

Narrator: Brian Storry (BS)

Company Affiliations: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC)

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Interviewer: Nancy Perozzo (NP)

Recorder: Nancy Perozzo (NP)

Transcriber: Sarah Lorenowich

Summary: Retired assistant chief grain inspector for the Canadian Grain Commission in Thunder Bay Brian Storry discusses his career across Thunder Bay’s waterfront. He begins by describing his family’s history of farming in Saskatchewan before moving to Thunder Bay, and his joining the CGC as a sampler out of high school. Throughout the interview, Storry surveys the Thunder Bay waterfront, listing every operating elevator he worked in and sharing memorable stories and people from each place. He recalls some of his responsibilities as he became a fulltime inspector, like re-examining samples, being on the “flying squad” and following loading vessels around the harbour, and acting as chief inspector for Canada in Winnipeg for a period of time. Storry describes the work conditions in elevators, dealing with wildlife, drinking, and dangerous machinery. Other topics discussed include the elevator hockey league, automation, privatization of all non-export inspection and weighing, interactions with the Canadian International Grains Institute, the rise and fall of grain pooling, and the CGC’s attempts at cross-training inspectors and weigh staff.

Keywords: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Grain inspection; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Grain elevators—Equipment and supplies; Grain sampling; Grain grades; Grain varieties; Grain transportation—ships; Grain transportation—rail; Grain pooling; Canadian Wheat Board; Boxcars; Alcohol use; Health and safety; Workplace accidents; Automation; Privatization; SWP Pool 8 (Ogilvie Elevator); Westland D (CPR D); Northwestern Elevator; Paterson Elevator O; SWP Pool 5 (Western Grain); Fort William Elevator F; Fort William Elevator E (Consolidated); National Elevator (Cargill, Grand Trunk Pacific Elevator); Searle Elevator; Parrish & Heimbecker Elevator; MPE Pool 1; Thunder Bay Elevator; SWP Pool 7A and 7B; MPE Pool 3; MPE Pool 6; MPE Pool 2; Richardson Main Elevator; SWP Pool 4A and 4B; AWP Pool 9; UGG Elevator A; Canadian International Grains Institute (CIGI)

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: It’s Nancy Perozzo, and this interview is taking place at Bayview Towers on January 14, 2015. I’m going to ask our narrator for today to introduce himself and his connection to the grain trade.

BS: Brian Storry. I retired in 1998 as assistant chief grain inspector for Thunder Bay. I started with the Grain Commission September 23, 1963. I was hired on at the entry level and then progressed through the different levels to the position I was in when I retired. How's that?

NP: Good. Perfect.

BS: Okay.

NP: Now, were any other members of your family involved with the elevators?

BS: I was born on a farm in Saskatchewan.

NP: Oh, whereabouts?

BS: Rabbit Lake, just north of North Battleford. My parents, they--. How much--? I won't go into that, but they sold the farm--.

NP: No, I'm really interested in the early years too, so.

BS: Okay. Well, yeah. I left there when I was 9 years old. Went to, well, it's not a country school. It was in the village of Rabbit Lake. And most of the time, the roads weren't plowed in the winter, so we had what's called a cutter, and my father had a team of light horses. They weren't full workhorses. I used to go by cowhide blankets and go to school. It was only three miles away, yeah.

NP: So can I ask you when you were born?

BS: Yeah. 1944.

NP: Okay. Do you remember much about the farm? Was your dad a grain farmer?

BS: Yeah. He was a mixed farm. Yeah, he was a grain farmer. We had the cattle, horses, chicken, sheep, pigs. They had the whole schmear, yeah.

NP: And what were they using for farming implements at that time for the grain crops?

BS: They were still using a binder. The threshing machines were just being introduced to the area. This is northern Saskatchewan. There was no power, so each farm had their own--. Like we had our own generator just for lighting of the house, but the barns were the old coal oil lanterns, and the outhouse. The Eaton's catalogue, yeah. Hang the clothes up after washing, and they're stiff as a board in the winter. Yeah.

NP: So your father left the farm when you were quite young then?

BS: Yeah, when I was 9 years old. Well, yeah. 1952, so I was 8 years old.

NP: Was it by choice? Did he--.

BS: Yeah. Well, my father didn't like farming with mechanical equipment. Yeah, he liked the old horses, eh? And my mother's parents were living here in Thunder Bay—or the old Fort William. And what happened was my grandfather was a doctor there, was a surgeon, and there was no will. Supposedly, there was a will. My father and mother were supposed to get the farm and the house in town. There was no will, so everything was divided between his brother in Moosejaw, Saskatchewan, unequally. So they decided, "No, that's no more farming then." So my father came here.

NP: How did your mother and father meet if your mother's family was here?

BS: Well, my mother was born in Scotland. Her parents came to Montreal for a little while. There's another one. [Laughs] My granddad had a brother who moved to the eastern townships in Quebec, and he was sending him money for a dairy herd. So when my grandmother and grandfather immigrated over, my grandfather's cows had died. Just his, okay? Yeah. So anyway, they ended up here, at Canada Car at the time. Then they moved to Saskatchewan, and they ran a store, and that's how it ended up she met my father at the village of Rabbit Lake.

NP: Okay. But some of her family stayed here?

BS: No. There was nobody here then.

NP: So what caused them to move to Thunder Bay, then?

BS: Well, they moved back again, yeah, after the store closed, and my mother stayed there.

NP: And what was your mom's maiden name?

BS: Booth. Booth, yeah. Actually, she has a sister. She just passed away a few years ago. The rest of my mother's family over there—like my grandmother—they wouldn't let her bring my mother's oldest sister over because you're going to a frontier. There's no education, and she was in school at the time. So she stayed there, and she never did come. Yeah. Went back and forth for visits, but she stayed over there. Yeah, yeah.

[0:05:10]

NP: They didn't realize what a booming place this was!

BS: Place it is, yeah. Yeah.

NP: Thunder Bay especially. So other than having grown grain, then no other--?

BS: I had no--. No.

NP: No connection.

BS: No.

NP: How did you get involved?

BS: How did I get in that? Okay. [Laughing] I wasn't that good in school, and my mother worked for unemployment insurance. She told me one day--. Like, I finished Grade 12. I finally got my Grade 12 after I told all, one teacher in particular, to pass the word that, "Just give me a passing mark. I might have a chance of a job with the Canadian Grain Commission [CGC]." So I had a couple just passing marks. So anyway, I went back to school for Grade 13, and my mother said--. And I didn't like it. I was only going half days. My mother said, "There's an opening here. There's a posting with the Canadian Grain Commission looking for assistant grain inspectors." So I applied for that, and in the interim, they called me if I wanted to come on to be a sampler, which is a lower position. So that gave me some background. So I went down to the elevators. Like, I lived on Vickers Street there by the Jackknife Bridge, so there was Saskatchewan Pool 8 and there was Westland D down by the old Murphy coal dock. I went there to see what the job entailed.

[Audio pauses]

NP: Into the railway. [Laughing] Sorry, had to have a little stop there to clear my throat. Now, growing up on south Vickers, then, and as you mentioned, the Saskatchewan--.

BS: Wheat Pool Number 8.

NP: 8, which was Ogilvie's maybe at that time.

BS: Before that, yeah.

NP: And Westland D were in the neighbourhood. So as kids, did you ever sneak into the yards?

BS: Into the railyards?

NP: Railyards and elevators.

BS: Oh, yeah. If they were switching, we would try to catch a free ride until you get caught, they throw us off. Yeah, yeah. I never went into the elevators though. Never. Because they were seen to be too--. I don't know. Not too scary, but too immense to prowl around. I had a friend. His father was general manager for Ogilvie's, and they lived right on site. They had a—oh, yeah—a nice suite. Beautiful. Plus, there was a gardener, too. Full time gardener. So that's about as close as I came in my younger days.

NP: So where were the suites?

BS: Right on the second floor. The office was downstairs for Ogilvie's, the whole downstairs. They had a big staff. The whole upstairs was all one suite.

NP: Was it the building that burnt down?

BS: No, no.

NP: So where--?

BS: No, wait a minute. Did that one burn? No. I don't know. It would be right next to the railroad tracks. Oh, God. Just south of the elevator. There was a big yard in front. Big, beautiful lawn there, yeah, and flowers and everything else.

NP: Those were the good old days.

BS: Yeah.

NP: I'm thinking back to some of the postcard collection and photographs I've seen from various elevators, and right along that street, which was Syndicate, there was the CP [Canadian Pacific Railway] Station.

BS: Yeah, yeah.

NP: And Ogilvie's, and they both had gorgeous gardens. I didn't realize--.

BS: Yeah, yeah. They did. Yeah.

NP: Those were the good old days.

BS: Now you go by the CP Station and oh, my God. There's nothing. It's just tank cars and other vehicles there. There's nothing. They don't do that anymore. Yeah. At the Ogilvie office there, behind there was a small shed, and we used to climb on the Jackknife Bridge there and steal baby pigeons and then go try and raise them on our own in the shed behind Ogilvie office. [Laughs]

NP: Did you have any luck raising them?

