

Narrator: Brian Wright (BW)

Company Affiliations: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC)

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Summary: Retired operations supervisor for the Canadian Grain Commission Brian Wright discusses his career in the CGC's grain inspection division. He discusses his first job with the CGC as a sampler at National Elevator in the car shed and on ships. He describes the dangers of the working conditions, accidents that occurred, and the use automating and manual equipment. He then surveys the waterfront, sharing stories and unique features about the grain elevators, like the Pool 6 demolition, the closure of Pool 2, and the Pool 4A and B explosions. Wright then describes his ascent through the CGC to assistant and full inspector to operations supervisor, and he explains the growing responsibilities of each role. He recounts changes to the industry and CGC, like women joining the workforce, automation, the introduction of hopper cars, dust control, downsizing, new crops to inspect, removal of inward inspection, and removal of the Canadian Wheat Board. Other topics discussed include alcohol use on the job, the busy period of the '70s and '80s, close relationships amongst coworkers, work social activities, health issues with grain industry workers, and his sadness at the diminishing of the CGC's role in quality control.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: This is the morning of September 25, 2012, and I am conducting this interview on Cloud Lake Road. I will have the narrator introduce himself and his connection to the grain industry.

BW: My name is Brian Wright, and I started with the grain industry on September 14, 1970, as a sampler. I progressed through the ranks to operations supervisor in 2003 when I retired.

NP: We like to start with going right back to the beginning. Did you grow up in Thunder Bay?

BW: I grew up in Thunder Bay, correct.

NP: What was your first experience with grain elevators?

BW: Actually, I did not want a whole lot to do with grain elevators. I had just come out of high school and actually what I wanted to do was something totally different. I wanted to fly aircraft. My eyesight wasn't that great, so I had to settle for a private pilot license, and my dad was my instructor. I didn't have a driver's license so I was limited as to where I could go and what I could do. I was debating whether to go to university or college and try to get more education to do something. I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. I tried a couple of things. I tried pumping gas and that didn't work out. The job was in Port Arthur, and I am in Westfort, and commuting by bus wasn't working out for me. I gave that up after a couple of months, and I thought this is not what I want to do for a career. Then I went to work at Air Canada and loaded baggage for a while but that was short term which lasted about three months.

I came home one day, and my dad said that my godfather has said there was an opening for grain samplers at the Grain Commission [CGC]. His name was Bill Jarett. It turns out that I didn't know too much of what he was doing, but he was an inspector that worked out of our central office at the post office second floor. I thought that was interesting and I knew that they paid fairly well, but I didn't know too much about the job. I thought, "Well, I will go down and talk to him about it." I went down and he gave me a little tour of the commission floor that we had our offices on, and he explained a bit about the job, and he asked me if I was interested. I said, "Sure." He gave me an application to fill out, and I took that home and read it over and filled it out. The next day I came up and I was hired right on the spot. That was a Friday afternoon, and he said, "Well, you are going to have to go through this swearing in thing," which they did back then and they do now I hear. You had to swear allegiance to the Queen and everything. I thought this is something that I am working for a government now. I had to start on Monday. That was September 14th.

My first job was at the National Elevator, which is now Cargill over at the Mission. In those days, National was a busy elevator that had a lot going on there. I think it was probably the third busiest in the harbour. Interestingly enough, too, there was 22 or 23 elevators when I started back then, but now there are nine or so including Canada Malting. I didn't really know what to expect when

I got to the elevator, and I still had no car. When I was uptown talking to Bill and one of the other inspectors were there who worked and one of our guys who worked at Maxwell's, he said, "Oh don't worry. I know where you live, and he had parked there, and I had lived there across the road. I will give you a ride." That was great. I went there and introduced myself. There is all these WWII vets inspectors hovering around, and here is me who just got out of high school, and I thought, "Oh boy, what am I in for here?"

