when they changed sizes and--?

[0:40:09]

WS: Size of boats?

NP: Mmhmm.

WS: Oh, yeah. I'll tell you one thing I didn't tell you. We had three boats tied up at McCabe's one day. One was the *Superior*, one was the *Hudson*, and I think it was a boat called *Tribune* or something. They were all lined up there.

NP: And by 1998, I don't think you were going to get three boats lined up in the--.

WS: Oh, no, no. You never. You wouldn't even get one. You're just lucky to get one. One time I was there I was sampling on the boat, and these grain trimmers were gambling up at the front there. And the old boat was going like this. Any much more and it would have tipped over. I had to go up there. You know when you seen grain trimmers scramble? Oh boy! They were going.
[Laughs]

NP: They got too engaged in their gambling game.

WS: Yeah.

NP: They weren't paying attention.

WS: No.

NP: So the newer boats, then, would they take up the whole dock?

WS: It wouldn't take up the whole dock. McCabe's had a big, long dock, you know.

NP: What caused you to move over to UGG?

WS: Well, McCabe's sold out to UGG remember?

NP: Mmhmm.

WS: That's why. And then I had enough seniority and that, and I got homestead rights at McCabe's and seniority at the other one, seniority at the other place.

NP: And you wanted to move?

WS: Well, it was good for me. You know why? I could walk down there. I walked right from the house right down there. And McCabe's, well, that was a mile walk.

NP: In cold weather lots of times.

WS: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

NP: What did you notice differences about the elevators? So when you moved over there, what was new to you?

WS: Well, they had dumpers there. Grain Growers had dumpers, and they had door openers on the dumpers to open the doors. All you had to do was open the outside door. There was two big doors like this, and you had to put a lathe in there to nail them together on the hopper so the dumper opened up the car, it wouldn't fall in, the car.

NP: Now, did you say at some point—and I may have misheard you—that you were the door man?

WS: Yeah, at Grain Growers.

NP: And what does that mean, the door man?

WS: The outside doors on the boxcars, you've got to open them up, and then you've got to put that little tape on there to keep it from falling in, nailed them together, and they'd just fold over. The dumper man opened it up, put the--. And that was all.

NP: And what happened to the doors afterwards?

WS: Well, they stayed in the car, and some maybe fall down. You had to pull it out, get it out of the way of the--. The baffle board is going this way, and the other one goes the other way. Then the guys on the hopper, after a while, he went on the tunnels.

NP: What's the--. Oh.

WS: Run the grain up on the tunnels down in the basement, eh?

NP: What are the tongues?

WS: Tunnels.

NP: Tunnels, sorry. [Laughing] That's your Irish accent coming out!

WS: And--. I didn't know anything about it. They say, "Come outside. You're the hopper man." At McCabe's, I had five hoppers to run up five belts. You go there, two of them. It's just like falling off a log. [Laughs]

NP: Easy, then. Ah. Now, what did the tunnel guy have to do?

WS: When a boat come in, they'd run the grain up and blend it and all that stuff. When they were loading cars, they'd do that too, run the grain up for that. That's all they did. Little office down there, and they told him on the phone, and he'd go and do it. I did that stuff too at McCabe's.

[0:45:01]

NP: Was it hard to make the change to a different elevator, different group of workers?

WS: No. You just had to--. Well, I knew a lot of them down here anyway. Went to school with them all. Made a difference. They tipped me off on a few things.

NP: Oh, did they? Like what?

WS: One day I went out, and the dumper man says to me, "Jeez, you went quick for your coffee break." He says, "You should have took more time!" [Laughs] I said, "You're only allowed 15 minutes." "No, you take more than that."

NP: So a different--.

WS: Atmosphere altogether.

NP: How would you describe the difference in atmosphere, other than getting a longer coffee break?

WS: Well, the bosses didn't bother you. Nobody bothered as long as you did your job.

NP: Who were the bosses there, do you remember, when you started?

WS: Billy Tarnowski was kind of a foreman there. He gave me my punch card when I went there. And then who the heck was the superintendent? I forget his name. He was a Scotchman anyway.

NP: McKay? No?

WS: Yeah, McKay. Yeah. The poor guy. He got cancer after and died.

NP: I understood that they named UGG M--. No.

WS: Yeah, UGG M was McCabe's. Yeah. Elevator M they called it.

NP: Elevator M.

WS: And this was A. So I had homestead rights at M, and then when they bought out, I started working the Grain Growers, and I got Grain Grower rights too. I had both of them.

NP: So your career lasted how many years?

WS: Eh?

NP: Your career from '45--. A lot of years.

WS: Yeah.

NP: Almost--.

WS: 48 years, I think it was.

NP: 48 years. That's a long time!

WS: Yeah. 48 years in there.

NP: What job--. Were there other jobs that you did that we haven't talked about?

WS: Well, you shovel boxcars, you run the bobcats. McCabe's run the bobcats. Run the cleaners, and I was a dryer man too.

NP: What's does a dryer man do?

WS: Dry the grain. It was too wet, you had to dry it.

NP: What was involved there?

