Narrator: Stefan Turgeon (ST)

Company Affiliations: United Grain Growers (UGG), Agricore United, Viterra, Canadian Grain Commission (CGC)

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Summary: Former grain handler for United Grain Growers and current grain inspector for the Canadian Grain Commission Stefan Turgeon discusses his career in Canada's grain industry in Thunder Bay and Quebec. He begins by sharing how he came to work in Thunder Bay's UGG elevators from Quebec, and how he gravitated towards hard labour jobs due to his language barrier. He recalls his first impressions of the elevators, some of his colleagues, and the atmosphere of low morale due to a period of downsizing. Despite downsizing, Turgeon discusses how he retained his job by volunteering to be a silo cleaner as well as learning a variety of jobs in his downtime as a general labourer, like in the annex, tunnels, distributing floor, and cleaners. He shares stories of accidents in the elevators, recounts changes to safety and automation, and describes the importance of good working relationships to keep grain moving. Turgeon then describes the period of company amalgamation where UGG merged with the Pools to become Viterra, and he discusses learning grain inspection and transferring to the Canadian Grain Commission in Quebec. He discusses the differences between the eastern and western grain systems, as well as differences in working for a private company versus the government. Other topics discussed include wildlife in the elevators, alcohol use on the job, women joining the CGC workforce, and the importance of the grain industry to Thunder Bay's growth as a city.

Keywords: United Grain Growers (UGG); Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Terminal grain elevators—St. Lawrence Seaway; Grain handling; Grain elevators—equipment and supplies; Car shed; Railcar unloading; Grain varieties; Downsizing; Workplace accidents; Alcohol use; Automation; Women in the workplace; Annex floor; Ship loading; Grain cleaning; Amalgamation; Agricore United; Viterra; Grain inspection; Grain weighing; Labour unions; UGG Elevator M; UGG Elevator A

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: Good morning. I'm sitting here close to the Bunge Elevator in Quebec City interviewing Stefan Turgeon. It is September 1, 2011. So, just so that we have you saying your name on the tape, Stefan, would you just introduce yourself, where you were born? Then we'll start talking about your time in the grain industry.

ST: Yes, ma'am. My name is Stefan Turgeon. I was born in Saint-Hyacinthe in Quebec province, 30 kilometres outside of Montreal. I lived most of my life in Quebec City though. At the age of 19 years old, I decided to go out west to learn English—that's what I needed for school. I wasn't good in school for my grades, so I decided to leave Quebec and learn it the hard way. I ended up in Thunder Bay in 1981, and I worked in the grain industry since then.

NP: Well, first of all, how did you decide to stop in Thunder Bay? Most people don't stop in Thunder Bay to learn English.

ST: I ran out of money! [Laughing] So, I stayed there. Actually, I went to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, that's where I stopped. I met a fellow there—Dave Ferguson—and he told me that if you come to Thunder Bay that his dad could find me a job over there. So, I did, and in 1981, I started working in a grain elevator called the United Grain Growers [UGG].

NP: Dave Ferguson, what was his connection to the grain industry? Anything or just--?

ST: None. Just Dougie's dad had a lot of connections, so I kind of took his advice and I came to Thunder Bay. I got a job in--.

NP: UGG.

ST: That's right, at UGG.

NP: Did you have any connection with the grain industry in Quebec?

ST: No.

NP: So, this was your first--?

ST: Yeah, that was my first big job, and I kept it.

NP: Okay! So, where did you start with UGG? What was your first job?

ST: My first job was labourer like everybody else. They don't put you on the--. It's too complicated when you start that they don't put you in the car shed because of the cables, or they don't put you in a designated area. You've got to learn the flow of the grain first.

NP: So, what does a labourer do?

ST: Well, he makes sure that the elevator is clean. He gets dispatched every morning by a foreman, put him in a designated area to work for the day or for the morning or the amount of time that the foreman wants. During the time that he works there, if he has ambition, then he could learn side jobs at the same time that he's doing his main job. You've got to be wise there. If you want to move up, you've got to use your own time to kind of learn things. When jobs do occur, then you jump on them. You take advantage of the situation and say, "Hey, I know this job because I've learnt it on the side here." They kind of like that. If you did your own job and then you learn other work in the plant, they love it. It shows that you have initiative.

NP: Couple of just general questions about that early experience then. You came to Thunder Bay with English skills that you were hoping to develop. Did the fact that you spoke mostly French have any impact on your work?

ST: No, not at the beginning because, like I said, they put me in labour, so you don't talk much when the broom is in your hand. [Laughing] No, it only took me, actually, three months and then I was a bobcat operator. So, I was unloading boxcars. At the time there were boxcars, not railcars—well, very few of them. They were just starting in '81. It took 20 minutes to empty 45 tonnes with a bobcat, a little tractor. So, that was kind of fun actually! We used to do about 12 to 16 a day per person.

NP: It would be just like a boy with a big toy?

ST: That's about it, yes! [Laughs] For guys over there, they loved that. That was the job. Most people loved that job or the cleaner job, because that was a dirty job because you go inside the boxcar, and you receive dust and grain on you. So, you get dirty. There was two type of work over there: the dirty work and the clean work. So, me, I was more liking the dirty work.

NP: You felt by the end of the day you'd accomplished something?

ST: Not just that.

NP: And you could see that you had?

[0:05:00]

ST: Not just that. I think for the dirty job it was easier with my language barrier at the time. Over the years, I accumulated my knowledge in English and then I moved up a little bit.

NP: Good. Can you recall--. Now, I just want you to sort of put yourself back in that first day or few days on the job. What was your first reaction to the elevator itself?

ST: Wow! I thought it was very complicated. I think the way they built it, they're not all the same, but they all have the same purpose—to elevate grain and then be able to ship it out. But the architecture of it is different on each elevator. Some has more room in the basement than others. Some you can get claustrophobic, like it's closed spaces. But there's a lot--. You can see when you look in an elevator that it's complicated. The way they build it, it's complicated. Plus, it requires so much cement and steel, you know? I can just imagine the hardship the people had to build it. Some people even died building elevators.

NP: It sounds like you took a bit of interest in the history of building the elevators.

ST: Well, I just--. It's a big building. There's many of them, and even if the eyesore now, it created a lot of employment over the years for a lot of people, a lot of families. But now that, you know, the year 2000 have passed, automation has come, so now the elevators are dying one by one. It costs a lot of money to destroy them, so they try to find other ways of use them. Instead of tearing them down, just use them for other purpose. But there's not many other purpose that you can do in an elevator. But it's an amazing building, though. Like the way it's all built, it's very amazing, from the basement up. Complicated too, working there. It's not that easy. You've got to understand the part to clean the grain, the part to elevate it, the part to ship it out. There's many road the grain could take if you don't use the right slide or that sort of thing.

NP: So, would you say what surprised you most about what you learned about the--?