There were other samplers there and a government inspector PI 1. They showed me the ropes a little bit. My job with another sampler was to go out into the car shed, and they had boxcars in those days, so it was fairly busy. They had four sets of tracks and five receivers to receive the grain where the boxcars were unloaded. There is 20 cars spotted at any given time, but the five were unloaded at the time. So our job, myself and another guy, was to go out there and obtain a sample from each boxcar. The way we did that was that the car was unloaded by grain shovellers that they had in those days. You didn't have any automation at that elevator. The grain would be unloaded into a big hopper and would go via a conveyor belt to a series of buckets on a conveyor belt, and of course the grain was elevated up into the scale floor and weighed off and then distributed.

NP: Let's go back to the actual sampling. As a novice sampler were there challenges in the car shed?

BW: It was easy, but you had to really pay attention because there was a lot going on in the car shed, and it was dangerous. Not only the dust--. And we had to wear masks, and I chose not to because I found them too restricting, and you had to wear work boots of course. Every time the set of five cars were unloaded, the horn would sound, and they would have a winch man, and he would be winching these cars out and a new set would come in. When you heard that horn, you had to get out the way real quick. As a matter of fact, I remember one incident in Port Arthur where one of the elevator workers got caught in between the cars. The winch man actually hit the horn at the same time he hit the lever, and the guy was coming right out between the cars and he was killed. That was a real wake-up call for everybody to pay attention to what was going on.

NP: Was that while you were working?

BW: That was while I was there. I can't remember what elevator it was at, but I think it was in Port Arthur. I think it was Pool 4. No, it wasn't Pool 4. It might have been Grain Growers A. Everybody was devastated. He was just a young fellow. I think he was maybe a year older than me. That was pretty terrible. There were a lot of things to watch. Part of my duties was to go on ships to sample grain with the PI 1 under his direction. That was tricky too because you had all of these buckets and scoops, and walking up most of the time it wasn't a walkway, it was a ladder that went from the dock up to the deck of the boat, and you had to be carrying these buckets and everything. Sometimes the trimmers would help you, but most of the time they wouldn't. You get up on the deck and of course there was a lot going on the deck even when you were sampling. You had to be careful of the empty holds, and if you

got too close, and of course the grains comes out of the spout so fast you had to be careful that you didn't lose your scoop and then lose your balance. Again, that happened too that there have been people that have fallen into the holds. Fortunately though, the ones that I remember anyway there was grain in the hold, so they were not hurt that bad. There is always something to watch and you had to really watch in those days. Of course, now everything is automated in the office and most of our guys are in the office now so that eliminated all of that.

NP: How did they automate the system? First of all, talk about what the system was like before it was automated.

BW: As a sampler, my job in the car shed was to obtain samples. They had automated samplers which was basically a long chain with a series of little buckets that took scoops out of the grain as it flowed by to the leg—is what they used to call it—to be elevated upstairs. It would deposit the grain into a little hopper and down into a bucket. All I had to do really was to match up this sample with the boxcar it came from. I would write down the car number and mix up the sample with my hands a little bit and pour into a burlap bag at those times in those days and put the car number in and carry that into the office. The inspectors would work on the sample and put the official grade on it, et cetera.

NP: If you are doing five cars at a time then there would be five samplers?

BW: No, there was two of us. One day I would take three receivers and the other guy would take two, and then we would tag off the next day. It was not really that bad, but of course in the wintertime it got cold, and you could not really escape the cold. There is nothing colder than a grain elevator in the winter. You are walking around trying to get warm as best as you can. Once in a while, you would get to go into the office and get a cup of coffee if they decided they wanted you in there. Most of the time you get out and stay in the car shed. Depending on where you were, the guys were pretty good.

NP: I am just thinking about an elevator and thinking about the hopper underneath the cars as being unloaded and three tracks just being about to being unloaded.

BW: Four tracks.

NP: Four tracks, but if you are doing three, then just the physical getting from one place to the other---. So I am thinking of the little automatic sampler, Woodside. How did you physically do that? Did you do it at the end of each car?