WS: Well, you had to watch your temperature, how much--. 168 degrees, and then you had a chart there to see if it was running balanced, the temperature. It would be big, green just like that. That was on the clock.

NP: A clock like timing the amount of time that it's in the dryer?

WS: Yeah. You've got maybe 45 minutes for a draft, maybe 35 minutes. Depends how damp it was. You couldn't get it too dry.

NP: It was just like drying clothes then. You had to determine how much--.

WS: There was some grain that you had to watch it and some grain you had to dry it at certain temperatures. You had flax was drying, then you put them screens on the windows to keep it from losing the flax. It would blow all over the place.

NP: Ah. So what was the trickiest to dry?

WS: I'd say the flax was. You had to put all them screens in the windows, and then if you got enough air coming through to cool it after.

NP: What happens to flax if you over-dry it?

WS: You might have oil. [Laughing]

NP: So from flax to oil. From flaxseed to flax oil.

WS: You might burn it. That's what happens. One guy—a smart guy—I covered up for him too pretty good. A guy down there from way down, a Newfie. He liked his drink. He says, "Look at this here. The grain's burnt. I don't know what happened." He went there over to the Coal Docks, went over to the Legion over there to drink beer, and it just cooked away.

[0:50:04]

NP: That would be a pretty expensive trip to the bar.

WS: So we got grain out of the farm dryers that was just like puffed wheat.

NP: What can you do then?

WS: You just have to sell it the way it was. Can't do nothing with it.

NP: Mix it in, in some cases?

WS: Well, you could blend some in, I guess. They called it blending, but if we made a blend, that was mixing. [Laughs]

NP: That took some skill to do that right, the blending or mixing, whatever you call it.

WS: Well, they give you a ticket, and you put two percent of this, percentage of that, and you go down and feel it with your hand. I was pretty good at it. When I was on the cleaner deck, that was my job. "Go and put so much more of this bin on there." Down they go. One day, my cleaner was overflowing, eh, going down the sewer. I get that straightened out. "I'll go down there now and straighten it out for you." Down I go.

NP: I don't understand. Start again.

WS: The flooding?

NP: Yeah.

WS: Well, the grain was going down where the old chute come out and the grain go in, and the wheat was going along with it. You had to adjust that cleaner so it wouldn't happen. They'd go to the back of the cleaner and lower that one, lower on the bottom, put it on the centre. All that kind of stuff.

NP: What's the sander?

WS: In the centre.

NP: Oh, in the centre.

WS: There was three units on top of each other, eh? The second one you'd blend--. It was taking the seeds and everything out of the grain. You had to take that down.

NP: So when you think back to your long career, what were you doing at the end? What was your last job?

WS: I was hopper man at Grain Growers.

NP: Which job did you like the best? Out of all of the ones that you had, can you--?

WS: I liked the dryer.

NP: And what about it did you like the best?

WS: Well, I liked it the best because when it was cold in the wintertime, it was nice and warm in there. [Laughing]

NP: That's very practical. And enough to keep you interested.

WS: Oh, yeah. You had to watch your charts, and your garners up on top telling you, "You want some more grain in there?" Then you went and run downstairs to get a sample to test it to see if it's dry enough for the moisture. You had to do that yourself too.

NP: So you ran the show, essentially.

WS: Yeah.

NP: And you were responsible for yourself and doing things right.

WS: Yeah, yeah. Make sure it was dry enough—13.8, 13.9, that was okay. If it was 14.1, that was okay too. But--.

NP: How do you test it? How do you test the dryness?

WS: Well, you put a thermostat in, and you measure so much out. It depends what kind of grain you're working with. And then you put the thermostat in it, thermometer in there, and see how--. You wait and wait to see what temperature it is after a while. Then you drop it in this little machine, and then you start it up. You click the thing, and then you look there. You look at it. How much is--? What the hell was that for? It was how much dampness was in it. It says 45 and 48 on another one. There's a chart. You had to read down the temperature in this way, and you got to how much it was.

NP: Sort of the humidity or the moisture content and the temperature combined?

WS: Yeah, yeah.

NP: To get the right thing.

WS: Yeah.

NP: And you'd have several different kinds of grain that you'd be working with to keep track of.

WS: They just put a lot this, lot that. Then there were some like feed wheat, well, that was a different measurement of grains to start with.

NP: And what job did you like the least, the absolute least out of all of the things you did?

WS: The least?

NP: Yeah.

WS: The old sweat board. [Laughs]

NP: Tell me about that one.

WS: A car and two cables in there, two shovels. You hooked them on the cables, and you go up in the back end, you dug it in, held onto it, and put your--. The other guy--. And then you got to watch and make sure you don't come the same time to the door, the both of you, because you'll go flying out the door. [Laughs]

NP: Sounds like that happened sometimes.

WS: Well, it didn't happen to me anyway. It didn't happen to my buddy either.

NP: You were a good team?

WS: Mmhmm. We watched each other, let one go and then the other guy go.

NP: The elevators, especially in the early days, from other people I've talked to, besides the explosions, they can be quite dangerous places. What kinds of accidents were usual?