ST: Well, what surprised me in terms of the building is the size. It's huge! Takes a lot of people to clean it up [laughs] and to keep it clean. For the grain business, it's complicated. I didn't think it was so complicated from the seeding to the harvest to the shipping, for the countries to buy it. The whole operation it's complicated.

NP: The whole system.

ST: The whole system. From the seeding, like I said, to the end where it goes in the country. There's a lot of politics involved.

NP: What do you mean by politics?

ST: Well, you have the Canadian Wheat Board [CWB]. They've got to go through the CWB, I guess, to ship it out of Canada.

NP: For the wheat.

ST: For the wheat, yes. Then you've got the barley that goes through countries like United States for feeding, cattle feeding, or malting for the beer. But that's for barley. But there's 21 grain, actually, that the different Canadian Commission take care of. But out of the 21 grain, we probably will see 7 on a continuous basis. The rest we have to have the knowledge to inspect it or manipulate it, but we don't see it as often.

NP: Can you state what those seven are?

ST: Yeah! The wheat. The durum, which is to make pasta. You have the Red Winter to make cakes. You have corn. Right now, I work in the eastern region of Canada, so eastern corn is in demand. You got soybeans—that's really in demand too. Then you have canola and flax. Those are the main grain that we usually see. But you have mustard as well that we will see occasionally. Oats that we will see occasionally as well. That's about it for what I've seen in my life. There's a lot of little type, but I think my fellow worker, Patrick Chandler, can answer—because he's an inspector—he can answer more on question about the grain issue.

[0:10:22]

NP: Let's go back to your early career then with UGG, 1981. So things were still going pretty well in Thunder Bay. Can you recall some of the people you were working with at that time?

ST: Yes! The first person I met was the superintendent of the elevator at the time. His name is Ray Cousineau. Raymond Cousineau. Very good gentleman. He knew I didn't speak much English, so he dispatched me in a spot where I'm like, "Grab a broom and just mix some dust." [Laughs] But he was the first person I met and a very, very, very good man. Other than him, Bill Belanger I met shortly after. As some of my good friends there, well, you have Sergio Vesilino. He's still one of my good friends over there. Well, other acquaintance that you made over there, but the people that made a big impact on me was the superintendent, Ray Cousineau, and my favourite foreman, Bill Belanger. [Laughing]

NP: Which elevator did you work at?

ST: I worked at McCabe's elevator. It was M House at the time in Thunder Bay. They closed it down now. Our company had two elevators. We had M House, and we had A House. It's McCabe's elevator. The name is dedicated to the family, I think, that started it. I'm not too sure about that. It was the McKay family. Murdoch McKay. Yeah, Murdoch McKay and the father as well. Murdoch was actually—at the end—was actually my boss in Winnipeg, which now that he became the big chief of the--.

NP: One of the commissioners?

ST: Yes, that's right. He's the commissioner of the Canadian Grain Commission [CGC] at the moment for the next two years. I'm kind of glad to have him there. He's a very knowledgeable man. Yeah, that's about it for the people I met there. I mean, you're always going to meet other fellow workers, you know.

NP: Did it make a difference whether you worked at M House or A House? Was one considered easier to operate or--?

ST: Yes. M House was older. It was built very old fashioned. We still had steel cables in the car shed, and we were pulling five cars at a time. We could unload at three tracks at a time. The basement was very, very low. A man who was 6 feet tall or higher had to walk with his back bent down, bent forward. It was a good place for me, I guess, because I'm short. [Laughing] I don't know. McCabe's, you get attached to the place you start. So, McCabe's is where I started, so I didn't like to go to A House that much. But at the end, I finished my career at A House. It was much newer. But McCabe's had the view of the lake, you know? They had wild animals at night that come around there—moose, deers, you know. It's kind of neat to see those just right in your yard where you work. I was kind of grateful to see all kind of wildlife there.

NP: What else besides--? You know, it's interesting to me that you say that about the wildlife because I've always thought that one little offshoot of the grain industry are the animals and birds that congregate around the elevators. So, moose and deer, any others that you can recall seeing?

ST: Oh, yeah. There was skunks, porcupine. At the end we had groundhogs from Saskatchewan that came in cars. When we unload the cars, well, they kind of take off and they go in the backyard. Then they make their family there. But we had ravens nesting on the fire escape of the elevator. We had all kinds of different animals, even rats sometimes [laughing] and mice. But those are the most common animals you see—deer, moose, skunk.

[0:15:11]

NP: What about the birds besides the ravens and obviously the pigeons? Any other that--?

ST: Seagulls.

NP: Ah, yes.

ST: Lots of seagulls. Pigeons. Pigeons! But pigeons are probably one of the nastiest thing you could have in an elevator because they have in their excrement, they have disease. They have scabies, and a few people did get that over the years. When I said my job was to clean the elevator, where there is places that we don't use every year, like the dryer for example. If the grain is dry at the harvest time, you don't need to use the dryer. So, the dryer will get dirty. Because there's little holes where the heat comes out, the pigeon goes in there and they nest. So, every four years or so, we have a bad harvest—which is the grain is still wet—so we have to start up the dryer. So, we have to clean it. That's a lot of work! That is probably one of the ugliest, nastiest job you could have in there. People didn't like it. You had to dress in a white suit because--. Dirty. Mask, everything. But pigeons are probably--. If you ask anybody that work in an elevator, sure they're cute, but they don't like them. They cause a lot of trouble, the pigeon.

NP: Let's go back then. You started out as a labourer. Obviously, because you're still here now, you moved on. So, how did your career progress?

ST: Well, my career progressed slowly because there was a downsizing in the mid '80s and early '90s. But I got the opportunity to stay on thanks to Mr. Belanger who phoned me at my other job, and he told me to come back for three weeks in 1990 or around there. I was going to be the last guy called. So, I took his advice, and I went back to work. From about 1988 to about 1994, I was just labourer. There was too much downsizing. Nobody was moving up, you know? Everybody kept their job, and everybody wanted to keep their job. The posting they had at the elevator, well, that's basically the posting they had for those six years. We were just grateful in the end that we made the cut, actually. So many people lost their employment. When I started in 1981, there was 2,250 employees. When I left in 2007, there was 330, around, employees on the waterfront of Thunder Bay. So, the workforce has diminished dramatically over the years.

You could say it's automation—the cause of it—or displacement of the grain being shipping in Canada. Instead of buyers coming and buying in Thunder Bay, they're just going to go to either Vancouver or Quebec, which are at the extremities of Canada. They have cleaners now, I'm pretty sure, on both sides of Canada, so the grain doesn't have to be stopped in Thunder Bay to be cleaned. Again, the farmers do clean a lot of the grain now out on their farm or out west, so when it's being shipped out, they bypass Thunder Bay in the wintertime now. So, there's no rail program now in Thunder Bay. So, the grain is being shipped right from the Prairies to the West Coast or the East Coast.