BW: There was a light system in the car shed, and there was somebody called a lever man who was pretty good. I remember his name was Gunter Fischer, and he was always good to us. He would let us know if the car was elevated, and he would push a button

which gave the light to the weigh man on the scale floor, and he would know if the car was finished, and he could weigh off the car. As soon as we saw that light, we knew that we could clear the buckets and be ready for the next car. Once all five of those were all up, then they would winch in the next set of five cars and repeat the whole process again. Occasionally, though, we had to get in the boxcar because there would be partitions which could be basically a plastic separation in the grain where they have two different types of grain. Our automatics in those days were not designed to pick up a lot of samples. So a lot of times we had to physically get in the boxcar and grab a scoop or a bucketful of the grain because the sampler just wouldn't pick it up. That was dangerous because you had to have a guy standing there so that nobody winched the cars out while you are in it, and of course there are nails and everything. Back in those days at that elevator, everything was shoveled by hand. I am not sure if anybody described how that worked, but it was a tricky process and a very dirty dusty thing to do. The guys did it because somebody had to do it.

NP: When you had to take a sample inside a car, how was that done and was there a special process?

BW: No, you would just get in there and take a bucket and label it. You would have to label what end of the boxcar it came from. There was a brake end and a no-brake end, and of course when the little wheel is on the outside that was a brake end. You just label where it was physically in the car. You could draw a little diagram if you had time just so the inspector would know that this sample came from that end of the car and the other one came from the opposite end of the car. Occasionally there were three or four different partitions in a car.

NP: Knowing how if you are using boxcars and doors--.

BW: The doors would be opened already and what would happen is as soon as they recognized--. The cars would be tagged on the outside that there is a partition inside, in which case the grain shovellers would know to just leave it alone until we come and take a look at it and get our sample out. If there was any more than two partitions in it and for sure we would have to get a physical sample and jump in the car get out sample and get out. But there is somebody always there to let us know what was going on.

NP: You say very nonchalantly that you would jump in a car, but when the cars are loaded with grain, how do you jump in a car?

BW: It is not easy, but there is a partition, and if the partition is a small amount, it would be in one corner and there would be larger amount in the other, so the grain shoveller would get in there and as carefully as he could move as much grain out as he could. You could get in the car and walk over to where that partition was, but he had to be careful too because you don't want to rip the partition in between and mix the two grains together. Otherwise, there would be written reports to be written by the inspectors. It was a tricky thing. It didn't happen that often, maybe one a week or a couple of times a week, but it did happen.

NP: Did you have to take a sample that was representative of the load or just take a scoop?

BW: No, it was a grab sample and of course everything would go through the automatics, and if we did pick up enough sample from the automatic, then we would use that sample because it was more representative. It was caught all the way through and maybe baptized that sample with the grab sample that I had.

NP: What does baptize a sample mean?

BW: Just add to it just enough because they need to work on a roughly two-pound sample. If it was less than two pounds, we would have to add a little bit from the part that we grabbed just to add enough so that they can analyze it. But most of the time we try to let the automatic catch the car because it was more representative.

NP: Were you also responsible then for if there were issues with what was supposed to be there and wasn't? Or you just took what was there and somebody else--.

BW: I am not sure what you mean?

NP: If a car was--. And you said there was supposed to be a certain number of bushels of a certain grain and that there wasn't--.

BW: No, that was the weigh staff. I was on the inspection staff, and that would be a weigh staff job. They would do what they call load lines where you could see where the dust line on the inside of the car, and they would measure that, and they would compare. I guess there were calculations, but I am not sure exactly. But there were calculations to figure out what was in there and what should have been in there at the time. So there would be a loss or an overage but you would have to talk to a weigh staff person to get that knowledge.

NP: Was the weigh staff person also in the car shed?

BW: No.