WS: Well, some guys with the cable get hit with that. Or one guy there, he was an oiler. He stick his fingers in everything and got the fingers cut off. Then he was working in the car shed at the old Thunder Bay Elevator, and he was going to stop this car, and he put his foot under the wheel! Cut his toes off. They preached safety to you, but that didn't do any good.

NP: Did you see changes in the safety concerns over time?

WS: Oh, yeah.

NP: Did--.

WS: Oh, yeah. There was changes. They had to supply masks for you in the dust, goggles for your eyeballs. When you were doing cars, you didn't want no dust in your eyes.

NP: What do you think led to the changes? What brought about the changes?

WS: The explosion.

NP: Ah.

WS: I think one guy, the general foreman come out one day, and I had given this assistant foreman, I was giving him hell. I said, "I don't want that light right there. I want it over here." I said, "Maybe step on it, and I'll go flying on the floor." I said, "By the way, I can load cars without a light too, you know."

NP: Without a what? Without a leg?

WS: Without a light. I didn't know the general foreman was listening to all of this. He come out, and he says, "You know what, big boy? Jerry," he says, "he's loading cars. You don't have to trim. How come you had a trimmer?" You had to put the car in a certain way to hit the far corner, and I guess he just put it in, and it hit next to where he was loading it, the side he was loading on. The guys were trimming every car.

NP: Because it was important just like--. I didn't realize you had to trim the cars similar to like the ship so that it was well balanced.

WS: If you didn't put the spout in right, you had to trim it because you couldn't get it all in the car.

NP: Now what was involved in trimming the car?

WS: With a scoop shovel. Crawl in through there and up to here. You could hardly get in there.

NP: Up to your neck?

WS: All over the grain there, and down, you know. All over the place. When I started, guys didn't have to trim.

NP: So again, people thought, "Well, what's the big deal here?" And then they learned what the big deal was.

WS: Yeah. But he never learned.

NP: No?

WS: Big Frenchman. One time he was in a big hurry to load these cars in one track, and we were shovelling these cars in one track. He knocked the grain doors down. Holy cow, did he ever hit the guys in the back of the leg and go into the hopper and get half killed. When I was on the safety, I told them about it too. He was on the safety committee too. [Laughs]

NP: So what you're saying then is that some people took safety seriously and others didn't.

WS: Yeah. Well, one time there was a ladder that got little hooks in the bottom so you don't slip in the wintertime. He took it and he drove it into his foot. That's what--.

NP: What was it he had that had the hooks in it?

WS: A ladder. He was climbing out of the car when he was coopering them, and he dropped that down and put it through his foot. That didn't teach him much of a lesson, I'll tell you that. He was carrying this thing--.

[1:00:07]

NP: Did that person last for a long time working at the elevators?

WS: Oh, yeah. He was coming down from the scale floor. Knew everything. He didn't know nothing.

NP: Hm.

WS: Yeah. What are you going to do? Poor old guy. He went to BC after.

NP: To work in the elevators there or to retire?

WS: No, he was retired. He always said, "Look at that." He had a little stove up there and a thing to toast their sandwiches on. "Jeez, that's pretty good." Those were blacker, that there. He said, "That's good for the worms. No worms," he says.

NP: Blackened toast.

WS: Yeah. You wouldn't get any worms from that. [Laughs]

NP: I asked you what you liked to do best and what you liked to do least, but what gave you the biggest challenge over your career? What challenges did you have?

WS: It really wasn't that big a challenge, you know, in the elevator. Some guys made a big issue out of it when you were charged with the cleaner deck from 4:00 to 12:00. Didn't bother me none. I liked it. You check the sample, see if it's okay, and then the scale floor ordered to bin it. There's nothing to it. It wasn't that hard a job. The hardest job was those sweat boards.

NP: A hard physical job.

WS: Yeah. And sweat.

NP: That's why it was called the sweat board, I take it.

WS: Yeah. [Laughs] And then the poor guy that lived on Grenville Avenue.

NP: Lived where?

WS: On Grenville Avenue over here, one of them wartime houses. I don't know who he was, but he come out of that boxcar and just sweat just pouring off him, you know, shovelling boxcars. I felt sorry for him. "You come pile the bags in here, and I'll go shovel them cars for you." So I did. [Laughs] I wanted the fridge removed from where I used to live to put in here, and I got him. I said, "How much I owe you for that?" He says, "Nothing." The sweat was just pouring off the guy. He would've died on that job. He wasn't used to it, eh?

NP: Well, I was interviewing a fellow who was complaining about going to Pool 5 when it was over--.

WS: Oh, that guy. When it was Saskatchewan Wheat Pool?

NP: Yeah, when it was Pool 5 on the Kam River. He said the day he went--. He said he didn't like to work at Pool 5 because it was a shovel house, and they were using the sweat board, I guess. And he said he went in. Nobody gave him any training, and he said he practically killed himself that first day.

WS: Oh, yeah.

NP: And then somebody came along and showed him how to do it the right way.