NP: So, you were talking about how your career progressed and the fact that there were a lot of cutbacks in the ‘80s. You did a good job of summarizing the reasons for that. What was it like to be working then? It couldn’t have been a very happy place because of--.

ST: During the downsizing?

NP: Yeah.

ST: No, it wasn’t, like any other workplace. Downsizing means everybody wants to cut everybody’s throat to keep their job. I guess it’s human nature to defend yourself for your employment. I mean, you don’t want to lose your employment. So, when there was overtime, everybody wanted it, to have some extra cash, or showed that you were dedicated to your employment. Pass mid ‘90s—from mid ‘80s to mid ‘90s—they got rid of a lot of employment at the company. There was 252 on the seniority list, and I think they went down to about 150. So, they cut back about 100 jobs, I guess, at our place. Quick pause?

[Audio pauses]

[0:20:32]

NP: Okay, we are now going back online. Okay.

ST: All right. So, to get back to the ‘90s, now you’re probably going to say, “Why’d they kept me, the bottom guy? Why was I called to another job, had another job to keep my job?” So, for three weeks I did two job at a time. I did 16-hour shift for about three weeks. I was glad after three weeks it was over. It’s because my main job, my main quality at the elevator over there was to clean silos. Because we had a plant—we had a lot of oil seeds like flax, canola—and at the time we cleaned those oil seeds. We had to clean them before shipment or else they would be non-commercially cleaned, and it’s not good. If the buyer wants clean stuff, well, we have to clean it. If they want clean grain, well, he’s going to get clean grain.

But cleaning oilseed brings a lot of residue, but those residue they’re not being wasted. Everything has a purpose in the grain, so everything is being sold, regardless if it’s dust, regardless if it’s grain or small seeds inside. Everything is being sold. There’s hardly no waste in the grain industry, unless it’s been burnt or fire burnt or really wet. So, for me my job was to clean silos, and I was good at it. I think I was good. Plus, I guess if the foreman or your employer likes you, they’ll do what he can to keep you on. So, between those two things, well, I stayed on when there was a cut off.

NP: So, what was involved in cleaning silos?

ST: Well, in cleaning silos, it's a four-man team. One man goes down on a little chair on a cable, down to 105 feet. 95 to 105, it all depends on the size of the silo. There's different size of silo. There's round, stars, and triangle. Why there's different shapes of silos is very easy. If you put four round one, the middle one will be a star, and when you get to the edges of the elevator, you'll have the triangle ones. It's just because it's rectangular usually, so you get the round ones, so you get three shapes of silos. Sometime when you had a lot of residue, there's a hole in the metal that creates--. It's empty. It's like a cylinder. You take a cylinder, and it creates like a hole of 100 feet from the top to the bottom, but on the outside this hole it's hung up. The grain is hung up.

NP: So, it's almost like a donut with the hole in the middle?

ST: Exactly! Perfect, perfect--.

NP: Description!

ST: Description, that's it! You had the word. I was looking for a word for it. But, yeah, that is exactly the shape of a donut. So, you have a hole in the middle for me to go down in the little chair, which I go down about eight feet at a time. Then I undermined it. So, I cut on one side and then I cut on the other side vertical, then I make my horizontal cut and everything lets go. If I'm lucky, big chunks will fall off and I won't have to undermine that too much. But sometimes it does happen—it's very hard the stuff. Sometimes it's hung up 95 feet. It could take me a week to clean it. But usually, a couple of hours or half a day, a day, and it's cleaned.

NP: How did you learn to do that?

ST: Oh, that? You just have to be, I guess, a little bit of a daredevil at the beginning. It's not everybody that goes in there. If you're claustrophobic, they won't let you. They won't force you to do that. That's one of those jobs that even if you're the bottom guy or you're a labourer, if you have a fear of heights or are claustrophobic, they won't put you in there. I mean, they're not masochist or sadistic. They'll ask for volunteers, but I had a couple of years in Quebec as a stuntman, and I've always been a daredevil, so for me--. Again, my language barrier. I felt that they were the jobs designated for me at the time because I didn't know much in English at the time that I got there.

[0:25:32]

NP: So, going back to the stuntman situation. So, what skills as a stuntman were you able to put into play in--?

ST: Oh, no fear. I just had no fear. No fear of heights. No fear of--. I don't know, just no fear. "Just put me in there! Give me a mask and a suit or just a mask and goggles. Just whatever, and I'll go in there." I felt at home there. I mean, [laughing] I felt good cleaning bins. I mean, we call it cleaning bins, cleaning silos. I just felt good. I just liked it. You worked hard, and I liked to sweat. I was young and in pretty good shape. I don't know. I just felt at the end that I'd accomplished something, you know? I gave them a new--. Every time you clean a silo, that gives them space. An elevator wants space! An elevator wants the grain, and he wants to ship it continuously. If they could have it 12 months a year like this, they'll do it. I mean, that's their bread and butter.

NP: Was there any danger involved in that or was it pretty safe?

ST: There's always a danger, but everything we did at the elevator, from what I recollect, I don't remember anybody getting really injured at the time I was there—like major, major injuries—except falls. But for cleaning silos, no. You can bang your knee because a chunk of grain kind of hit the chair and threw you against the wall of a silo, or you could get cut on the side of your head because your head hit the bar of the chair, but those are little things. I mean, back in the old days building the elevator, I'm sure they had worse accidents than that.

NP: So, when you talked about falls, what kind of falls were ordinary in elevators? Was it more like tripping over something, or is it actually--?

ST: Oh, if you climb a ladder to go clean a top of a machine and you slip. Dust on metal gets very slippery with your boots. With the rubber on the dust on metal, it's dangerous. Then sometimes it rains, and the rain comes in, and that too gets slippery. Usually, it's for a lack of attention because, well, I never fell. I did lose a piece of my thumb though.

NP: How did that happen?

ST: In the car shed at A House. I started at McCabe, but I finished at A House. In 1984—that was three years after I started—it was on a midnight shift at 4:00 in the morning. A cable fell off, and the man that was winching, he was 62 years old—good man, I won't mention his name. The cable fell off and I gave him my signal with my hand to stop the cable. He did. As I put it back on the boxcar, I guess he thought I'd given him the signal to start ahead, so he started winching with the cable, but my hand was still there.

So, my hand got caught between the boxcar and the cable. I spotted the whole car yelling at him, but because the horn was on and he was 62 and he had eyesight problem plus a hearing problem, he didn't hear me nor see me. So, I just spotted the whole boxcar, and when he was done, well, piece of my thumb--. The thumb part of my glove fell with my piece of thumb in the basement somewhere. One of my fellow workers went and got it from the basement, and I went straight to the hospital. I was off only two and a half weeks. I came back after.

NP: So, when you say you spotted the car throughout this, what does that mean?