NP: Would they be brought in if you noticed separations?

BW: No, there would be somebody called a trackman that worked at the weigh staff, and his job was to do the load lines if necessary and make sure the cars were unloaded completely and that there was no grain left in, and if there were, then they would

have the elevator staff winch the car back, and they would have to sweep it out properly, just to make sure that all the grain was out and that they had an accurate total of what was in it. That was their job, and of course the weighman would be on the scale floor, and he would do the official weighing with an elevator weighman. There would be two of them there.

NP: The trackman was government?

BW: Yes, he is the government trackman, and they have long since done away with that I am sure, at least I think they have.

NP: The sampling at National was done on cars that were shovelled, and it was a shovel house--.

BW: It was a shovel house yes. It wasn't a dumper house. There were a few dumper houses like Manitoba Pool 1 and Pool 4, I think, and Grain Growers and Richardson had a similar system. National had a shovel house, Sask Pool 7B was a shovel house.

NP: Western?

BW: Western. Oh yes, in the old days, Western. All the old elevators on the river I think were all shovel houses and Paterson.

NP: You were just out of high school, and you didn't have any experience with elevators before your job?

BW: Not a thing. There is a story I can relate it to you about my grandfather, and it is only for anecdotal purposes, but you are the first one I have told out of my family, so I will relate it to you.

My grandfather and my grandmother, I was pretty close to both of them, on my dad's side especially, but both sides. My grandfather was really special to me. I knew he worked at Paterson Elevator on the cleaner deck. He retired in the early '50s I guess. He only lived down the street on Brock Street from us, so my dad and I used to walk down and visit him all the time. We didn't talk too much about his job, but I know he always thought highly of John Paterson Senior, who owned Paterson Elevator and was a fighter pilot during the war. Let it go at that.

I had been on the job maybe a year, and I had occasion to work at Paterson Elevator. I went over there, and the PI 1 that was supposed to be there were loading cars, not unloading cars. His job would be to go upstairs on the distributing floor and catch a sample manually as the cars were being unloaded. He wasn't there, so I got moved over to do his job.

I was upstairs, and of course the distributing floor is a quiet place as far as people are concerned, but there are motors and everything and there is a buzz of machinery. There was a break in the action, and I am standing there looking out the window, and this fellow and--. I looked out of the corner of my eye, and I saw this fellow standing there. I turned around and I didn't recognize him or anything, but I hadn't seen anybody up to that point. This guy walked up to me, and I said good morning to him. He said, "Just do your job right, and you will do fine." And I thought that is an unusual thing to say instead of good morning.

But I thought, "That is weird." So anyway, I said to him, "That is good advice for anybody," and "I haven't seen you this morning. Who are you?" He said, "I am the timekeeper." I thought, "Okay." So, I went about my job and later that afternoon I had occasion to be in the superintendent's office downstairs, and I was talking to the general foreman. I remember his name was Harry Balmer, and he was just ready to retire. I mention to him about seeing this guy upstairs, the timekeeper.

Just to go back a moment, there was something familiar about this guy. He was not really anybody I recognised, but I recognized the voice somehow there was a familiarity to it. I said to Harry, "Who is this guy, the timekeeper, up there?" He looked at me and stared at me and he says, "We haven't had a timekeeper here since Charlie Wright did it." Charlie was my grandfather. He was talking about it. I said my grandfather worked here, but he was on the cleaner deck, and he said, "No, he was also our timekeeper." Then we both stared at each other, and he said, "What is your last name?" I said, "Wright." Then we both turned around and walked away. I never told anybody for a long time after that. It was the weirdest thing. You can take what you want out of it, but it was strange. I never saw the guy again. It was weird.

NP: You did have some family history in the elevators?

BW: Bill Jarrett, the guy who got me the job, he was married to a Wright. He was an inspector on the job. But other than that, I had no other family that was in the grain trade at all.

NP: Where did Bill Jarrett live?