BS: No, no. [Laughs] Well, some. But we'd try to make them into homing pigeons, and they didn't work. Yeah. [Laughing]

NP: So I sort of took you back to memoryland, but you went as a sampler, your first job with the Commission. Can you think back to, say, that first day or week? That would be your first introduction to the goings on in an elevator. What are some of your thoughts?

[0:10:12]

BS: Well, my first job was called the yard office. There was CN [Canadian National Railway] and CP. The Commission had, well, they were samplers, but we didn't sample. We had to tag boxcars, put information on there for where the grain was, what the shipping station was from out west, and all that, and where it was going to go. Well, we didn't say where it was going to go. We just put the tags on. Well, the guy in charge--. Now--. No. What that my first--? No, that was my second year, when I came back as a grain inspector's assistant. That would be in '64. The guy in charge--. Because I had Grade 12—and I think I was the second person to be hired with Grade 12—there was a lot of, not animosity, but a lot of them World War II vets, they never had time to finish school. They had to go overseas, and they couldn't get promoted from sampler after that. So this one guy thought I was an undercover RCMP because he had heard a rumour that the government was putting out these "spies" to see just how the government is handling its internal affairs. So he thought I was an undercover RCMP going to make a report on what they did. [Laughs] Yeah.

NP: Well, and I could see you were the young whippersnapper coming in with the education. Yeah.

BS: Yeah. What education then? I guess Grade 12 is something, but not to this day.

NP: So I interviewed one person who did this work, but maybe not in the same yard office, and that was Bill Kelso. Was he--?

BS: Yeah, Bill Kelso. One-armed Bill. Yeah. He was on the weighing staff. He was like a trackman, which would have been equal to a sampler. They were the same level. I think the same pay level. Yeah. He stayed at that position. He didn't want to go to be advanced, yeah.

NP: Yeah. He said he really liked working outside.

BS: Yeah. Well, he actually built his own house with one arm on Neebing Avenue. He's still with us too.

NP: I know. I interviewed him last year.

BS: Did you?

NP: Yeah. He's my godfather.

BS: Is he?

NP: Yeah.

BS: Oh! Well, I know his son-in-law. What's the daughter's name?

NP: Maryanne.

BS: Maryanne. Her husband. I forget what his name is, but he's Italian.

NP: I think it's an Italian name because I remember-- [Laughs]

BS: Yeah, it's Italian. It's Italian, yeah. Because he said Bill--. I saw him at a mutual friend's house, and he mentioned that Bill still remembers me. I said, "Oh, good, good!"

NP: So what yard office were you at then?

BS: I was at the CPR office at the end of Ford Street.

NP: Okay.

BS: Just off of Fredrica. I think there's a ball diamond there now. There was a big office there. The CP clerical staff had one end of it, and then we had the other end of it. Yeah, yeah.

NP: So you still weren't getting into elevators then?

BS: No. It was just shortly after that I got into the elevators. Actually, no, I shouldn't--. I'm just trying to remember. Right at the mouth of the Kam River there was a wooden elevator called Empire. I remember I think--. Was I sampling then, or was that in '63 or--? I forget now. But I was thrown on a boat with another assistant inspector to catch samples. Well, I didn't have a clue. There was no such thing as pre-training in those days. "Here. Do it." So I'm with a scoop and the grain coming out of the spout. Yeah. I still remember that. Oh, that was a mouse-infested, rat-infested place. I think a year later it was torn down. Yeah, you were thrown right into it. I worked with your dad at Northwestern. Yeah, yeah.

NP: Oh, really? Well, actually, tell me about Northwestern because actually I haven't really encountered anybody who worked at Northwestern.

BS: No?

NP: So tell me, who owned it, do you know?

BS: Federal Grain, and then Federal Grain was bought out by Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. Now, I can't remember if Northwestern was closed before Saskatchewan Wheat Pool bought it or not. I don't know. Right next door was another elevator I never worked at called Lakehead, but I don't know who owned it, what grain company, to this day. I was just thinking of it the other day. I should phone Bill Roukala. Your dad knew him quite well. He lives in King Arthur Suites. Yeah, I think he lives there. His wife just passed away last year. Yeah, there was the Lakehead. There was 11 elevators in Fort William when I started. There was 23 elevators in total when I started in '63 in the harbour.

[0:15:30]

NP: So tell me about Northwestern. What was it like physically?

BS: It was a small plant. It was a little hard getting down to the vessel because they have to go check the vessel before they load to make sure it's empty, clean, and dry before they receive grain. That was the responsibility of the inspection staff of the Grain Commission. It was a little iffy trying to get the ladder because it was quite a drop there, the high bank. Yeah. I used to screw up there all the time on your dad.

NP: Oh.

BS: I was at Cargill—that's the old National out at Chippewa—they had five receivers. Like the grain come in, say, five cars at a time, so you have to go pick up every--. Once the car is finished, you run to each. You had to do it manually. It was automatic samplers, and then dump it into a bucket. So you bagged the grain. So you have five bags to carry. I go work with your father. There's only two receivers at Northwestern, and I don't know what--. [Laughs] So one receiver was this hand, two receiver sample was this hand. The car numbers--. I don't know. I go downstairs, and I got turned around, so I always seemed to reverse them. [Laughs] Oh, God. I was embarrassed. And actually, that's where I was laid off from was Northwestern.

NP: Are you trying to blame that on my dad? [Laughing]

BS: No, no, no. That was the close of navigation.

NP: Now, for history, you can mention my dad's name.

BS: Pardon?

NP: You can say my dad's name for history.

BS: Oh, George. George Marks, yeah. They had a nickname too, you know that, eh?

NP: Oh, did they?

BS: Yes. You didn't know that?

NP: Hm.

BS: You did? Yeah, Groucho they used to call him because, you know, Marx at the time. Yeah, yeah. Your dad, that's good.

NP: Well, he would have been with Mr. Lourie and--.

BS: Jack Lourie, yeah.

NP: And who else was in that sort of--?

BS: Gerry Simons. George Adams. [Coughs] Excuse me. Harry Marshall. He was a PI-1. Harry the Horse we used to call him because his face was--. I could tell you a story about Harry. He liked to BS quite a bit. So one day, they got talking, and a guy says, "I carry about \$100 on me." That's quite a bit in those days. So Harry says, "I always pack \$5,000." The guy says, "Got you. You haven't got--. I'll bet you haven't got \$5,000 in your wallet." Harry had \$5,000 in his wallet. Just sold his house for cash. [Laughs] Yeah. I still remember that, yeah.

NP: So what would you say about that generation of grain guys, the inspectors? What comes to mind, positive, negative?

BS: Carefree. Carefree. They lived for today and didn't worry about tomorrow, quite a few of them. Well, they were drinkers, those--. Well, I think it was a given because when I started, they were working six days. During navigation, they were working six days a week, and then on top of that, three nights a week minimum when they were busy. Yeah, they were a good bunch of guys. Oh, yeah.

NP: Did they take their jobs seriously?

BS: Oh, yeah. Quite a few did.

NP: [Laughs] Quite a few did.

BS: Pardon?

NP: Quite a few did, so not all of them?

BS: No, no. Not all of them. There were some real--. Well, there was one fellow—he was a sampler--. Should I mention his name? No? Okay.

NP: Mention the names of the good guys, and--. [Laughs]

BS: Okay. Anyway, this fellow, yeah, he was a Korean prisoner of war in Japan, and they really--. He was tortured, and just his solace was the bottle. Good guy to talk to, but he just didn't care about his job or--. Yeah. There was quite a few dedicated people.

NP: I wonder because even in those days, they had to sign off saying, "This is what's on the ship."

BS: That's right, yeah.

NP: So you have to keep your wits about you.

BS: Oh, yeah. Yeah, because it will come back to haunt you. The buyer of the grain down at the other end, either in Canada or overseas, they'll complain. Yeah. I remember when I was up in the office then—I was, I don't know, assistant district inspector-in-charge—and I got a call from our Winnipeg office. We had to check the bags, check our samples, to make sure--. We had to send them to our Grain Research Lab to see if there's some kind of residue or something that would make animals sick. So what

happened, we found out Israel had bought this big shipment of Canadian grain, but that was the embargo when Jimmy Carter was president, and they couldn't ship to--. I think it was to--. Well, they couldn't--. Yeah, no. Who was the embargo--? Couldn't ship to Russia or something. I just forget how the background was, but Israel used to buy a lot of grain from the States, so they went to Spain and bought some. No, no. Oh, I've got to get this straight now. Bear with me, Nancy.

[Audio pauses]

[0:21:09]

NP: Want to start over again because then that way we can have it all in one?

BS: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Okay.