ST: Well, all railcars that we received, they go in the back of the car shed. As we move along during our day of work doing our daily work, we have to unload those railcars. But we cannot winch--. They were boxcar, so in order to unload the boxcar at A House, it wasn't like McCabe. It wasn't with bobcat. It was with a rail dumper. So, you had to spot the boxcar on the dumper individually. Not like McCabe where you get five cars at a time, and then cut it off and spot it on top of--.

[0:30:01]

NP: So, spot means really to just locate it over the chute where it goes down to the--.

ST: That is correct. Well, over the place where it will balance left and right and down and up, with the crossbar that goes in the middle, you know, the arm that they call it to go inside and let go of the grain into the hopper.

NP: Okay. Spotting is a term I've heard often, but I never really understood what it meant, so thank you for that explanation!

ST: Yeah, spotting is a car, it means that out of the cars that you receive for the day, you just bring one at a time or five at a time or whatever the--. Each elevator, like I said, they're all built different, plus they all have their way to work differently. So, each company or each elevator, back then, there was both boxcar and railcars. McCabe was designated to do both, and so was A House, but one was with bobcat and the other one was with a dumper. But those all the job, I guess, that I knew. I did all these jobs, but not at fulltime.

NP: So, I have a couple of questions from what you've said. One was I have heard from doing these tapes that there was a person once caught inside a bin over a weekend. Was that part of the stories that you've heard?

ST: Yes, it's true.

NP: It is true?

ST: No, no, it is a true story. The man is deceased right now. I don't know if you want to hear the name, or I don't know if it matters.

NP: I suspect there was a report written up.

ST: Oh, I don't know. Back then, I don't know if there was anything written up.

NP: Why don't we just not put the name and you can tell me later, and then we can work out some way. But it is a true story?

ST: It is a true story. It is actually a real true story. There was only one shift at the time of your incident that you want to know about.

NP: What elevator did it occur at?

ST: It happened at McCabe.

NP: Oh, really?

ST: If I'm not mistaken, it was at McCabe. It was at the elevator where I started. The man went down to clean the silo, like the job that I like to do, and at 4:00, the three people that remain on top thought there was another shift coming on, so they left. But right there, they don't do that no more. You don't leave the man down in the silo unattended. What they did was wrong. I have to admit. I'm the one who goes down in the silo usually, I wouldn't like my crew to leave me. There was no radio at the time. Walkie-talkies, they weren't really perfected to go down. Even in our days, radio with a lot of dust doesn't work properly, so a lot of time you had bad connection. You have to remember, in the cement used to build an elevator there's rebar. There's a lot of metal, there's a lot of steel to hold the cement. So, if you have one silo and another silo and another silo, and the tower to communicate with your radio is located in another building outside the elevator, the communication might not come around.

So, anyhow, to get back to the story and the man. He was left on a Friday at 4:00. The men on top, they left. They went home. So, the man inside the silo, well he just continued working until he realized he was tired. So, he started yelling, "Hey, get me out!" But there was nobody on top. So, he just sat in his chair until Sunday when they got him out. They found him. He was singing. He was tired. [Laughs]

NP: Was there any ill effects from that?

ST: Well, two days on a chair doing nothing. You're in the middle, yeah, about 50 feet—the height is about 50 feet. You can't go down. You can't go up. There's not much to do. Plus, you still need your daily routine of living, you know? If you get my drift. Washroom, you know? So, the man was left two days there, so they found him. There's no way to undo nothing there. There's no where to go to washroom, so you have to do it in your pants. He was--.

NP: Was he off work afterwards?

ST: I'm not sure. That I'm not sure. There's rumours that he took a week off. There's rumours that he got more money. There's rumours, but that is not the issue. I think the issue was to leave someone for a weekend like that, it was not properly done.

NP: But it was an accident?

ST: Oh, it was an accident, but it could have been prevented, I guess. Common sense! You don't leave someone in a silo and all three people on top goes home. I mean, you've got to wait for another crew to come in.

[0:35:12]

NP: So, do you know approximately when this happened?

ST: That was long ago.

NP: Before your time?

ST: Late '60s or early '70s. That was way, way, way before my time. Back then, there was not much rules. There was a lot of drinking too back then in those times inside of the elevator.

NP: Did you see changes in sort of safety and alcohol use?

ST: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Two years after I started there, there was no more alcohol. It was finished.

NP: What do you think made that change?

ST: Oh, I mean, society changed. Injuries. Modernization. I don't know. Look at the way it is in 2010 compared to the 1980s. Like I haven't seen before 1980s, so I can't really make a judgement on that. But from what I have seen of the elevators from '81 to 2007, every 10 years you could see a big drastic change either in the way the philosophy with their employees or with the downsizing or with the dislocation of the grain. The displacement of the grain, I guess, is downsizing indirectly, but everything. Automization.

NP: Automation?

ST: Automation! So, all this put together, yeah, safety and common sense, I guess, came in place eventually. I mean, walking around with a bottle of whiskey between cleaning grain back in the '60s, it was common. People working in the shed with a beer was common. Construction workers even around Canada making roads, you know, it was common too. But over the years they say that alcohol, well, it brings effects, or it shouldn't be tolerated at work, which is right too.

NP: Well, I shouldn't say this. Putting words in your mouth. Were there issues then between those who drank on the job and those who didn't?

ST: Nah. Well, I mean, issues--. It all depends what you mean by drinking on the job. I mean, there's drinking, and there's getting drunk. Both occurred, actually. When there's booze, somebody's going to get drunk. I guess after the first year I started there, there was a few things that did occur that the foreman had no choice but to put a stop at certain things. I'd rather not go into too many details. I think it'd just tarnish the image of the industry, I guess.

NP: It's the reality of the industry, and you are not the first person to mention the drinking!

ST: Oh, I'm not the first person, and I'm not going to be the last one! But it's not like that no more though. There's zero tolerance. Almost like driving—zero tolerance for drinking and driving. I mean drinking and working. [Laughing] They--.

NP: So, what got so bad that it no longer was tolerable?

ST: Well, I guess people sleeping, drunk. Falling asleep drunk, and there's a mix or there's a spill or there's injuries. Plus, just the way life goes now, you don't work--. It's basically accidents, I would have to say.

NP: What this makes me think of—and I don't know why I make the connection—but it would have been about that time too that women started working on the job. Or was that a little later?

ST: Working on the job, you mean as an employee of the elevator?

NP: Other than in the office.

ST: Yeah, but, I mean, as an employee in the elevator or as an employee of the Canadian Grain Commission?

NP: CGC, but they would be present at the elevators.

ST: When I started 1981, there was no female employee on my side of the industry, meaning that the UGG didn't employ women to work inside the plant. To the day that I left the elevator, there was no women. Their philosophy--.

NP: And you left the elevator when?