WS: One guy at McCabe's there, I was on the shovel—the old sweat board I call it—first time, and I come--. I says, “Boy, that was hard on your muscles in your stomach. They were sore, boy.” It was not hard enough for that kind of work. But a week after, didn't bother me no more.

NP: You were using muscles you hadn't used before.

WS: Yeah. Then that didn't bother me at all.

NP: Thinking about Current River and the elevators here reminds me of another interview where the guy was talking about the hockey league. Did you play hockey at all, or--?

WS: No. No, they didn't have it at that time, but they started a baseball league. These guys from Sask Pool would say, the guy says, “I thought they were supposed to be all old guys in McCabe's?” [Laughs] We had a few guys play baseball on the Murillo Mudhens—me, Bud Cliff—and we beat them every time.

NP: So that was with the McCabe's team?

WS: Yeah. We beat them every time. It didn't last long. They gave it up.

[1:05:03]

NP: So the whole league didn't last long?

WS: No.

NP: You should've shown them some mercy!

WS: Why? [Laughing] They wouldn't show us mercy! We called them the Wheaties.

NP: So did they have different nicknames for the various workers at the different elevators? So the--.

WS: Oh, they had lots of nicknames. I had a nickname too.

NP: Mmhhh?

WS: Manitoba Hayseed. [Laughing] The guy from Saskatchewan, I called him the Grasshopper. Oh, we had lots of names like that.

NP: When you look back, it's sort of special that you came from Manitoba from a farm and then you ended up at this end of the shipping. Did you feel a special connection to the farmers at all?

WS: Yeah, I did. I had uncles out there farming. I was trying to watch the cars to see where they come from and all that.

NP: Did your uncles deliver to Saskatchewan Wheat Pool?

WS: I think they were all in Manitoba.

NP: Ah, right. My mistake.

WS: My dad was in Manitoba, my uncles were, and then my dad got a dollar or something and they sold out a dollar something shares. My uncle offered--. He had shares in there too. He died, and they never cashed that cheque either.

NP: Do you have any thoughts about the Manitoba Pool and Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and UGG disappearing?

WS: Oh, yeah. McCabe's, that really got me going. Changing over. McCabe's sold out to Grain Growers, and then there was the Thunder Bay Elevator. I don't know what company owned that. Grain Growers bought that out.

NP: Oh, did they? I didn't realize that.

WS: They were figuring, "Well, we got boats here. We can get a boat across the end of the dock and one up the other way. Three boats at a time." Never materialized. Would've been the biggest elevator going if it did.

NP: And the Thunder Bay Elevator shut down.

WS: Yeah.

NP: Do you know when that happened?

WS: Oh, it was just after the war. I was going to say something. What was it?

NP: About McCabe's selling out?

WS: Oh, no. Thunder Bay Elevator, you know how that was operated? Steam.

NP: With a plant right there?

WS: Yeah, all in there. It was steam operated. They run the shipping belts, the shipping legs, and everything. There was a big shaft there that drove everything, and it had to be driven by steam. The hoppers and everything.

NP: What kind of difference would that make for the people that worked there?

WS: Where?

NP: As opposed to having an electric operation?

WS: Oh, that would have been a lot easier.

NP: The electric?

WS: Yeah. And then the company would save money with hydro power.

NP: What fueled the steam, coal?

WS: Yeah, it was coal. Big pile of coal out the back. Boat brought it there and dumped a big pile of coal there.

NP: So they had to have people shovelling coal?

WS: Oh, yeah. Coal passers and engineers. What made me mad was the company that I was working for, the plumbing outfit, he wouldn't sign the papers to give me my third-class engineer papers.

NP: Which would have made a difference to your career.

WS: Oh, it would have. Would have made a lot more money, too. I knew something about plumbing, I knew something about steam fitting, and all that stuff.

NP: Do you know why he wouldn't sign them?

WS: They had to pay me \$10 an hour. The union should have kept their mouth shut until he signed the papers, then jumped on him. [Laughs]

NP: Were you involved with the union at all in your career?

[1:10:01]

WS: Oh, I was on the safety committee and all that stuff.

NP: Were you on strike?

WS: Oh, yeah. We were on strike. I was in charge of the picket line too. I think three or four picket lines I had to look after. Different days I had to go. I put more time on that picket line than the rest of the guys did.

NP: If you had your uncles farming out west, did you have some discussions with them about you clogging up the system by being on strike? [Laughs]

WS: Oh, they were going to threaten to come down and run the elevators. Baloney! You'll run it all right. [Laughs] I said, "You would run it alright. It would be a hell of a mess!"

NP: So would you go to visit them on vacation?

WS: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

NP: And what were some of the conversations you'd have? Sort of trying to straighten--.

WS: "You guys went on strike again?" "Yeah, we want to get paid. We're under a dollar an hour getting paid, and other guys are making \$2 an hour in the paper mill and all that."

NP: Did you get much sympathy from your farmer relatives?

WS: No, no. That didn't make any difference to me anyway. [Laughing] So. We did go on strike one time for a 40-hour week instead of a 48-hour week. They offered us a 44-hour week. "No. We want a 40-hour week. Everybody else had it." We finally got it. The next time we went on strike, we wanted \$1.06-an-hour raise. We got \$1.05-an-hour raise, so that was good enough for us.