BS: Okay, please. Yeah. We had a complaint from Israel to our Winnipeg, which is our head office, to check a shipment of barley. To follow it back, we keep file samples from every shipment that's shipped out of Thunder Bay and send samples to Winnipeg to the Grain Research Lab to check it for any pesticides, insecticides, or if there's any contaminants. Then we find out later that Israel, they changed on their Holstein cows, and their cows are big compared to the Canadian ones. Instead of having certain rations, so much Canadian barley, they fed them pure barley. Well, that changed their whole metabolism, and they couldn't stop movements. [Laughs] That's all--. Yeah. Just over that. So their feeding ratios screwed up their--. It wasn't our grain. Our grain was good, yeah.

NP: Yes. I understand from talking to people from the Grain Research Lab and also a lot of inspectors that very seldom was there problems, when you consider the amount of grain that went through here.

BS: Went through here, yes. Yeah, yeah.

NP: I'm also interested in something you said because I interviewed Vic Bel.

BS: Oh, Vic. Yeah, yeah.

NP: And he used to do inspections on the ships. So would--.

BS: Yeah. He was a different department.

NP: And both had to ship, or both had to check?

BS: Yeah. But he didn't do every ship. I think they did it annually. It's called a--. Did he do the phyto? Yeah. Free of infestation and I forget what else the name is involved. They check for insects. Or especially if it was a foreign boat, a saltie, they check to make sure there's no other insects from, say, South America or Europe on there. Yeah. But they didn't do every ship.

NP: And what were you checking for then?

BS: We just checked to make sure it was empty, the hold was empty, and it was clean, and it was dry. Yeah, yeah.

NP: We sort of jumped ahead in your career. So you worked at the Northwest.

BS: I worked at every elevator. I worked at every elevator in Thunder Bay except Lakehead at the time.

NP: Did you have a--. Let's work our way quickly around the waterfront, and then you can sort of tell me about what you remember about each of the elevators.

BS: Okay.

NP: So we'll start with Northwest because that's where you were, and then the next one would have been Paterson.

BS: Paterson's, yes.

NP: So what do you remember about there?

BS: There? The superintendent and foreman--. There was only two spouts, and in those days, we were still manually sampling on the deck of the boat, of the vessel, with a scoop and a bucket. I remember you'd go from one spout—there's only one person on the boat—one spout to the next one, back and forth. The rule of thumb was you took--. Like from the scale would release maybe 30 tonnes of grain, 20 tonnes. You'd take three scoops during the beginning of it, and then middle—called drafts—three more scoops the middle of the draft, and then three more at the end. That was all. But the foreman and superintendent, you could see them on the cleaner deck. They would be behind the pillar, and they'd see which spout I was going to, and they'd try to drop some off-grade

grain on the other spout. But I would run over because I'd be watching them. Yeah, yeah. [Laughs] Just to pass the time, but just to get 'em. Yeah, yeah.

[0:25:20]

NP: Then you come to Western Grain.

BS: No. Oh, yeah. It was Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.

NP: It was Western 5.

BS: Yeah, yeah. There, it was quiet there. I sampled there. I was a sampler there. When you're a grain inspector's assistant, you did your whole sampling job, plus you worked on the bench assisting the full inspector level 3. So yeah, Pool 5, I was sampling there.

NP: Now, were there sort of two separate--.

BS: Then next to 5 there was E and F.

[Audio pauses]

NP: There we go. We took another pause, this time for a trial smoke alarm test in the apartment block. So in the interim, we were looking at some postcards and the Friends of Grain Elevators' Facebook group. But we'll keep on with our quick tour around the waterfront, and you were talking about Pool 5, and then you came up to what is now Western Grain By-Products, and that was Elevator F.

BS: Well, there was E and F. Western Grain Products took over all three. Like, they had the original Pool 5, and then they took over the E and F. Actually, they were--. Western Grain took it over from Sask Pool. They were actually Western 5, Sask Wheat Pool 5, and the other one was 11, and I think the other one was 12 they had at the time. Sask Pool had them numbered.

NP: Would have been 10 or 12?

BS: 10. You know what? I just forget now.

NP: They keep changing them, and it's really hard to keep up.

BS: I know. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

NP: So when you think of Elevator E and F, so let's--.

BS: They were set to handle malting barley from the Prairies, and that's all they pretty well handled, just selected malting barley. See, there was one broker from Winnipeg--. Oh, what the heck? The local manager was Cam Perry, and who was the--? Oh, I forget the company he worked for, and that's all they handled was malting barley at both plants. I'm pretty sure it was both plants.

NP: So who would have owned it at the time when they owned all three?

BS: Well, it was K. A. Powell was a company in Winnipeg. K. A. Powell owned it. Yeah. Now, whether they owned the elevators or leased it, but it was their grain that was--. Yeah. And it was used for shipping down to the States for brewing.

NP: So Mr. Mailhot owned it at one time.

BS: After. After.

NP: Not Maurice, but his dad.

BS: No. Okay. But K. A. Powell sold it to Sask Wheat Pool. I think that's how it went. And then Sask Wheat Pool sold it to Mailhot, Gene, and, well, his son runs it now. Yeah, yeah.

NP: Now, we have put in for National Historic Site status for Fort William Elevator F, which is Maurice's elevator.

BS: Okay. Yeah, yeah.

NP: So if you can think back and think about working in there, did they still have the rope drives?

BS: That I don't know. See, I didn't work there too long. Like I was only maybe--. It was never a week at a time, maybe two or three days. I spent most of my time at Intercity and North End, Current River.

NP: Okay, because my dad worked there.

BS: Yeah.

NP: At some point.

BS: And if he was in charge, he would be there for one year. So it went the inspector-in-charge would stay for one year, then they rotate.

NP: And the one, then, which would have been Pool—or not Pool—but Elevator E, probably the oldest elevator on the--.

BS: Yeah. I'm not too familiar with that one either. I was there, but not--. My knowledge of that elevator is very limited, very limited.

NP: Okay. Let's skip across the river and go to Searle.

BS: Searle, yeah. At one time, I spent a lot of time next door at National. That's where I did my sampling and then my assistant inspecting there. Searle Elevator, at one time, they had their own cafeteria. They had a cafeteria there for the employees because they were spending so many hours there, spending more of their time there than at home than any leisure time. Yeah.

[0:30:25]

NP: So where would the cafeteria have been?

BS: That I don't know where it was located. Really, I don't know. All I know is that there was a cafeteria there, and that was owned by Searle Grain then. Yeah. Then Federal bought it, and then Sask Pool bought it from Federal, when Federal I guess they closed shop.

NP: Now, were you paying any attention when they closed down Searle and then opened it up again as Mission Terminal?

BS: I had a little bit. I was still working then when it happened, but we didn't have— Oh, wait a minute. Just put a pause. I'm just trying to remember now. **[Audio pauses]** Oh, sure, sure.

NP: Okay?

BS: Yeah. The fellow that bought it from Sask Pool, he was an ex-employee of Sask Pool. I should say Searle Elevator. He wanted to make wood pellets for the stoves, but something happened. There was an accident there, and it sort of shut down. And then he decided he'd go into the grain business. Then Sask Wheat Pool had it in the clause that the elevator wasn't supposed to be used ever again for handling grain. So I don't--. It went to a lawsuit. It got settled, but then Mission Terminals, which was a subsidiary of—oh, I forget now—they took it over.

NP: Upper Lakes Shipping.

BS: Upper Lakes, yeah. But before that, though--. No, Upper Lakes took it over. There was another, I think, another company in there, then Upper Lakes took it over, and they'd been handling grain. But they have a different--. They're sort of union. They've got a special dispensation from the local union because they pay their employees less money, and they don't pay overtime. The employees take it in time off during the winter. So that's my--. I can't remember if they were operating before I retired or not. They must have been, I guess. I think so. '98 I retired. Yeah. I just--. My mind's a blank on that one.

NP: And we haven't done--. We did one interview with the owner after Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, but he talked mostly about his Saskatchewan Wheat Pool career, and so the second interview is going to be--.

BS: Who was that?

NP: Gary Wiwcharyk.

BS: Oh, Gary. Oh, yeah. Yeah. Gary. Yeah. Quite the man. He's quite--.

NP: Yes, he has his fingers into a lot of pies.

BS: Yes, yes. Well, he had a big white elephant out at Murillo anyway. He built a restaurant out there, and it ended up as a daycare. Now it's closed. Yeah.

NP: Yeah. Well, that happens with entrepreneurs, right?

BS: Yeah, right.

NP: They try some. Some work, some don't.

BS: Yeah, yeah. Well, when Gary was still working for Sask Wheat Pool, any surplus grain that--. The Grian Commission got a sample of every tank car or railroad car that came in, kept it for 30 days in case it needed re-inspection on the unload, and then it's dumped and goes out for bids, for tender, who buys our grain, surplus grain. So Gary Wiwcharyk bought it or got the tender, but then I don't know what happened. He didn't have enough--. He had maybe too much stock to get rid of, so he started complaining that we're giving him dirty grain—had nails in it and everything else, which was BS—but that's the way he got out of his contract. So then the final years, our biggest tender was Wing Chao, a pig farm just out by Murillo out Oliver Road. Yeah, yeah. He hauled it all away.

NP: Since you're talking about that grain that is kept for 30 days, how frequently would there be questions about it?