ST: In 2007. So, from 1981 to 2007, there was no women. Not one woman got hired by UGG, Agricore United, or Viterra. Those are the three companies that I did work over the years. But their philosophy with women in the plant is they cannot do the same than a man on a regular basis. So, if they would be the bottom person on the seniority list—everything worked with the seniority over there—so if the person who is the bottom person and cannot do the same than the man, well then, the person ahead of that person will have to work for her. So, they decided instead of having conflict of interests that they wouldn't hire any women. But Sask Wheat Pool did hire, or Cargill did hire a woman, and she was still there, I think, up until this day. So, there is exception in any workforce that either sex could do the job. But instead of taking the gamble on it, their policy of the company I worked for, they decided not to hire any. So, I thought that was okay.

[0:41:17]

As for the CGC, I started in 1981 and yes, there was female at the time on the worksite. Some were alert and some weren't. They didn't really understand the grain. But over the years, some of the females they hired became some of the best inspectors. I always said the female, they have a better eyesight. They're more attentive to what they do, I guess. [Inaudible] They do refined work. They take their work very--.

NP: Attention to detail?

ST: Well, yes. They're softer. I don't know how to explain that. Looking at grain, you don't need to be a man to do that. You know? [Laughs] I think that was a good job for a woman because the CGC has two part of it. They have the inspection side and the weigher. The weigher is more like a man job, because you deal with the guys at work. You're in the control room where the environment is guys. Guys say things sometimes that they regret, right, in front of women? It's vice versa, but in this case, it was men. So, when a woman was a weigher and she comes into a room where you have six employees in the control room—all men—and then she walks in, well, then she has to--. Especially at the beginning, it must have been pretty tough for those women to hear guys talk, you know, shop talk, which is sometimes pretty nasty. Some didn't care. They just said, "Ah! They're guys, they're guys. Let them talk." But some took it personal, so.

But to get back, the weigher, I thought it was more like a guy thing because you're with the guys. But the inspection side, you dealt with the more refined people. [Laughing] You know? People that were dressed in civil clothes to work, and looking at grain, and dealing with the foremans, and dealing with the more like the--.

NP: They showered on a regular basis? [Laughing]

ST: Yeah! That kind of stuff. [Laughing] They don't drink too much at the elevator like back in the old days. They were more like, I don't know, dress well. I thought the women fit really well in that realm.

NP: A culture. We talk about a culture of a workplace. I understand exactly what you're saying. Because of our timing I don't want to lose sight of your career, so let's move on. We could spend a lot of our time obviously--. [Laughing] So, we left you when you were talking about your time cleaning bins. Was that what you did until you left?

ST: Well, you don't do that. You don't clean silos every day.

NP: Okay. So, how did you move along? What else did you do?

ST: Okay. I'll give a description of some of the work that I've done over the years.

NP: Good! Yeah.

ST: I worked as a labourer when I started there. In the meantime, while I was working as a labourer, I've learned on the side how to use a bobcat, either in my breaks or either when foremen are not looking at me sweeping. I do an hour sweeping and then they tell

me, “Take advantage of the situation. If you’re sweeping in the car shed, ask around how to operate machines. Learn on your own. Show initiative, like a personal initiative.” So, I’ve learned how to use a bobcat. Then I learned to work on the distributing floor. That’s where you put your spouts either on the proper silo number so the grain is going in the right place in the elevator, or on a shipping bin, which it goes straight to the boat, or the cleaners to get clean. So, the purpose of that job—distributing floor—is to dispatch your silos at the right place. I learned working in the annex with the trips, which is a machine that moves on a moving belt to place on the right hole in the annex to put the grain in the right place.

[0:45:43]

NP: Sort of almost like a transportation system? So, you’re going along, and the grain has to go off into different directions and the trips--.

ST: No, it doesn’t go in different directions. It always goes straight. But let’s say you have bin 600, then bin 601, then bin 602, but this time it’s [No.] 2 Red or [No.] 2 CWRS, Canadian Western Red Spring. You want to put that into silo 602, but the trip is set on 600.

NP: The trip being--?

ST: The trip is the machine that will move to the right place. It’s a converter belt, so the trip is inside the converter belt. Like the converter belt is inside the trip--.

NP: The conveyor--?

ST: The conveyor belt. So, in order to move to--. All the grain moves on a conveyor belt, so in order to go to the right place, you need the trip to set it there. We call it a trip or a tripper. It all depends which place you work. So, the guy that works on that floor, he takes it from—my example—600, and he moves it two bins ahead to 602. Once it’s set there, he’ll set this fan to get the dust into the air system. He’ll put the brake onto the machine, and he’ll set it fixed. Then he’ll call on the radio that 602 is ready to go, ready to receive grain. So, then the control operator will let go of the grain, and once he sees the grain going safely into the silo, then he could walk away from that place and do another set somewhere else. Usually there’s three tripper annex. So, there’ll be three on the outshore annex and three on the inshore annex if they have two sides like we did at A House.

NP: How long would it take a silo to fill? Or would you not fill it with the--?

ST: Well, a car--. Because this all depends the size of the silo. Like I said, there was round, stars, and triangle. Triangle was the smaller one. Stars hold about--. Triangle hold maybe a car, a car and a half, which is about 90 tonne to 100 tonne, or 120. It all depends. A star bin will hold three and a half cars. That's about 350 tonne to 400 tonne. A big silo is 900 tonne in Thunder Bay. Over here in Quebec they can go to 1,500. So, one car will take about seven minutes to go up, ten minutes at the top. But for the whole silo, well, 10 minutes per car, 9 cars. So, an hour and a half to two hours to fill it up.

NP: So, that was one of the jobs you did.

ST: Some of the jobs. There was another job like gallery man, which is a job for the shipping. Tunnel man, which I did that job. You're in the basement of the elevator when they say that--. Because we didn't have an elevator which—at A House it was automated—it was manpower work, so somebody had to be in the basement in order to open those silo to get shipped out. So, you come in in the morning and let's say there's a laker waiting to get filled. The inspector-in-charge will give you a sheet of silo with the grade that is going onboard. They'll say, "Take the 220, let's say, and the 302, and mix them together. So, open half of this side, half of this side, and let the grain go." So, tunnel man is basically the big helper of an inspector. If the inspector say, "Go in the basement and open two notch of this silo." Well, two notch doesn't mean half. You don't open wide. You're going to make--.

NP: The mix would be a problem?

ST: No, it's going to be a mix in the grain, but it's not going to be the grade demanded to go onboard. So, you'll have a *déchargement*. You'll have to unload the boat, which over the years it did occur a few times that we had some mix going onto the boat, or not the grain that they asked, or heated—a lot of heated. That's the worst thing you can have in the grain is heated grain. But if your tunnel man does what the inspector says--. So usually, they're good buddies those two. They're buddies. They're good friends in life.

[0:50:18]

NP: And this inspector is the inspector with the company as opposed to the CGC inspector?