NP: Who was heading up the union?

WS: Oh, he's dead now, that guy. I forget his name.

NP: Frank Mazur?

WS: Oh, no, no. Frank Mazur took over after him. The owners didn't like him. [Laughs]

NP: Didn't like who?

WS: Mazur.

NP: Why do you think that was?

WS: Because he made us tow the line, what they could do and what they couldn't do.

NP: And the boss before him was not--?

WS: No, he wasn't--. I forget what his name was.

NP: As effective.

WS: No, wasn't effective. When I started there, we only got 60 cents an hour.

NP: How much an hour?

WS: 60 cents. One day, the old man come around and says, "I'll give you a five-cent raise. Sixty-five cents." Then it went to 70 cents. Then I got in the cleaners, and it got to 75 cents. No, 35 cents. Oh, come on. I'm all mixed up.

NP: Eventually you hit a \$1.00 and then \$1.06 or \$1.05.

WS: Something like that. But we had to go on strike to get that. Oh, boy.

NP: Did you always feel that the strikes accomplished what you had hoped?

WS: It accomplished what we wanted it for. The company would say, "Oh, give them a nickel. They'll be satisfied." That nickel business has gone out the window. [Laughs]

NP: You also had your career through the time where it was very, very busy here.

WS: Mmhmm.

NP: And then when it wasn't so busy. What impact did that have on you, anything?

WS: No. I'll get to maybe do a different job or something in the elevator, that's all. They moved you into jobs.

NP: But you were pretty used to doing just about everything, so--.

WS: Oh, yeah. We didn't care.

NP: Now, just a couple of general questions. From what I've been able to learn about the grain system, I think Canada has a pretty good—both a growing system and a transportation and cleaning and shipping grain system.

WS: You know what they come up with? The proteins in the grain.

NP: What difference did that make to you, anything?

WS: Well, buyers like that. There was 13.5 protein, some had 13, some had 12.5 proteins.

NP: Did you have to learn to--.

WS: No, the government, they had a tester for that. We didn't have none of that.

[1:15:03]

NP: What was your interaction, if anything, with the government people?

WS: Well, you had to do as you were told. [Laughs] They'd say, "That's not clean enough. You have to put it cleaner." They'd tell you whether you were overweight in dockage or too heavy on the mix.

NP: What kind of working relationship was it?

WS: Oh, they was all right. They'd tell you, and if you didn't do what they told you, they'd shut you off. They graded the grain, and one guy in the elevator, he was a better grader than they were. [Laughs]

NP: Who was that?

WS: Eh?

NP: Who was your grader who was really good?

WS: Willy Tarnowski was one of them. Bob Devine was the other one at McCabe's. Then Mike Brazowski. The Grasshopper, I called him. He would run into the government office all the time.

NP: Why was he doing that?

WS: To see if he got the grade right.

NP: I think that's pretty hard to do, actually, getting those grades. Just being able to look at things and--.

WS: Oh, they do. If there was any frostbitten and all that stuff that was in what they looked for.

NP: Did that ever interest you, getting into that kind of work?

WS: Well, on nights, you had to watch it too because there was no inspector or nothing there. "Then some oats was burnt," they said. You had to cut that open and look inside. The kernel was--.

NP: Yeah. I guess if you were cleaning and drying, you got to know a lot about the quality of grain.

WS: Yeah. We had to know what's the quality of the grain. You had to know the quality because you had certain drying temperatures for different grades, right?

NP: Mmhmm. Hm! So overall, when you look back on your career, what are you most proud of over your many, many, many years of working in the grain elevators? What brings you the most pride or satisfaction?

WS: On the cleaners, that's what I liked. You learned things too. As you went along, you learned different things.

NP: You liked learning?

WS: Oh, yeah. Especially in the grain.

NP: Do you think that the work you did made Canada a better grain trader?

WS: Well, everybody like their proteins. In England, they'd buy the high protein wheats from Canada for making their bread. Didn't know that, did you?

NP: Yeah, it's a good selling feature for us.

WS: Yeah.

NP: Yeah. So are there any questions that I should have asked you that I didn't? Things that you wanted to say that you haven't had a chance to say?

WS: I don't know. [Laughing] You covered about everything.

NP: Well. When you retired, you worked longer than most people did. You would have had a good, I would think, a good pension.

WS: A good pension?

NP: So that you could have retired earlier.

WS: Well, I want to tell you something.

NP: Okay.

WS: McCabe's never had a pension.

NP: Ahhhh.

WS: I got one when I went to Grain Growers. I got it. You had to sign up, or you had no job.

NP: You had to be part of the pension then? And that was a good thing.

WS: Yeah, yeah. Then they had the Canada Pension. I got on that right away from McCabe's. That was compulsory for them to give you that, because they had to pay so much, and I paid so much.

NP: How old were you when you retired?

WS: I was 65 when I got my pension, but I was on disability for a couple of years before that.