BW: Bill lived on the corner of Heath and Amelia in Westfort.

NP: I remember that name from--.

BW: Bill and Mae Jarrett. Bill passed away 15 or 16 years ago now.

NP: When you first started what was your impression of elevators?

BW: Dirty and dusty and cold and, “What am I doing here?” Still, at that point I was not prepared to stay that long. I remember when I started, I was making \$2.95 an hour, and when I was pumping gas, it was \$1.50. So, for me that was a lot of money. I was still living at home, so I thought, “Is this something I want to do the rest of my life?” I was hemming and hawing, and I ended up that I stuck with it anyway. In the wintertime you got laid off, so we collect unemployment. I was living at home, and I thought, “Boy this is great.” So, I thought I would keep going. Then gradually positions opened up, so I applied for them and carried on from there.

NP: How long did they keep samplers at various elevators? Did they make it a habit of moving them around?

BW: Yes, quite often actually if people were off sick or on holidays, you would have to go and fill in. Or if there was a boat at the dock and they were not staffed for doing both, then you might have to move. Usually, it was the PI 1 that got moved. Samplers usually stayed where they were. But if they were shorthanded, they would take a sampler away and occasionally you would have to run all five receivers yourself. Instead of the two of us there, there would only be one which kept you busy. The day went by pretty quick.

NP: You mentioned PI 1 which stands for what?

BW: That is Primary Products Inspector I, which in the old days you use to call them GIA's, which is Government Inspector Assistant. That was the next steppingstone from a sampler. They eliminated the sampler positions somewhere in the latter part of the '70s, I think, and the entry position would have been PI 1 from then on. Now of course they are getting rid of all of them, and there will be nothing left.

NP: What was the atmosphere like in National Elevator, and who was running it at the time? Do you recall any of those kinds of details?

BW: The superintendent at the time was Don Munroe, and his general foreman was Gordon Wittick. For the samplers like myself, and even some of the assistants, unless you had been on the job awhile, they didn't really associate with us. But on the off times of course, they would spend a lot of time in our office playing cards, as you probably heard from Jack Lourie. There wasn't much of an association between the junior ranks and the elevator staff, although some of the elevator staff, like the rank-and-file guys, were pretty good. We got to know each other pretty well.

NP: Do you remember some of the people at National? Any characters that you can recall?

BW: Gunter Fischer was the lever man, and he was a German fellow. He was actually a very nice guy. I am still friends with one of the grain shovellers. Gee, I say I'm a friend of yours, but I can't remember his name. He lives out by Oliver Lake. A big, tall guy that should have been a basketball player. He is almost seven feet tall.

NP: If you think of his name let me know. Perhaps he is somebody we should interview?

BW: Yes, I can get you his name. He was a Czech fellow and very nice guy. The other guys at the time there was Jeff Maltin and Billy Richardson. Those two guys are now retired. They ended up as inspectors, and they actually worked on our staff before they went to the elevator staff. I don't think I can remember any of the other guys because there was so many turnovers back then, especially grain shovellers.

I can't remember any of the guys as they just come and go. I didn't spend a lot of time as samplers there because, as I say, there were 22 elevators and you had to move around. They wanted to get you moved around to get a feel for all of the elevators, so that you had some experience everywhere. There was a lot to cover.

NP: I don't want to put too much of a break into your career here, but I am interested in those elevators. Our group is called Friends of Grain Elevators, so we have a special interest in elevators.

BW: Like I say there was 22. I am guessing but at one point I did count 22.

NP: Let me go through the elevators as I recall them, and if you can think of anything that pops into--.

BW: Okay, I will do my best, but I am going back 42 years.

NP: I know you are doing very well so far. I am quite impressed.

BW: I have been thinking about this for a week now. [Laughs]

NP: I am going to start down at our present-day Bowater and the first elevator there I think it was still around, but it may have even been gone by the time you started. That was the Electric or the Phoenix.