BS: Oh! [Laughs] You'd maybe get 100-200 inquiries a day. Yeah, yeah. Have it reinspected. So we'd get the samples off the storage shelves. We had a--. Well, before we didn't. It wasn't regulated, the temperature for our storeroom for our samples. Get the sample off the shelf manually. They were all classified at different elevators. Take them out, and then it would be reinspected by a senior grain inspector here. If he concurred with the grade assessed to it at the elevator, a portion of that sample was sent to Winnipeg, and it was reinspected again to see if they agree. And if they didn't, well, they'd change it.

[0:35:42]

And then there was another final step. If the company or the owner of the grain—the farmer maybe—didn't like the Commission's re-inspections, they could go to an appeal tribunal, and it was three individuals. One was a grain inspector with the Grain Commission, and the other two were trade inspectors. But they couldn't look at their company's unload sample. If it belonged to them, it had to be another. And then they made the final decision.

NP: So if it was the company, the person from the private industry then could not be representing--.

BS: His own company, no. No, no. Yeah. Well, there used to be quite a few. Oh, yeah.

NP: So if you had--. And I know it's hard to say--.

BS: But basically, when you get down to it, it was a waste of time. [Laughs] Our inward inspection--. Because all we ended up being—the Grain Commission, the inspection, and even the weighing—was we were a referee between the country grain elevator and the terminal. Same company, but we ended up the referee between the two of them to settle the grade. It was their own grain. It was their own grain! Yeah.

NP: Even if it was coming from the Wheat Board? Couldn't it be stored in other--?

BS: Oh, yeah. Yeah. The Wheat Board, that's a little different. But the Wheat Board never shipped, per se. They just called for--. If we got a ship coming for [No.] 2 Red or something—a grade—they'd call out in the country to get the railroads all lined up to haul all this [No.] 2 Red here to be ready to go. But they had nothing to do with each individual car. That was to do with the companies, yeah.

NP: Right. But they could have got something from, let's say, a Manitoba Pool elevator that eventually ended up in Cargill as--.

BS: Oh, yeah. That was the old pooling days. Yeah, yeah.

NP: So when did the old pooling days end?

BS: That would be--. Oh.

NP: When you were still there?

BS: Yeah. Well, actually, when I was still there it was each company received their own grain. Oops. Oh, yeah. Okay. You caught me. But then after it changed, they pooled everything, which speeded up the unloading. And then they went back to each company gets their own, and that's the way it is right now. Yeah.

NP: So if you had to guess—and I won't hold you to this—you said you might have a couple of hundred a week.

BS: No, a day.

NP: A day?

BS: A day, yeah. When we were busy, yeah.

NP: So what percentage of those would have been found to be mis-graded?

BS: Oh.

NP: Like are we looking at 25 percent, 2 percent?

BS: Oh, no, no. Maybe 5 percent. I'm just guessing. I was never aware of a study taken just to see. Yeah, yeah. It wasn't that high. See I'm still protecting the Grain Commission, eh? [Laughing] In inspection.

NP: Okay. So National or currently Superior—and in between called Cargill—what do you remember about that plant?

BS: Yeah. Oh, it was very large. Like, when I first went in there as a sampler, it was like five receivers. Oh, to me it was gigantic because you have to go out in the car shed and see which hoppers the grain was being elevated on and make sure you didn't get a mix on your samples. If you did, you'd have to go--. Like in those days, it was just boxcars, so you'd go to get a sweeping of the grain left in there to make sure your sample compares to it. Oh, I made some mistakes. Yeah. Then another one, the worst scenario is some of the country elevators, they might have some off-grade grain. They'd put it in one end of the boxcar and then cover it with a big canvas, and most of the time they'd let you know, "Brake-end or no-brake-end, there's a canvas." But sometimes they didn't. Then you got the garbage grain getting intermixed with the better stuff, and that degraded the whole car.

[0:40:13]

NP: And what did they intend to happen there? Like how--.

BS: Just to get it rid of it out of their plant out in the country. But a majority of them, we were notified that there was undercover--. Just to clean the elevator out to make more room because he might have maybe 10 tonnes or 20 tonnes of junk, and it's tying up a bin that can maybe hold 50 tonnes or 100 tonnes. Well, a tanker is, what, 90 tonnes, I think? Yeah, yeah.

NP: So what did you call it when they had a car that was--?

BS: Under canvas. Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

NP: Yeah. When the car came in, and it would have been divided into these two different grades, what was the technical name for that shipment? A brake or something?

BS: Yeah. A brake-end of the boxcar?

NP: Brake-end?

BS: The brake-end. Yeah. The brake-end. Am I talking too fast?

NP: No, no. I'm just--.

BS: Okay. Yeah. Brake-end to identify where it was located in the boxcar. Yeah. The rest was we called it main part or bulk.

NP: So excuse my--.

BS: But some of them would have the main and then two under canvas at both ends too. Yeah, yeah. You'd have to get a sample of that.

NP: And in that instance then, the brake, you're actually referring to the boxcar brakes end?

BS: The brakes, that's right. Yeah, yeah. Okay.

NP: Good. See this is terminology that gets lost, right?

BS: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

NP: What happened to the canvas?

BS: Most of the time it was just jute, and the elevator would keep it. No, they wouldn't send it back. We used to have a problem. [Laughs] There's another story I could tell you. Some of the boxcars were lined. Most of them were cardboard. I think it's steel core it's called with ribbons through it to hold the cardboard, but some of them were nice wood. We had one of our inspectors—he was a carpenter—go at night down to the elevator, or even during the day, and was stripping the wood out of the car, nice plywood. It was beautiful plywood. Yeah. Then the railroad would raise some hell when they got the cars out of the elevator. So we found

out it was one of our guys, yeah. And the guy it was, you wouldn't even think. [Laughs] Should I say his name to you? No. Okay. Don't bother. He'd be the last guy you would think would do it. Yeah, yeah.

NP: Now, I had the understanding that over the years—especially with the wooden boxcar doors—that a lot of people were using boxcar door lumber for various projects.

BS: Various houses, yeah. Those houses down by where the seaplane base is, that's what they were all built of, those boxcar doors. Mostly just the doors, yeah. The slabs. Then, let's see. Nope. That's it. I can't--.

NP: Anything else about National?

BS: [Laughs] Rat infested. Oh, yeah. You'd open--.

NP: Weren't they all?

BS: Yeah, they were all, but Cargill seemed to be where disposal--. We were up quite high and about a 10-foot drop where our office was located. People from the elevator would go in and bag the grain that we disposed of. Well, they'd go in there. We'd come in especially in the spring when it starts to melt, there was holes, rats, all over the place outside. Never mind inside, they were outside. So I brought a pellet gun to work one day. The spring wasn't very strong on the gun, so I'd shoot it at a rat, and all it did was roll over and just keep going. [Laughs] Yeah. Oh, yeah. You never knew once you--. Any of the elevators, you open a drawer, if there's a hole, if it's infested or--. Yeah. Just, yeah.

NP: Did that improve over time?

BS: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. The elevators brought in pest control people. Yeah. So when I left, the elevators were really infestation free, yeah, for pretty well--. Considering they've got a lot of wet grain draws a lot of animals, but no, they had a lot of control. They had sites all over the terminals and the different floors—distributing—and they had traps there for mice.

[0:45:10]

NP: Wildlife. You mentioned rats. What other kinds of animals would you find?

BS: Well, the last--. Well, just before I left, the racoons. We never had racoons here, but I think it's coming up. They seem to get a ride on a transport truck from eastern Ontario or something, and they come up. But no, that was not too many of them. It was just rats. And well, you get your seagulls and your pigeons. Excreta. Lots of excreta. [Laughs] Yeah, that's about the only--. There's no wild dogs.

NP: Deer?

BS: Oh, deer, yeah. Deer at Intercity and out at Chippewa there. Cargill, there's always deer. Yeah. But yeah, there was a herd down at Intercity here one time by McCabe's. You know where the McCabe's Elevator is? Yeah, there was a big herd in there. No, that's all I can--.

NP: So then we can hop across to Westland D, and it was still operating when you were--?

BS: Yeah, it was there. That was a hole. That was a hole. [Laughs] Long way down into the basement to get your sample. Oh! The office, oh God! That was rat infested. As you're creating a sample, a rat could be beside you looking at you. Oh, I still remember that. [Laughs] God, yeah. The employees there for the company were, how do I say, quite a thirsty crew. Quite a thirsty crew. Yeah.

NP: So it varied from elevator to elevator?

BS: Yeah, it depends on the company, and it depends on the superintendent of the elevator, yeah, how much. Hey, well, they all came from the same breed, World War II, and that's just the way they drank.

NP: But did your generation join in as part of being part of the--?

BS: Oh, yeah. Well, I'd join in because I was a young punk, eh? Got to do what you're told. I used to have to get off work because I had a car. I'd get off work early to drive this one guy to the Legion. He'd say, "I'm going now. Let's go." That's it. The other guys are stuck at the elevator. Yeah, yeah. I feel bad, but yeah, "Let's go." I take him to the Legion, either drop him off, or he'd make me go in and have a beer with him. Yeah.