NP: Oh, what happened? Something related to work?

WS: Oh, no. No. What the hell was it? I had a stroke.

NP: Ah.

WS: The doctor said, “You can go back to work. Don’t worry.” I said, “No, I’m not going to go back for two years.” He said, “Okay, we’ll fix that up.” I stayed on disability then. I got 65 for that. I was getting my holiday pay every year.

[1:20:08]

NP: So it bridged you to when your pension kicked in?

WS: Yeah. Then we had the disability pension and all that crap in there too. I had to go uptown there to get my cheques every time at the PUC.

NP: To prove that you were still disabled?

WS: [Laughs] Well, you had to prove it. The doctor made sure of that. If you had a no-good doctor, you never got it.

NP: So any other stories that you’d like to have recorded for history?

WS: No.

NP: No? If we get a centre, which we would like—we think we deserve a national historic centre to recognize the--.

WS: For grain handlers?

NP: Yes. Yes. The elevators and the grain handlers. There’s lots of historic sites that recognize the farmers and maybe less so for the railways, but nothing for the big grain handling elevators. So if we did that, what kinds of things do you think might interest people?

WS: Well, I will tell you right now what’s going to interest the farmers. You should restore their country elevators because they don’t like hauling that grain for miles and miles. They want the railroad to haul it. That’s what I heard that in Manitoba when I was out the last time.

NP: So do you still have relatives that farm?

WS: No.

NP: No nephews or--?

WS: Oh, I got nephews, but I don't think they farm.

NP: No?

WS: No. My cousin quit farming, and my cousin he died from cancer. His dad died from cancer, and his mother died from cancer. Me and him looked the same.

NP: Hm. But you're hanging in there. This is good.

WS: He's a couple of years older than me, I think.

NP: Yeah. Did you ever take any pictures of the elevators or you working at the elevators?

WS: I've got one picture here.

NP: I'll look at it later then. Or can you get it easily?

WS: Oh, yeah. It's right here. It's in a frame.

NP: Ah.

WS: At Grain Growers. That's me at Grain Growers.

NP: Ah, opening the hoppers. What I call the big screwdriver. [Laughing]

WS: That's at Grain Growers I was doing that.

NP: Oh, my. That's a great picture.

WS: The date's on there too, I think, on the front.

NP: Yes, it is. It's 1988. So that was 10 years before you retired, right?

WS: Yeah.

NP: This reminds me that I need to take your picture. Let me take a couple, just so--. Oh, I see. You want to have one without your--. Oh, that's a great picture. And then just sort of look down a little bit because--. There you go. Remember when you were at the display, and you were listening to some of the people talking? There was the screen, and there were some interviews coming up?

WS: I don't remember that.

NP: We had pictures of the people who were talking, and so we like to have a few different pictures so when we have a little bit from your interview, we can have different pictures. And then just look straight out that way. Good. There we go. Good pictures! You're photogenic.

WS: I'm photogenic. [Laughs]

NP: Now. I just have the list here that you gave me a copy of, and I'm just going to mention some of the names, and if anything comes to mind about the people, if you remember them--. There was a J. Mackenzie?

WS: He was up on the scale floor. Scotchman.

NP: Ah. W. Ralph?

WS: That's the old foreman. He was a foreman there, when I come.

[1:25:00]

NP: And what about Mr. Mahoney?

WS: Mr. Mahoney, what's his first name?

NP: It's T. Mahoney, and it says here he--.

WS: T. Mahoney, he was a grain inspector. Company grain inspector.

NP: A company grain inspector, okay. An H. Frankish?

WS: He was a chief electrician there.

NP: Oh, okay. He lived on Marks Street in Fort William.

WS: Yeah?

NP: That's where my father grew up. A J. Taylor?

WS: J. Taylor was the scale floor.

NP: Okay, right. He was a weighman.

WS: He was one of the shipping weighmen, and the other one was a receiving weighman.

NP: And then there was a guy by the name of Kolomichuk.

WS: Kolomichuk?

NP: M. Kolomichuk, and it says here he was a cleaner man.

WS: Yeah. He'd be upstairs, I think.

NP: Okay. Risso, is that right?

WS: Who?

NP: L. Risso?

WS: Risso?

NP: R-I-S-S-O.

WS: Yeah.

NP: Winchman.

WS: Yeah. He was in the car shed spotting the cars.

NP: G. McCartney?

WS: He was on the distributing floor. Another Scotchman.

NP: And R. Devine?

WS: R. Devine was making out the shunts at that time.

NP: What does that mean “making out the shunts”?

WS: For spotting cars in the car shed for the dump.

NP: Okay. Getting them lined up to go in?

WS: Yeah.

NP: McCallum, J. McCallum?

WS: Stationary engineer.

NP: Stationary engineer, okay. Nurse, W. Nurse?

WS: Oh, old Nurse. He was up on the scale floor.

NP: Wow, you've got a great memory.

WS: Scale floor or something up the stairs anyway.

NP: Yeah. It says scale floor here. W. Smith?

WS: W. Smith. The Smith I knew there was the watchman.