ST: That's right. That's an inspector of the company, and he'll deal with his fellow worker of the company as well in that tunnel. Like I said, usually they're pretty good buddies because the inspector is as good as his guy in the basement. If the guy in the basement don't like the inspector, he could do some nasty things just to put him in trouble, to put the inspector in trouble.

NP: Did that ever happen?

ST: Sure, it did! Sure, it did. Everything happened. You learn quickly how to get back at somebody if--. I'm not going to say I never did anything like that, but it wasn't in my mentality to do nasty things just to get back. I'm not a revengeful person, but there is--.

NP: So that's one way of getting back at people was to--.

ST: Sure. You open the wrong bin.

NP: And what's another way? What are other ways that you've heard of that are possible?

ST: You just leave your site. You say you've got to go to the washroom and don't come back for half an hour. Everything. Or, I don't know, like--. Basically--.

NP: So, good relationships were critical, like any workplace?

ST: Yes. Or if you work as a cleaner man—that was my posting at the end, a cleaner man operator, that's where you clean the grain—you just don't adjust your machine properly, so you have to clean it twice instead of once. Just little things that will cost the company extra money or electricity to use their machinery. It's just little things like this, but the big thing is the tunnel man because the tunnel man, he's the one that opens the silo at the bottom when there's a boat. He's the one that could control things in a sense. If the inspector doesn't get along with his tunnel man, his tunnel man could, well, just do a mistake and just say it was a pure mistake. "I didn't do it on purpose. Prove it." You know? The inspector cannot prove it, so they try to keep a good relationship with their tunnel man.

NP: So, when the wrong or not quite right mix gets into the ship's hold, how do they get it out?

ST: We didn't have the facility like they have here in Quebec with a self-unloader or booms that suck out the grain on the ship. So, they called a company called Clara in Thunder Bay to come in with a big vacuum with an air system.

NP: Is that Clara as in C-L-A-R-A?

ST: Yes.

NP: Okay.

ST: With a big vacuum, and it's just got so much pressure. They just put a hose onto the hold of the boat and you just--. Or we use our vacuum that we had at the elevator if there wasn't too much to take out. Under, let's say, 40 tonnes, we could do it ourself. Anything over 50 was--. Unless the boat's paying or whoever is paying. Because 50 tonne with a little vacuum cleaner that we had, it's too long. But with Clara's vacuum it takes long too, but it was possible, couple hundred tonne or something. Anything above that, you have to ship it out somewhere else basically, and they would have to use their big equipment. Thunder Bay wasn't really equipped for self-unloading. We were more equipped to load the ship. Down in the coast like Vancouver and Quebec, that's where they receive the lakers, so they have to have a facility to unload the lakers. But Thunder Bay's purpose was to load lakers, not to unload them. So, we weren't really prepared for--.

NP: All right! Continuing on, then. As you moved along your career, you became more and more knowledgeable of various jobs. So, continue.

ST: To get back to the end, basically, of my story of Thunder Bay, in 2007 we got offered a buyout by--. Well, our company, we were public, so we were on the stock market.

NP: Okay. Just back up there a bit. So, UGG--. So, you were there during the time that there was rapid change in ownership and so on. So, tell me a little bit about that leading up to 2007.

[0:55:00]

ST: When I started up at UGG, we had two elevators. In the mid '90s, we bought a company called Alberta Wheat Pool or Manitoba Wheat Pool. Well, no. Alberta Wheat Pool got bought out by Manitoba Wheat Pool, if I'm not mistaken, and then we bought Manitoba Wheat Pool. Then at the time, we had three elevators. We kept those three elevators right until Sask Wheat Pool bought us out. So, yes, there was a lot of companies being swallowed up by bigger ones. Or in our case, we were kind of the biggest one in the end, but we got swallowed up by Sask Wheat Pool. They had more backup, I guess, financially.

So, the history of the elevators that I worked for is I started as a UGG employee. After that, we changed names. After we bought Manitoba Pool, we became Agricore United. And in 2007 there was a war, a bid, between Richardson—JRI—and Sask Wheat Pool to buy us. Well, we all know now that the one that succeeded was Sask Wheat Pool. Then they merged the company, and they changed the name to Viterra. Viterra. But the sad part about it is I was the bottom guy there on the seniority list for many years. I had 25 and a half years of seniority at our company, and when we got bought out, the way--. The union, you know the book in the union?

NP: The seniority level?

ST: No, you know when you have a new contract, they give you a book?

NP: Oh, yes, the agreement. The union agreement?

ST: Yeah, the union agreement or the convention. How do you say that? The convention?

NP: The convention, mmhmm.

ST: In the convention agreement for the union, it says that if we work outside our plant into another--. Let's say Sask Pool bought us out. If I go work in their house, I go below their employees, regardless if he has one year seniority or 30 or 35. I go below them. But if they come into our house, it's the opposite. They go below us. So, by buying us out, we had three elevators. At the beginning, they wiped two of them. So, they kept A House, and they closed down McCabe's and they closed down the Pool 1. There was only our elevator at A House left. But last December, they closed A House too, so all my fellow workers, they are out of work. So, they strike. We had about eight contracts over the time that I was there, and the time they started working, and the time they lost their employment. We had many contracts we fought for, many strikes. At the end, they lost their employment over people that had three years of seniority or less. But the way the agreement was written was the way it was written. So, they go by it and that's it. They're out of work.

For me, I got lucky in 2007 because of the CGC. The last two years of my career at the elevator in Thunder Bay, I got the opportunity to go to school in the wintertime while I was laid off to become a grain inspector for the company. Thank God there's a man named Bill Belanger who gave me my opportunity to move ahead because I was the bottom guy on the seniority list. He put a sign up, "Anybody who wants to learn to be a grain inspector, put your name down." There was only two that put their name down, two or three, and I was one of those guys. Well, I guess I did really well, so they took me for two years in the summertime. I did railcars, inspect railcars. And John Eres—which is a very good guy, John Eres, to talk to if you want to—he's very, very knowledgeable. He's the only guy I knew that was inspecting grain over there for this company.

NP: Which company was that?

ST: Agricore United.

NP: Okay.

ST: He gave me a good push, and he gave me--. He said I was doing good work, so they kept me there for the following year. I met some CGC employees at the time that were inspecting, and they were kind of amazed. Or just they appreciated the work that I did. So, they gave me a hint that, "This place is going down and you're bilingual so go apply for the CGC down east," which I did. So, during the buyout situation, I had vacation, had the time scheduled. So, I came down to Quebec, and I had a meeting with this CGC. They gave me the job right on the spot, and they told me when I could start. I says, "In a week."

[1:00:21]

So, I went back home. I packed up. Because I was a non-driver, so I told my daughter if she wants to drive me to Quebec with a U-Haul. She said yes, so the following day I arrive in Thunder Bay, I went and signed my paper, which I quit the elevator. Because I had 25 years seniority, I was entitled to a pension, but even with 30 percent off it was, you know, $1,800 a month, which is pretty good still. So, I signed my papers. I quit the elevators. I packed up my U-Haul, and I came in Quebec within a week. And I've been working in Quebec for the CGC since then.