NP: My husband, who worked for the city in the assessment department as one of his jobs before he went on and finished his university degree, that was his task too was to take the assessor, drop him off at the Legion or the bar somewhere.

BS: The Legion, yeah, yeah.

NP: So it wasn't just the elevators.

BS: Oh, no. No.

NP: I've often wondered about it because you've mentioned it, and it comes up in anybody's interview that's familiar with the elevators that drinking was a real issue. I've wondered how much of it goes back to what you said earlier about how to cope with the war experience.

BS: Yeah, yeah. Because we've had--. Like there was one fellow there, actually, after the Army--. Like he was in the Army. He was machine gunned, but he was in such good physical health that he lived. He should have died. He should have because there were chunks taken out. Well, your dad knew him pretty good too. [*edited out of transcript. NP*]. He came from the war and became a city cop. I think he got too physical, that's the type of person he was, so he ended up with the Grain Commission. But just the way they--. Just carefree life, eh?

NP: Just glad to be alive, I would think.

BS: Yeah, yeah.

NP: In a sense. Now, it would have been over the time you were there—just to finish off the drinking part—that things really changed, and the drinking--.

BS: Yeah, yeah. It really come in.

NP: So what happened, in your mind? What brought about that change?

BS: Well, I know at Pool 7—that's the big elevator, 7A—I know there's a fellow that got off shift at 8:00 in the morning—He was working midnights—Got off shift and fell in the slip and drowned, and he was intoxicated. Then the Department of Labour come in, and laid the law down. Yeah. Because some of the superintendents, they had to go to the Smith Clinic too, but they straightened. It just evolved over time. That was it. Yeah, yeah.

[0:50:18]

NP: And what was the impact on those who worked in elevators with that change? Was it a highly positive change?

BS: Yeah, it was because grain trimmers were bad too, like never mind the elevator guys. The grain trimmers were really--. They were the real--. [Laughs] Well, they were more visible. In the elevator, you could hide, but out there--. Yeah. So it was a good change. It was a real positive change. Then there was the grain trimmers themselves. I know there was a change in management. My wife's grandfather was a grain trimmer, and they had a new president put in, and he sort of just--. He was, "Let's straighten up," and that's it. A lot of people were getting suspensions and sent to dry out to the clinics.

NP: What was the family name of your wife's grandfather?

BS: Chisamore.

NP: Chisamore, okay.

BS: Yeah, yeah. Then there was McKinnon, that's a cousin.

NP: Okay. Yeah, that's a tight-knit group.

BS: Yeah, yeah. They are, yeah.

NP: Someone had said--. I had gotten a phone call after this project started. There was an article in the newspaper about our project, and I got a phone call in Winnipeg, where I was living at the time, and it was somebody who was from a grain-trimming family. I can't recall if they introduced themselves, who they were, but they were talking about, "Oh, yes. We've got some pictures of our grandfather with Al Capone."

BS: With Al Capone?

NP: Yeah. Any of that--.

BS: And they were in Winnipeg?

NP: No. Here in Thunder Bay.

BS: Here?

NP: No stories like that make their way from your wife's grandfather's side? [Laughs]

BS: No, I've never heard that one. I'll have to ask. Yeah. I'll have to ask with the family. With Al Capone?

NP: I think it was Al Capone, but I could be wrong.

BS: Huh!

NP: Who else would have been in bootlegging? I think he was sort of the big guy, eh?

BS: Well, they said—this was well before my time—the old Mariaggi Hotel there, there was supposed to have been a tunnel underneath the tracks there, and they would bring in non-taxed liquor. [Laughs] Yeah. Well, maybe he could have been tied in there too. It could have been his liquor. Who knows! Yeah, yeah.

NP: Oh, Thunder Bay. Hundreds of stories yet to be told! [Laughing]

BS: Stories, yeah. To be told.

NP: We're doing our part. Did you play hockey?

BS: Yeah, yes.

NP: Okay. So tell me about the hockey leagues, since we're on themes here.

BS: Well, I started--. I think at the time the Elks was the only organized group that sponsored hockey, like Peewee.

NP: Did you play for the grain elevator teams?

BS: Oh, yeah. I played, yeah.

NP: Okay. So tell me about the grain elevator league.

BS: Oh, yeah. Those were--. Go get free ice time at midnight. Or not free ice time, cheaper ice time at midnight. Your gear has been sitting in a car and it's 20 below. You had to put that on. Yeah, yeah. There were four grain companies that had the hockey teams. There was Sask Wheat Pool 7, Manitoba Pool 1—that's who I played for—and United Grain Growers and who? Okay. Manitoba Pool, 7A, United Grain Growers, oh, and Sask Pool 4. Yeah. There was four teams, yeah. We had a league. We had a president of the league. He was the cleaner-deck foreman at Pool 4, and we had--.

NP: Is he still around?

BS: No, he passed away. Einar Olson. Yeah, yeah. I think, yeah, he's gone. Oh, there's still quite a few of the hockey players still around.

NP: Yeah. So did you play with Brian Mallon then?

BS: Brian and Billy, yeah, and their younger brother Patty. Patty only worked in the elevators, I think, during the summer. Yeah, yeah.

NP: How would you describe the league?

BS: Rough. Yeah. It was rough. Yeah, yeah. It was rough. It wasn't chopping, but it was, yeah, it was--.

NP: And I understand they hired people. [Laughs]

BS: To play hockey?

NP: Well, sort of.

BS: Well, no, I never knew that.

NP: Tom Hamilton said, yeah, he was a good hockey player, so he was on the summer staff pretty quickly.

BS: He might have been after me because I know Tom Hamilton to see him, but to talk to him, no. So he must have been after I quit, after my time.

NP: Well, Brian said—Brian Mallon said—that he quit because--.

BS: It was getting too rough? Yeah, yeah.

[0:55:03]

NP: So you can agree with that?

BS: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Well, there was one fellow, he just passed away. He played in the American hockey league, and he ended up working at Manitoba Pool 3. I think he did a little stint in the pros too. But he was playing. We finally had to tell him, “Don’t come out anymore,” because he was playing as if he was still in the NHL or the American--. Like rough. Oh! But then it got worse, yeah.

NP: What eventually happened to the--?

BS: I don’t even know. I don’t think there’s a league now with the elevators all closing and less employees. So it just folded. Yeah.

NP: Did you ever play on the ice in the slips?

BS: No, no. No. [Laughs] No, we were spoiled. We had indoors. Yeah. But at midnight or 10:00.

NP: Would anybody have taken any pictures? Like we did have one posted on the website, but just one, so.

BS: Yeah. Of the team, but not of the actual on the ice. Like a team picture, that’s about it.

NP: Yeah. Who would be the keeper of those do you think?

BS: Oh, Brian or Billy. Brian and Billy should have some. I’m just wondering. Bill Giertuga, he ended up as a guard at the district jail. That’s his son is the alderman, but he worked, I think, at Manitoba Pool before he went to the jail. He might have some

pictures because he is the longest playing in the elevator hockey league from the Manitoba Pool team. He was the longest time playing.

NP: How long did he work for the grain industry?

BS: That I can't remember.

NP: Like years or--?

BS: No, not that many years. No. No. Because I only played for maybe 10 years if that. If that.

NP: Okay. We now move down to Ogilvie Elevator.

BS: Yeah, Pool 8.

NP: Pool 8. So what can you tell us about Pool 8?

BS: Oh, that was--. [Laughs] That's like working in the Garden of Eden there. Well, even the old office, then they built a new office, eh? Just one receiver. They unloaded maybe 20 cars a day. You had lots of time in between, so you never worked hard. The only time you worked hard was when you went on the boat and there was two spouts. Just walk back and forth to catch a sample. It was nice working there. Beautiful. You slip across the railroad tracks—you're not supposed to—and go to A & P. It was still there on Syndicate. So on a hot day in July, you'd go over and get a brick of ice cream. It was good. It was a good place.

NP: Now, if only they'd still had their gardener on.

BS: No, that was the old Ogilvie's, yeah. I'm talking the Pool 8, yeah, Sask Pool.

NP: Yeah.

BS: Ogilvie's had--. I can't remember.

NP: They had the mill there too. That was the part that burnt down.

BS: Yeah, yeah. See, I don't know if they had inspection there. I know in '63, I went there, and there was an older gentleman named Archie Bain. He was the inspector there. No, he wasn't. He was at Westland D. It was another guy. Alfred Attridge. Yeah. He was the inspector.

NP: Hattridge?

BS: Attridge. A-T-T--. Yeah. He was from Port Arthur. So when you were a bad boy, they'll send you the farthest away, yeah, to work from home for you to travel. Yeah. [Laughs] So he lived, I think, over around Orton Street or somewhere, so they'd make him go to Pool 8 and work every--. Because he was--.

NP: Now, we interviewed a John Attridge.

BS: Okay. That would be his son.

NP: Whose family lived right near P&H [Parrish & Heimbecker] initially.