NP: This is like a contest. You're right! [Laughing] I should have a prize at the end.

WS: An old Scotchman.

NP: So a lot of Scotchmen working there then?

WS: Yeah. When McCabe's--. In the common house, they'd all be Scotch people talking there.

NP: Oh, did they speak Gaelic?

WS: A lot of them at Grain Growers did.

NP: Oh, really? Did your family ever speak Gaelic?

WS: No.

NP: No?

WS: Our Gaelic would be different than theirs anyway.

NP: Yeah.

WS: Every clan had their own Gaelic.

NP: Ah. Sort of like a special--. Like in Italy where in different parts of Italy, you speak a different kind of Italian. Polonski?

WS: Polowski. Oh, Polowksi.

NP: He lived on Ray Boulevard.

WS: Polowski, where the heck--.

NP: Polonski. I think it's a J. It says here he was a cleaner man.

WS: Yeah. Downstairs. Yeah, I was going to say that.

NP: L. Graham?

WS: Annex man.

NP: What did an annex man do?

WS: Moves the trips and put them on the bins.

NP: So he's the guy who has to know where everything goes.

WS: No, he's told which bin to put the trip on, and that's what he does.

NP: He just has to find them, like that guy who was running around looking for them, right?

WS: Yeah.

NP: R. Morash?

WS: R. Morash. What the heck did he do?

NP: It says here scale floor man.

WS: Yeah.

NP: He was from Fort William. So they had a mixture of Fort William and Port Arthur people, eh?

WS: Yeah. I was on there, but they I quit for--. That's why I'm not on there. For four months or something.

NP: I see. Barubek?

WS: Rabbit?

NP: P. Barubek? Barubek?

WS: Oh, Barubek. Where was he now?

NP: He went around with an oil can.

WS: Oh, yeah. He was an oiler.

NP: That changed quite a lot when computers came in too, right?

WS: Yeah. Just push a button and it was gone, already oiled.

NP: Yeah. And then, I think somebody told me that the oilmen had to go from one end of the elevator to the other, and by the time they finished doing that, they had to start over again, just oiling machines.

WS: Every day.

NP: Every day?

WS: Every day. Check everything, make sure there's not hot bearings or anything. One day, I went to work there at 4:00, and you could smell this bearing is hot. Nobody could find it. They're standing there looking at it! [Laughs]

NP: Took somebody coming in from the outside to notice. Warniack?

WS: Warniack? I think he was a hopper man.

NP: Well, it says, "Running up grain." What does that mean?

WS: That's a hopper man.

NP: Okay. Running up grain. Now, why do they call a hopper man running up grain?

WS: Well, that's what he did. Running up grain. [Laughs]

NP: I don't understand. Oh, running it up into the elevator?

WS: Yeah.

NP: Ah, okay.

[1:30:04]

WS: Out of the car shed.

NP: That makes sense. A. Young?

WS: A. Young?

NP: Millwright helper it says here.

WS: Yeah. I was just trying to figure out where he was. I know the name.

NP: J. Balius or--.

WS: J. who?

NP: Elevator employee, it just says. B-A-L-I-U-S. Balius. Hm. McHenry? No. Mahoney. Another Mahoney. M. Mahoney.

WS: Millwright staff.

NP: Belina?

WS: Belina? He was a sweeper upstairs. Old guy.

NP: And Polonski was an oiler. He's here twice or there's two Polonskis.

WS: Yeah.

NP: Oh, there's a J. Polonski and a P. Polonski.

WS: Yeah.

NP: And then there was a W. Yahn, is that how you pronounce it?

WS: Who?

NP: Yahn. Y-A-H-N.

WS: W. Yahn?

NP: Yeah.

WS: That would be Bill Yahn. He used to be in the annex.

NP: Floor boss it says here at some point. C. Poulin?

WS: Poulin? He was a millwright staff.

NP: Right. Huczkowski? Huczkowcki?

WS: I think he was on the cleaners.

NP: You're right. Kusiak? M--.

WS: Some of them--.

NP: He was cleaner man too. And I may be pronouncing it wrong. The printing wasn't very clear.

WS: Yeah, no.

NP: W. Mullock?

WS: W. Mullock?

NP: On Wolseley he lived. Wolseley. A. Woitkiw? W-O-I--. Woitkiw. W-O-I-T-K-I-W. Is that how you say that?

WS: I don't know. Hm.

NP: It says seal helper. No, that can't be.

WS: Sealing cars?

NP: Well, it says helper. Hm.

WS: Pidscelli [sp?]. I think he was a millwright.

NP: That's an unusual name, isn't it, Pidscelli? Landry?

WS: That's the big Frenchman I was talking about. [Laughs] He was on the scales.

NP: Ah. It says X belt. What does X belt mean?

WS: X belt?

NP: X belt and bin floor.

WS: Oh, that's the cross belt.

NP: Oh, cross belt. And what's the cross belt?

WS: It runs one end to the other and this way and that way in reverse. If you want grain to go that way, you put it on the other end. You put it on there, and you take it down there with that. It's just reversable belt.

NP: Oh, okay.