NP: So, that was 2007--.

ST: Seven.

NP: That you made the switch?

ST: Yes. If I would have stayed over there, I would have had 22 weeks worth the first year, 9 the second year, and then out the following year. So, my choice was the right one.

NP: Yeah. So, making the shift then from the company side to the government inspection side, what are your--?

ST: It's different. Very, very different.

NP: How would you describe the differences? What sticks in your mind as--?

ST: Even the Grain Commission in Thunder Bay and the Grain Commission from down east is totally different. Thunder Bay, their elevators are all clustered together. Quebec, they're everywhere. They have manpower in most of the elevators here except for Trois Rivieres and Sorel, which when they have a boat then they dispatch people.

NP: Mmhmm. So, let's split this out into two things. The first will be what you noticed as the difference between working in a company situation versus a government situation. And then secondly, the connection to the western system versus the eastern systems. So, let's start with the switch from company to government.

ST: Okay. I thought at the beginning that it was going to be easy working for the CGC. I thought the government was a good choice and sure bet for the rest of my career, and easy to understand. But I think the private side is easier now. I think the private side gives you, well, you have a union. They go by the contract. They go by this, you know? Blah, blah, blah. At 8:00, you go there in the morning, and you know your job. You know what you're going to be doing. On the other side, working for the CGC, you don't know what kind of grain you're going to ship out. You don't know when you're going to work. You don't know when the elevator--. You see, when you work for an elevator, you're there for your employer, which is the company. Because you're just the little guy—you work for a company—you don't have to dispatch employees. You're going to be always working in the same place, same job, except for overtime when you're needed at different places.

NP: Pretty predictable.

ST: Yes, pretty. But the CGC is not predictable. It's tough, even. There's many, many aspect that comes into consideration, you know? You could have problems with an increment. You could have problems among ourselves. You could have problem. It's more--. I don't know how to explain it really. It's just harder to do, that's all. It's harder to get along, harder to do, harder to understand the system. There's a few of us, so you don't have room for too many--. You don't have room to get sick, basically. You've got to be here. I don't know if you understand a little bit of what I'm trying to say?

NP: There's—I shouldn't say no fat because that's not it—there's, if I'm interpreting what you're saying properly, it's the people to deliver the service is pretty thin, and so everybody has to pull their weight equally. If you don't, there's nobody to fall in behind.

ST: Yes. You see, in an elevator, everybody knows basically every job. So, if somebody doesn't come in, they take a labour guy and put him on. But in the CGC, we need to be here because we're designated a job. See for me right now, I'm the weigher. I do railcars and I do boats, but I could work on the inspection side. If I'm not here, there's not many that do the weigher's side here. Like in Quebec, we have a few people, but I don't know. And we're not clustered. The elevator are not clustered together in the East Coast. In the West Coast a little more than here, but they're not clustered as well either. So, when they need replacement, they need to take

down from a different port and bring them here. So, it becomes, down east, pretty costly. And a lot of times it gives us extra pressure. We have to go to work because they need me.

[1:05:46]

Excuse me, ma'am, but I have an appointment at 11:00. I have to leave at quarter to, can you tell the time?

NP: Oh, jeez. Are we there already? Okay. So, let's--.

ST: No, I just, I don't know the time. I'm just asking you--.

NP: It's 10--.

ST: 10 to?

NP: No, no, it's 25 to.

ST: Oh, I don't know if--. Just five minutes.

NP: Another five minutes. So, let's--.

ST: Patrick just came here about two minutes, and he--.

NP: Yeah, I didn't realize that we had taken so long.

ST: Time flies, huh?

NP: Oh, doesn't it? Okay. That's fine because, actually, we've done a lot of talking about changes, and that was a major section that I was going to deal with anyway. So--.

ST: I don't really want to talk about my point of view because I'm having a lot of friction here. I don't like the way it's done down east. I really don't.

NP: Okay, let's talk about—and it's not even so much whether you like it or don't like it, but it's different--.

ST: Patrick will tell you more things.

NP: Yeah. So, what did you learn? You know, I talked about when you went to work in Thunder Bay initially, what was against your expectations? And you said, "Well, I was surprised by this, that, and the other thing." So, when you came and worked down east then, what was different about the way things worked here that you just weren't aware of when you were working in Thunder Bay?

ST: Okay. Well, first of all, the main difference between East Coast and West Coast is the grade of the grain. You have Canadian Western Red Spring, but you have eastern grain as well. The eastern grain is not into the--. The eastern grain, you could have two wheat, basically, or ones, [No.] 1-Red—which is the best quality of making bread, [No.] 1-Red—but because one comes from the East Coast, the other one from the West Coast, you can't put them together on a ship unless the buyer don't care. But usually--. And they're not graded totally the same either. They both have their restriction on the grade that you can put, like fusarium, that kind of stuff.

And so, what East Coast has as their grain is corn, soya, wheat, and that's about the three major grain that they grow now, and the Red Winter. Those are the four grain that they grow a lot down east that will grade individually, not like the west side. But Patrick could tell you more about that because that's his department. And that's one reason that I thought it was different, like the grading system. Plus, like I mentioned a little bit, we're not clustered together. So again, the lab in Thunder Bay for the CGC was there for everybody to use, and because all the elevators were clustered, there was a nice lab—big—so people could--. You know, there was a lot of stuff to learn in there, not just--. There was a lot of samples to look at.

To be good at inspecting grains, you have to look at grain a lot, and different kind of harvests. Every harvest is different. One could be the sprouted, the thing they are wrong with, and the other one could be the midge, which is infected by insect eating the grain. Another one could be heated, another one could be wild oats. There's many—fusarium, eye fuzz, whatever—there's a lot of things that can go wrong in the grain, so the more you see it and the more you see different grain, well, then you get better at it. When I came in Quebec, there was railcars to be graded, but now we don't do railcars. They say that we're not enough inspectors, and it costs a lot of money to get them over here, so the government has decided to drop that, and they hire private company men now to inspect the grain for the rail cars. Or they previously inspect them out west before they get here. So, an official grader from out west graded them before they got here, so all they have to do is place them in silos as soon as they receive the grain here.

[1:10:00]

NP: Now what elevators, then, are considered part of the eastern system?

ST: The eastern system, you have the main office of Ontario in Chatham. Chatham, that's part of us now. Before it used to be part of Thunder Bay, but now Chatham is part of Quebec. Other elevators that it has employees full time, you have Quebec, Baie Comeau, Port Cartier, Montreal, Chatham that I said, but that's about it. But elevators that we'll take care of that we don't have any manpower full time, there's Halifax, Sorel, Trois Rivieres, Prescott, Hamilton, Goderich, and I might forget one, a little one out in Ontario.