BS: Oh, initially? Okay, yeah.

NP: Yeah. So that is probably--.

BS: So that would be his son. Yeah, that's Alf's son.

NP: Now, I'm sure all of the other elevators would have been gone. Remember the ones I was pointing out to you that showed these ones?

BS: Yeah.

NP: They would have been all gone by the time you got here?

BS: Yeah, yeah. I just--. Well, let's see now.

NP: Because one was at the base of Victoria Avenue.

BS: Yeah, yeah. They were gone. Okay. No, they weren't there. There's Mount McKay there.

NP: Yeah. Did anybody ever—like the older guys that would have been there when you started—did any of them ever tell stories of what it was like back in the olden days working in the elevators?

BS: Oh. Yeah, but I don't know. I was at the age that I didn't pay attention. It's like, "You've got to work for your pension." "What's a pension?" when I started. "What are you talking about, pension?" No, the inspector-in-charge here—what the heck was his name—he was actually a butler in England. Like he worked in housekeeping for a family, and he immigrated out here. He was one mean SOB, they say. This is what I heard, yeah. What the heck was his--? **[Audio pauses]** Yeah. He was weighing staff. *[Name edited out of transcript. NP]*. Yeah.

[1:00:35]

NP: Yeah. I think you've already mentioned Empire Elevator, so unless there's something else you'd like to mention about there--?

BS: No.

NP: Because it would have been just gone about--.

BS: Yeah. I was there, and then all of a sudden, it was gone. Like I can't remember if that was in '63 I was there or '64. I can't remember.

NP: P&H?

BS: P&H, yeah. There's another nice little--. Like Pool 8, but the same amount of cars coming in, about 20 a day. One receiver. There's nothing spectacular there. None of them really. The only one is Pool 1, the two Mallons. I first went there, and at Pool 1 you went to the distributing floor to catch samples manually that was being loaded on the ship. You didn't go out into the annex and catch it off the belt. You caught it right there. So I went up to the scale floor. There was a manlift there, Humphrey, go up the scale floor. You get some information, what holds they're going into, then I took the fireman's pole down. Slid down. Then I look. Here was the same Mallon that I just saw upstairs. I go, "What?" Here I didn't know they were twins. That's the first time that happened. Yeah, yeah.

NP: You thought you were going the fastest way down.

BS: Oh, yeah! Yeah. *[Laughing]* And here it was--. I don't know which one was up. Brian and Billy were there. Yeah, yeah.

NP: The fireman's pole sounds like a pretty dangerous thing because you're coming down how many feet?

BS: Not that many. Between floors. Maybe, I'll guess, maybe 20 feet. It wasn't that far, no. It was more dangerous driving a little Humphrey because it was just little handholds to hang onto and a little belt. It was more dangerous on that than the fireman's pole.

NP: Are any of those still around?

BS: You know what? I haven't been inside for years.

NP: But when you left in '98--?

BS: Well, that's what I meant. Even then, I wasn't really inside. Yeah. Yeah, I think they were still there. I think. I don't know if the Department of Labour made them get rid of them. I don't know. I never thought about it. No, never thought about it.

NP: Maybe this is a good time to just throw in the issue of safety then. As an inspector or sampler or weigh person, was it an unsafe place to work? Were there injuries?

BS: Yes, there was. Old Manitoba Pool 9, it's destroyed now. Next to Grain Growers, there's a pellet mill there. Grain Growers built a pellet mill. There was a fellow from there. He was working at--. No, it didn't happen at Pool 9. I think he's an older assistant inspector. He never applied to go any further, or I don't know if he had the knowledge to go. He had a nickname, but he was like an old lady. We used to call him Mutha. This is when we had hardhats. They introduced hardhats. He was on a vessel at Richardson's, and he was leaning against you know the cables they've got for the safety, for the railing? He's leaning against that, and it wasn't tight, the turnbuckle. He didn't die there. He died in hospital. He fell right off on the dock. Bill Haight is his name. Yeah. That was--. Then after that, you know, with any boat that came in, they were all checking their turnbuckles to make sure they were tight.

NP: How do you--.

BS: And then we had other--. [Laughs] Then we had another directive come out. When you have a hardhat on, make sure you've got the strap on. Yeah, yeah. Poor bugger. He was about 60 then when he fell.

NP: How do you spell Haight?

BS: Okay. I don't know if he's H-A-I-G-H-T. His brother Percy was superintendent of Manitoba Pool 3. Yeah. But he worked for the Grain Commission, Bill. Yeah, yeah. I still remember that.

[1:05:09]

NP: Any--. Sorry?

BS: Sorry, go ahead.

NP: Any injuries or illnesses that were more likely to happen to people working for the Grain Commission? Like I'm thinking some people have repetitive stress injuries. So like if you're--.

BS: Oh, yeah. Right. But no. I was involved in a survey with Health Canada, the dust levels in the government offices. There was no effect. According to them, there was no effect, and it was quite a study. We wore a breathing apparatus just as you're mixing your grain up and doing this and that. There was nothing. Yeah. I was at Pool 7 too and that was the busiest elevator. A lot of grain coming through there. In those days, did we have--? It was still physically carrying the samples in. Or did we have transporters then?

NP: What were transporters?

BS: Transporters, it's hooked--. It is tubes run by motors hooked up to each receiver where the sample would dump in the bucket to be carried in manually. Now it was delivered directly to the office, yeah, transporters. That cut a lot of manpower.

NP: Did you like the transporter system versus the manual delivery?

BS: Well, to me, you get the sample a lot faster. [Laughs] Some guy out there decides to stop and have a union meeting or something, you know--. [Laughs] It was quite unique. Yeah. It saved a lot of time. Then they introduced it into the shipping too. They put in samplers, and that's delivered right from the scale and right into our office. So actually, you could see the grain as it's going on the ship. By the time the grain got on the ship and the guy got a sample, well you'd sample maybe every—how did we work it?—every 500 tonnes you send a sample in. By that time, there could be more off-grade grain on the ship. With the automatics, you could just open them up and have a look, see what's going on immediately. That saved a lot of heartaches, a lot of miss--.

NP: How much pressure was there in that job? If you think as you became more proficient at it, that's one thing, but when you were first starting, and especially if you were working at a busy place, was there any sort of pressure?

BS: Yes, to get the samples done. To keep up, that's the pressure. Yeah. Just to keep up.

NP: So would the automatic samplers have made that even worse then?

BS: No, no.

NP: No?

BS: Because the grain was still unloaded the same way, it's just the sample was delivered to you faster. So we'd leave maybe 3:00, get close to quitting time, maybe leave 3:00 or 4:00 and do them first thing in the morning when you come in 10 to 8:00 or whatever. Yeah. To keep up, yeah. Now that's all gone now. Yeah. Now it's all private.

NP: Do you have any comments on that?

BS: Well, like I mentioned earlier, all we were between the country division and the terminal division were referees for the grain companies anyway. We could have done away with that segment quite a while--. Yeah.

NP: And it was up for termination long before it actually happened.

BS: Yeah, if it wanted to. If they--. Yeah, I don't know what, because it was always instilled that we were there for the farmer. Well, 90 percent of the grain that came here, the farmer had sold it out in the country. He didn't have any--. He had sold it. It was out of his hands. It belonged to the company now.

NP: Producer cars would have been a different story.

BS: Producer cars, a little different, yeah. Yeah. Producer cars, well, I forget what--. The percentage wasn't that large, and now I see the producer car people are crying that they're not getting enough service from the railroads. Yeah. That's the luck of the draw, I guess. I really don't know.

NP: Mmhmm. Where did you hear that?

BS: I read the *Western Producer*.

NP: Online?

BS: No, no. I get it from Bill Green. He subscribed to it.

NP: Oh. Can you save them, pass them onto me?

BS: Well, I'll have to check with this other guy, okay? He wants them too! [Laughing]

NP: Okay. Because I used to get them from the Grain Commission.

BS: Is that right, eh? Yeah.

NP: Yeah. I've actually talked to the editor of the paper because he has his finger on the pulse of--. Well, the publisher actually.

[1:10:24]

BS: Yeah, yeah. There's a *Grain Line* one that Billy Green sends me all the time. Bill Green sends me. I forget who puts the report out. He's nonpolitical. He gives a shot--.

NP: Yeah. Like that would be really great to even post some of those things on the Facebook site.

BS: Yeah, yeah. It covers everything—beef, cattle. Yeah.

NP: Yeah. Just pull out the grain ones. Yeah.

BS: Yeah.

NP: Anything else about the change over to the private inspection services?

BS: Well, it hasn't been a complete changeover. Any grain that is shipped out of Canada for export, the Grain Commission still inspects it, but they've changed their policy. This is my thing now, okay? At one time, when you loaded a vessel, the grain had to be uniform. Like uniformity in moisture, protein, foreign material content. The elevators always wanted--. That's how the certificate final was issued, on that. Now they've changed it. There could be highs and lows in the loading, but the Grain Commission now says it's based on the composite loading, the final. So you could have some real high and low areas, and if it's one buyer, that's fine. But if it was some poor guy in China or something, he's only getting a small portion of it, and he gets the junk, well, there's going to be--. That was the main reason to keep it uniform. Yeah.