WS: One time somebody let the trip run away and it went right through the wall! [Laughs] Smashed it all to hell.

NP: My goodness.

WS: And I happened to be on the cleaners at that time.

NP: Did you ever make a mistake that you were sorry for?

WS: No.

NP: Oh, come on now. [Laughs]

WS: No. I didn't make no mistake.

NP: There we go. You were careful.

WS: I caught the big boss making mistakes, putting the grain in the wrong bin, giving me the wrong bin to put it in. He said, "What's that there?" And I go--.

NP: Oops!

WS: And the foreman, he was loading the boat one time. I was checking all the guys, making sure he's got the bins right. "How much percentage?" Go down, I shut that off right away.

NP: Yeah.

WS: I go upstairs. "Who gave him this bin here? Oo, want to feed them screenings?" "Yeah?" I said, "You better shake it out some place. It's all going up there." Shook it out. I said, "Now is it okay to come ahead?" "Okay."

NP: Well, I can see why you had a long career because you were very observant, and you made sure that--. A. Cliff?

WS: Bud Cliff, we called him. He was doing everything like me.

NP: Now, was it Bud Cliff or Bud Cuff?

WS: Cliff.

NP: Cliff. Because he lived on Frances Street.

WS: Yes, he did.

NP: Yeah.

WS: His wife was a teacher.

NP: Oh, okay. Vanderway?

WS: Vanderway? An electrician helper.

NP: Mmhmm. Belesky?

WS: Mike Belesky?

NP: Yeah. An M. Belesky anyway. Komistek? Komistek.

WS: Komistek? That was Crazy Paul, I called him.

NP: [Laughs] How did he get that name?

WS: He was crazy, all right.

[1:35:00]

NP: He was an elevator worker, so--.

WS: He used to be working on the bagger with me, and he got tough with me one day. I was going to beat the living Christ out of him. [Laughs]

NP: So did he have mental health problems really?

WS: I don't know. I don't think he was all there.

NP: Oh, well.

WS: And then he was upstairs blaming the hopper man making a mistake and all this. One guy was down there with me. He said, "Goddamn buggers. He didn't make no mistake. They made it up there." Up the stairs he goes, gave him shit. [Laughs]

NP: Phillips?

WS: George Phillips. He's gone, that old guy. Me and him were good friends.

NP: Car shed?

WS: Yeah. He was a hook man when I was there.

NP: Lewandowski?

WS: Lewandowski. That name--. What the hell was he doing?

NP: W. Lewandowski. It just says an elevator employee.

WS: Oh, lots of us were an elevator employee. You didn't have no classification for some places.

NP: Solowski or Sokowski?

WS: [Laughs] Sokowski? I think he was in the cleaner.

NP: Wilson? A. Wilson on Pruden. He was a watchman. He was--.

WS: Oh.

NP: Homolka?

WS: Homolka? What the heck was he?

NP: Just an elevator employee. Breza?

WS: Fred Breza. He was an elevator employee working the bagger with me and all that stuff.

NP: Oh, okay. J. Neil.

WS: Oh, Neil? He was a real drunkard, that guy. He was in charge of the cleaner deck 4:00 to 12:00.

NP: The drinking was a real problem with people, right? Especially after the war, I would think.

WS: Oh, they were drinking like fish down at the elevators until that guy fell in the slip at Pool 7 or something and drowned himself.

NP: Oh. By accident?

WS: Yeah. He was all drunked up, and he fell in and drowned himself.

NP: So that's what--. I wondered what changed things because it was really quite a dramatic change.

WS: That's what changed that.

NP: When would that have been?

WS: Oh, jeez. I don't know when the hell it was. In the '40s, I think.

NP: Well, no. There was drinking going on beyond that. If it--.

WS: Yeah, but I said when he fell in that ended it.

NP: Yeah. Mahoney, F.?

WS: Mahoney, which one?

NP: F.

WS: F.? Frances Mahoney.

NP: Frances, aha. Millwright helper.

WS: Yeah.

NP: Hunter?

WS: Bob Hunter was up on the scale floor. He was in the annex. He was all over the place that guy, but he didn't stay there very long.

NP: Brooks?

WS: Brooks? He's another guy I knew.

NP: At Jumbo Gardens. Not too far away.

WS: Yeah, yeah.

NP: And Mack, R. Mack?

WS: That was Richard Mack.

NP: Just listed as an elevator employee.

WS: Yeah.

NP: Well, that's good. You filled in some details on these people. So I think there's no more left than an official thank you very much for sharing your career.

WS: I hope it's good enough for you. [Laughs]

NP: Oh, excellent. No, very good. Thank you. And for filling in some of the details about McCabe's because, as I said, I don't think we had anybody else who worked at McCabe's. So thank you very much.

WS: No? That's their seniority list for McCabe's.

NP: Okay. That's good to know.

WS: Did I give you one?

NP: I think you gave it to me, and you took it away. So I'll check my papers and make sure I don't have two.

WS: I got two more anyway.

NP: Okay. So I'm just going to turn down--. Stop the interview now.

End of interview.