NP: So, those ones that you mentioned, the second group, do they use private inspection, or you go as required?

ST: We go as we get called in to go there. But again, you have to be flexible. This job, like you have to be on the road, work overtime. Another thing that I thought it was totally different, Thunder Bay has a rule in the union that five hours overtime during the week, that's all we could do. There was five hours overtime. You couldn't go to midnight, it was 9:00. From 4:00 till 9:00 at the end, that was five hours overtime, and that's it. Go home after. Go take care of your kids, your family, whatever. "You did 13 hours today. That's enough." We could do that twice during the week. During the weekend, we could do 16-hour shifts. Over here, there's 16-hour shifts as many as you want, for the employees of the elevator. For the government, we cannot do more than two in a row. But that part of overtime I find that's the toughest thing.

NP: Doing all that overtime?

ST: Oh, yeah. A 16-hour shift is inhuman. When we go to Trois Riviere, we do 16-hour shift inside. We don't even get out of the elevator, not even for lunch or supper. So.

NP: We have just a couple of minutes left, and I just want to ask you about the different elevators. Is one elevator pretty much like the next, or do elevators have reputations?

ST: I think they have reputation. I think the reputation could change either--. Or you could have a reputation of the cleanliness of the elevator. You could have reputation of the integrity of the elevator. If they like to try to put some grain that they're not supposed to without telling you. While some will be honest, and they'll say, "Hey listen, we've got some grain. We're going to try to open very little. We went are entitled." And the worst is--. All they have to do is you come to the inspection side and say, "Hey, we're going to try to get rid of some of our bad grain. We're going to open it a little bit. If you see that we're over, just tell us." If people were that easy to get along, you know, but instead they try to do it behind you just to see if you're going to see it or not. Well, in

terms of integrity—without naming any elevators—yes, the integrity or the reputation of an elevator in the cleanliness of the elevator, like the one I'm here, that I will say that Bunge is a clean elevator.

NP: Who owns Bunge? Like where's their head office?

ST: Bunge? Bunge, United States. Well, Bunge is one of the biggest in the world right beside Cargill. They've got Bunge China, Bunge England, Bunge USA, Bunge Canada—you've got Bunge everywhere.

NP: So you have Bunge, Cargill. Who else are owners of those elevators that you work in here?

ST: Oh, Dreyfus, Upper Lakes, Viterra now that bought Montreal. Cargill, Dreyfus, Port Cartier, Baie Comeau. Quebec is Bunge. Montreal is Viterra. Sorel is JRI. Trois Rivieres is Upper Lakes. And out in Ontario, I'm not sure. I can't give you any. Chatham, I don't know what they belong to, and the other places.

NP: I know that I've taken you right up to the time that you have to leave. This has been a fantastic interview. Thank you so much. I do want to get some of those names that you've mentioned, so perhaps you could just write them down for me of people in Thunder Bay that you've worked with that you think would be good. Like I have Mr. Belanger and Mr. Eres?

ST: Mike Toskovich you could write.

NP: Toskovich, spelled--?

ST: T-O-S-K-O-V-I-C-H. Toskovich. Something like that.

NP: Should be an easy one to find.

ST: Yeah. Mike Toskovich. Well, Bill Belanger. You've got Billy Green as well.

NP: We've interviewed Mr. Green. Great guy.

ST: Yeah. He's got a little voice, huh? [Laughing] "Well!" [Laughs] "Well, Stefan!" Well, he was actually a good man. I liked him. Murdoch McKay, which is from the Grain Commission.

NP: Yes, yes, Murdoch and I have had several conversations.

ST: He's a good man too. I like him.

[1:15:00]

NP: Actually, I was reading some history, and there was a Murdoch McKay back in 1919 or 1916 working.

ST: That was his grandpa?

NP: That was his grandpa, yeah. Neat.

ST: You know, this guy Murdoch McKay, we had a golf tournament every year and he pissed all the money away. His money, not the company money. I don't know. He's my boss now. It's funny. He was my boss in Thunder Bay, but now he's my big--. [Laughing]

NP: Your big boss, yeah.

ST: I mean, I don't see him everyday coming to work, but he's my--. But those are--. Billy Green is--. Bill Belanger, he was under Billy Green. He was a foreman, but he was a man that he could have suspended me many times for insubordination, I guess, for talking back. But his daughters were born—I've got two daughters and he's got two daughters—three years apart, both, same month both, a week apart, both. I says, "Hey, I think I like him." [Laughing] So, anyhow, they went to school together, my daughters and his. No, he's got one daughter and one son, Adam. That's right. I've got two daughters. But anyhow. Those are the people. But you have my phone number.

NP: Okay, Can I take one more minute? Yeah. Can I take one more minute?

ST: Yeah, but you have my phone number at home, and if you have any more questions, I can answer you.

NP: Yes, right. Okay, great. What we hope to do—as I mentioned to you, I think, off-tape—was we were hoping that we can get a centre established in Thunder Bay to recognize the important work that the grain industry has done, sort of from the shipping to the handling to the shipping out. And if we were to do that, what are important things that you think should be recognized in a centre such as that?

ST: Well, I think living in Thunder Bay for 25 years—I know I'm not born there, and I'm not an English person, I'm French from Quebec—but from what I understand of Thunder Bay is the industry of the grain was a big factor why they city is still there. Or it got built in the first place. That and lumber. But there was 15 grain elevators when I got in Thunder Bay, 1981. There's maybe seven standing right now. Operating, maybe five. So, I would say the importance of the people that started the industry, you know, the importance. I think we were the hub, the central hub of the grain exportation of a good part of the economy of Canada for a good, good part of the last of the 20th century, now in 21st.

During the 20th century, many people sweated a lot to build those things and try to make the city a good city. We all know now that Thunder Bay is changing. The way they go, they're more medical-oriented now, and more technological. But back then, it was hard labour, you know? Thunder Bay was a hard-labour city. It was people, good men, that wanted to work. Get up in the morning, go do their time at work, and come home. They weren't maybe educated like the way people are now, but they were good people. Immigrants, a lot of immigrants as well that worked there. You know, Italians, Finlanders, Ukrainians, whatever, Polish, French, English. So, they all part to build this elevator and to bring a history, I guess, of what Thunder Bay stands for. I miss Thunder Bay. [Laughs] Yeah, I miss Thunder Bay.

NP: Aw. Okay. Thank you so much!

ST: So, beside that I don't know. I just said what I think of Thunder Bay. I think the industry, without the elevators, Thunder Bay wouldn't be the way it is. That's my point of view. I think Thunder Bay was built because of the end of the Great Lakes, that was the furthest you could go inland. Lumber and grain was dispatched there, and shipped out from there. But without the grain, I don't know if they would have survived or have 100,000 people there. The grain brought business. You can't forget the people that worked. At the end, that's basically it.

End of interview.