NP: Now, there have been some comments that I've heard, again, from people I've talked to in Winnipeg mostly that there have been some customer concerns about quality.

BS: Yeah. Well, there's only one that made it to the *Western Producer*, but the guy's an ex-Wheat Board employee. He's working for another outfit over in--. I don't know if he's based out of Hong Kong. I forget the guy's name. He was raising hell about--. But he could be right on uniformity. He could be. I don't know.

NP: Time will tell.

BS: Yeah. Well, my chum, you know Murdoch McKay? Okay. Yeah. Well, he's a commissioner. All right. He's done a 360 degree turn because he was a private company, Grain Growers, and he hated the Grain Commission. Now, he's got to stick up for it. We bug him quite a bit about that. [Laughs] Yeah, yeah. So I've asked him--. We just had lunch. He was in town here over Christmas, and I had lunch with him, and I asked him about quality control. He just mentioned this ex-Wheat Board employee, but he didn't mention any other comments, yeah.

NP: So you noticed a change in Murdoch's comments about--?

BS: Oh, yeah. That's the 360-degree turn. Yeah, yeah. But one thing in that position, at least he knows grain because that's a political appointment, those commissioners. They could be farmers, but they don't know both sides—the government side and the private sector. So Murdoch, he brought expertise there. Yeah.

NP: I'm waiting for my second interview with Murdoch, so let me know the next time he's coming into town.

BS: Oh, jeez. Oh, God. He's a hard man to get a hold of. Yeah, yeah. For nine months, I was chief inspector for Canada, I was acting in Winnipeg. What year was it? '94? No, I forget now.

NP: Tell us about that experience and what you learned.

BS: That was a real political experience, boy. You have to have a thick skin. You'd be sitting in the office, and some farmer, he's on his combine. He phones you and wants to know what variety of canola is larger, Polish or--. I forget the other type. Yeah. You know? He's sitting on his combine, and he wants to know. [Laughs] It was quite an experience. You had to watch what you said if you got some customers because I was on quite a few of those--. It's called CIGI [Canadian International Grains Institute]. Okay, I was on quite a few of their courses, eh? I got in trouble a couple times because I said the truth. Okay.

[1:15:05]

NP: So what would be an example of something where you'd speak the truth where it would be--?

BS: Okay. The Wheat Board would tell a customer, say, in China or Japan, "If you buy out of Prince Rupert--." No. Protein level. "You can't get this kind of protein level out of Prince Rupert to your destination." Meanwhile, they're giving the protein level out of here. They're segregating it here to go somewhere else. So they would be telling the customer, "You can't get it." So I don't know. There's reasons behind it, but I didn't know. I went and told him, and I had a little talk to. [Laughs] I said, "I can't talk the truth. I'll have to lie now like the rest of you guys." [Laughs] Yeah. Yeah.

NP: Yeah. I guess it might have had something to do with that's just one plant in Prince Rupert, right?

BS: Yeah, availability. Availability.

NP: And here we had several to--.

BS: Yeah. It's an extra segregation. Yeah.

NP: While we're talking about that, because one of the things I wondered was you mentioned about the pooling before, and my understanding when the Lake Shippers were still--.

BS: Yeah, but--.

NP: The Ports Clearance Association was still operating on the waterfront here, that if you were trying to load, let's say, a high protein ship and one elevator didn't have it--.

BS: They'd go--.

NP: They'd just go someplace else and get it.

BS: Yeah. But that's because the Wheat Board owned it. Yeah.

NP: Right. Now that the Wheat Board doesn't own it, could you see that we would be in a Prince Rupert situation because--.

BS: Oh, they are now. That's why those ships are waiting out there. You know all summer, ships waiting because they go in for one load. They make one stop. One berth, and that would be for, say, Pioneer, Richardson's. They'd have the whole ship. They'd load it. Same with Sask Pool, or what are they? Viterra.

NP: So why were they sitting there?

BS: Because all the grain wasn't in the elevator yet, or it hadn't been cleaned or whatever. Yeah. It wasn't here. They don't--. There might be the odd time where they go from one company to the other company, but it's not like the other. Yeah. Yeah.

NP: Cooperation isn't possible because now it's not just the farmer's grain, it's Richardson's grain, or--.

BS: Yeah. Viterra and Cargill, P&H. That's--.

NP: I must say, looking out my window, I have much more entertainment. *[Note: NP's apartment overlooks Thunder Bay Harbour.]*

BS: Oh, yeah. Right. Yeah. But otherwise, if it was the Wheat Board grain, those boats were in and out. They'd move them maybe to six berths just to get a load, like when there were enough elevators to do it. Yeah. Get them out.

NP: Speaking of that, then, what would be the change in inspection? Because if they went from elevator to elevator rather than just loading at one, it must have made more work for inspectors.

BS: Well, not--. We have a full office complement in each elevator. They stayed there. When I first started, we used to have these flying squads. I think there was--. How many was there, ten? They decided you would follow a ship. Say it started at Paterson's. You'd follow that ship until it finished. So you would go into somebody else's, like to load a boat, another inspection office, but that caused a lot of heartache because you had the fellow in charge of that elevator. You're loading his grain, but you're doing the inspecting, not him. So there was a lot of heartache. Well, it's to do with overtime too because I was on one of those flying squads. You'd travel right across the harbour.

NP: So it was an attempt to make it more efficient?

BS: Yeah, that's what it was. But it ended up that it was done away with because you'd have to hire more people. Then if you weren't doing anything, you're supposed to go to an elevator to help. Well, some of them would disappear. [Laughs] Go sit around Boulevard or somewhere and wait for their next call. Yeah.

NP: Were you around then for the merging of the weigh staff and the inspection staff?

BS: Yeah. That's why I was retired.

NP: How did that go in your mind?

BS: [Laughs] Not very well.

NP: And what was the reason behind it, and what--?

BS: Well, their reason was to cut down manpower, make it all like one unit. But you couldn't. The Commission went about it backwards. They went from the top down. They should have started at the bottom. You know, get the people cross-training. It was cross-training. But the only thing what they found out was if a weighman isn't busy, an inspector isn't busy. And it was opposite. If the weighman was busy weighing grain, the inspector was busy inspecting it. So it didn't--. But they have a lot of--. Like right now, they're cross-training now. They're doing multiple tasks. But no, it was screwed up. [Laughs]

[1:20:40]

NP: Well, someone also made the comment that--.

BS: I didn't fit in. That's why I got retired.

NP: You didn't fit in?

BS: No, no. I didn't go for this because it was getting to the time where we would hold hands and say, "What should we do today?" instead of getting to work and doing it. This is to do with the multitasking, and I just didn't agree with it. I was close to retiring. I had nine months to go for my full 35, so they got rid--. Plus, they eliminated my position. No, they didn't then, but a couple of years later they did.

NP: Yeah. And I understood that, over time, because they reduced the staff so much, you were maybe in one group, but then there was another group went. Bob Ekholm, did you know Bob?

BS: Yeah, yeah. He's after.

NP: He didn't go at the same time as you. He went after.

BS: I don't know if he went after me or right around the same time. Yeah. They were cutting back.

NP: And then, of course, there was the big--.

BS: Yeah, Bob Ekholm, he didn't have that many years in the job. No.

NP: And then there was this last two or three years.

BS: Turn that off please. [Laughs]

[Audio pauses]

NP: Finish off with the elevators because we're getting our stories as we go from elevator to elevator. We stopped at P&H.

BS: Yeah, but they're not interesting. [Laughs]

NP: And now we're at McCabe's.

BS: McCabe's? Yeah.

NP: No, it was actually Pool--.

BS: Pool 1.

NP: Pool 1.

BS: Yeah. That was a fairly new office when I started. It was well looked after. But Manitoba Pool, [laughs] they were--. The grain elevators must have made money 40 years ago because overstaffed. Oh! They used to have three crews—one working, one going, and one coming. That's what we used to say about Manitoba Pool, like, as Commission employees. There were just so many.

NP: Well, and that was before the switch to the West Coast customers.

BS: That's right. Yeah, yeah.

NP: So they were really busy.

BS: Really--. Yeah, yeah.

NP: And then there was the holdover as they downsized, as the business downsized.

BS: Downsized. Yeah, yeah. And Manitoba Pool, it was a nice elevator. It was nice to sample a boat there. It was good. Yeah, yeah.

NP: How much difference did an elevator manager or superintendent make to the life of an inspector?

BS: Superintendent. Pretty good. Some of them their always want to take you out and buy you a beer if you can look the other way. There was always that offer. Oh, yeah. That was there because quite a few of them were on bonuses, eh, what the company made. But never--. Because it would come back and haunt you anyway if you ever did that. It would come back. That was all terminals.

NP: You had to sign.

BS: Eh?

NP: You had to sign.

BS: Yeah. The certificate final, yeah.

NP: Keep everybody honest.

BS: That's right. Because I remember we had an inquiry. I was at Pool 7. A couple of people from Washington came up. That's when they were shipping grain, the United States were shipping grain out of New Orleans.

NP: Out of where?

BS: New Orleans.

NP: Okay.

BS: Customers were finding rocks. Like it wasn't grain, it was rock they were putting in there. There were kickbacks, they were saying, to their Department of Agriculture inspectors. So I remember one guy, they were observing us at the Pool 7. They asked me, "How about look the other way?" We said, "If we do, it will come back and haunt us. We'll be in trouble." So they--. Yeah. I still remember that. It was about two or three of them came up just to check out our system.

NP: How long ago would that have been? Can you fit it into your career somewhere?

BS: I would say in the '80s, I think.

NP: Okay.

BS: I think it was the '80s. I'm just guessing. I was at Pool 7 for two years in a row. Just think--. Late '70s, early '80s. I just--. Yeah.

NP: So let's lump all of the rest together. So we have McCabe's, Saskatchewan A and B--.

BS: Well, I've got Thunder Bay.

NP: Oh, Thunder Bay, was it still there?

BS: That was another P&H and Pool 8. There was one receiver, and it was nice, especially on an overtime day. You could take your time. You could go out and get a little suntan. Yeah.

[1:25:30]

NP: Beautiful location.

BS: Yeah, it is. It was. Pool 7 was the big one. That's the busy one. Pool 7 in the springtime, you'd have to walk the tunnels. That's a long walk because the ice off the bins was falling on the dock. It would melt, and some guy, he got hit in the head. He got cut. Oh, yeah. Like the eaves, they didn't have actual eavestroughs on top of the bins, eh? I remember that, eh.

NP: So you'd have to go in--.

BS: You'd got to walk the belts, and you're bent over. Oh, and it's one hell of a long walk up there. Yeah.

NP: Made for short people.

BS: That's right, yeah. [Laughs] Next door was 7B. That was originally a Federal elevator called Stewart's. One of our guys was the foreman there. He used to be with the Grain Commission, and he wasn't proceeding through the ranks, so they hired him as an inspector, and they made him a foreman.

NP: And who is that?

BS: Gino--. Or not Gino. Al Fassina. I think he's in Bethammi. He's really in bad shape. Yeah. He was hit by a car. Some Americans down by Green Bay, they had been drinking, wrong side of the road, hit him dead on. He was never right after that. He had a little bit of brain damage and other physical--.

NP: And you didn't have anything to do with Canada Malting, I understand?

BS: Yeah, oh yeah.

NP: Oh, did you?

BS: Yeah.

NP: So what about--. That was the Bawlf.

BS: That was the Bawlf?

NP: Yeah.

BS: Oh, okay. That's the one. Canada Malt, yeah.

NP: And what about work there?

BS: Well, it was straight malting barley. That's all they took in. Yeah, it was nothing really significant there. And then next door was Manitoba Pool 3. I didn't spend much time at Manitoba Pool 3. I can't remember. I just never ended up there that often.

NP: The only thing different about it would have been those great big bins at the back.

BS: Oh, the round bins, which they're gone now. Yeah. They had, at one time, they had trucks coming from Manitoba would unload, it was basically flax, at the end almost on the street there, and then they would run it all the way in through those tanks, the bins, the belts there. They'd run it into the elevator to the receivers.

NP: Pool--.

BS: 6?

NP: No. Actually, before that.

BS: That's it. No? Pool 3?

NP: No. Pool 3, then there was the little guy.

BS: No, which way?

NP: Oh, Pool 6, what am I saying?

BS: Yeah, Pool 6. Yeah.

NP: They exploded it, and it's not even there anymore, right?

BS: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Okay. What about Pool 6?

BS: Oh, Pool 6. It was a busy place.

NP: It was old. It was old.

BS: That new office they got there--. Yeah, it was old. I was never in the actual plant. I was just in the office.

NP: Which was new.

BS: Yeah. Well, the new part. I was never in the old office. I just, I am trying to remember. No, no. It was the new office. Yeah.

NP: Pool 2?

BS: Oh, yeah. I was in the old office. That's right too because we used to leave--. We finished work either on a Friday or a Saturday, and we'd spread out that dust bane. You ever heard of dust bane? That green--. Yeah. Because we had wood floors, so it would soak it up over the weekend and clean it up on Monday morning. Yeah, I remember that. [Laughs] Dust bane, yeah.

NP: Pool 2.

BS: Pool 2. Yeah. A couple times there, not for any length of time. That was another slow, nice, easy place.

NP: And then Richardson's,

BS: Richardson's, that was very busy. They were quite busy. Two receivers, but they were busy. I manually sampled there maybe in the flying squad. They had an office suite there, like a suite. The manager used to live there at one time. That was there. I was there when they were pouring the new bins there. Yeah, I worked there quite a bit. I was there for one year. One or two years I worked there.

[1:30:02]

NP: Now, Saskatchewan Pool 4A and B, that was where the big explosions were. Did you ever hear stories of that?

BS: No, that was after my--.

NP: Yeah. Long after.

BS: Well, I knew a couple of guys who were in there because you could still see their scarring. That was Desi Stiles. He was a foreman at Sask Pool 7A. And another one. Oh, I forget his name. Part of his ear was torn. Ah. That lawyer. Passed away. Italian. Petroni. His brother. He was

Alf. I think his name, is it Frank? I'm not sure. Yeah, he worked there. That was a busy place too because you've got shipping scales on A side, and then you had shipping scales on B side, and they were all coming at once. Yeah. The inspector, when loading the boat, did everything from A side. There was a separate inspection for B side. There was like a small inspection office. There was maybe four people there.

NP: But it was one of the first to be shut down, wasn't it?

BS: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it was. It just couldn't make money, they said. Expense.

NP: And then we have UGG.

BS: Yeah. Well, you had Pool 9 that was there.

NP: It was there when you were there?

BS: Oh, yeah. I worked there. Yeah, yeah. That was straight flax.

NP: That was a little one.

BS: Yeah. It handled the flaxseed. See, that was before they had canola, and they weren't into mustard and that much either. So it was flax that was handled there.

NP: Inspecting flax, flax looks to me like, well, it's flax. What could go wrong with flax?

BS: Heating. Heating. Yeah. Oh, yeah. That's a--. Then add mixtures, but mostly heating. That was the only thing that could go wrong with it.

NP: Did you have a favourite kind of grain that you liked to work with?

BS: Amber durum. I liked the colour. Hard kernels. Your semolina pasta.

NP: Then we do have UGG.

BS: Yeah. I spent a few years there. They were--. But I was there after. Like the elevator almost slid in the slip. That was before my time.

NP: It did. It did.

BS: Yeah, yeah. There was a vessel docked there, and for some reason, the captain had to shift the vessel during the night. I don't know what the reason was, and a good thing he did because that elevator would have fell right on the boat. Yeah.

NP: Were there any other incidents like that? Like explosions or fires in the time that you were working?

BS: No, no. But I remember at Richardson's in the summertime, it was a real hot, muggy day, and we had one of our fellows upstairs catching outward cars, like sampling. He come down. He got scared because he thought the way the weather was there could be, you know, the humidity could be right for an explosion. Nothing ever happened luckily, but he was quite concerned. Yeah. So that's all I have.

NP: So what are you most proud of in your--?

BS: Well, I guess achieved through the ranks, movement through the ranks. Yeah.

NP: Do you think that you and your career did anything to help Canada become well respected as an international grain supplier?

BS: Well, I spent a lot of time with the CIGI people, and there were the marketers and flour millers. I had a good rapport with them. I told the truth to them, like what--. They appreciated it, and I still kept in touch with them, and they still kept in touch with me. Yeah. I think enhanced the—how would you say it—enhanced the image of the Canadian grain industry, yeah. Yeah.

NP: Did you ever take pictures, or do you have memorabilia like paintings or things like that that we should know about?

BS: No, no. Just what pictures I have are group ones. It wouldn't mean anything of international groups. Yeah. I got a couple old of us cooking in the offices. [Laughs]

NP: Oh, that would be great.

BS: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Because somebody was just talking about they had meals every day.

BS: Yeah. Well, some do. Manitoba Pool, every Friday, full course meal at lunchtime because you used to shut down for an hour. Even after they went to working through lunch, they still had--. They had some big spreads. Yeah. And Christmastime, yeah. Turkey and--. Yeah.

[1:35:18]

NP: See, that kind of picture would be really good for the--.

BS: Yeah. But I don't think I've got that type of picture though.

NP: No?

BS: I don't know who would. Oh, one of the--. Well, Billy and Brian, they might have because they were known. That was the place to work at Christmastime. Yeah, yeah.

NP: Well, thank you very much. We've had an hour and a half of--.

BS: Okay. Well, I don't know--. Yeah. An hour and a half.

NP: So that's been great. Yes.

BS: Yeah, yeah.

NP: So thank you so much.

BS: Okay. Well, I don't--.

End of interview.