BW: The Electric? They use to call it Northwestern. It was further down.

NP: No, Northwestern was next to it.

BW: I don't remember that one you are talking about.

NP: What I can tell you about the Electric that might refresh your memory. It may have been gone by the time that you started.

BW: I believe it was.

NP: It was the one where they used to raise worms.

BW: No, that was before my time.

NP: In the wooden elevator parts.

BW: Really?

NP: They were great for fishing.

BW: That is news to me. I didn't know that.

NP: The Northwestern was still there?

BW: That was where the Highway 17A and 17B are now, where they join now. That's in the turnaround basin, they use to call it. Northwestern and the one you are talking about, and then Paterson would be next.

NP: Do you remember anything at all about the Northwestern Elevator?

BW: Yes, I remember one of the inspectors on our job, Ed Zablony, his father was superintendent there at the time. Ed died before his dad. His dad just passed away three or four years ago at 90 something. Ed was 66 or something. Unfortunately, he passed away. I remember there was a shovel house, and it was also one of the dirtiest ones I have probably been at because where the automatics were, you had to go down into a dungeon, and there were rats scurrying around all over the place. It was not a very nice place to be.

You would get in there and get your sample and get the heck out. Actually, one of the other inspectors on our job, Frank Syrydiuk, use to be a grain shoveller there, and he retired from our staff as an inspector.

NP: Is he still around?

BW: Yes, he is, and I guess he is late seventies now.

NP: How is it spelled?

BW: S-Y-R-Y-D-I-U-K. He lives in Westfort right near Neebing Avenue. I can get you the address if you need that to.

NP: Okay, great. He was a shoveller at Northwestern?

BW: Yes, he was a shoveller at Northwestern.

NP: I am trying to get people that have worked at each of the elevators so that we get a sense of who spent long or formative years.

BW: Okay. Some of them I wouldn't know. But there might be a couple that stand out, and I will let you know.

NP: Moving on from there is Paterson. Anything other than your story of Paterson was there anything memorable about it?

BW: I remember our offices were huge, about the size of our house here. They were fairly new in 1970 and a little bit away from the car shed. Working in the office was like working in an office building. But the elevator itself was very clean, and the superintendent at that time—I can't remember his name—but Harry Balmer was the general foreman, and they were meticulous about keeping things as clean as possible. Of course, when you did that, there was less chance of infestation in contaminating the grain. The people who worked there, and I remember one fellow whose name was Bunty Mackenzie, he was a nice fellow, and he has long since passed away now. But he was in charge of his work crew. They kept the things in the elevator very clean. That is the thing that stands out for me anyway. Other than the fact that my grandfather worked there too.

NP: Was the synagogue still there when you were working there?

BW: No.

NP: That was the big annex building that was a very unusual shape.

BW: I don't remember that, no.

NP: Then you moved onto Western.

BW: There was Pool 5 and 5F.

NP: Five was Western, initially.

BW: Okay, you are way before my time. [Laughs] I don't feel so bad now. I call it Pool 5, 5F, and then there was Pool 10, which I think was named Pool 10 afterwards. Pool 10 is now Western, I think.

NP: This letter set of elevators--.

BW: Yes 5 was next to Paterson, then 5F was right next door.

NP: And E was before that.

BW: That is exactly right.

NP: And E was Consolidated at one time, but probably before your time.

BW: Yes, and we actually lived on East Gore Street, which is right across from the elevators. It is funny but to this day, I don't remember the trains as I was more interested in aircraft I guess back then. I don't remember the old steam engines and everything.

NP: So, you would be heading over the Brown Street bridge and down to the river and getting into trouble?

BW: No, that is my story, and I am sticking to that. It was a familiar area though, and the whole river was familiar to me. It was a place I could walk to without a car. I ended up buying a car because I was now on the job pretty steady back about 1972 or 1973.

NP: Westland D was the next one to come along.

BW: Westland D, I didn't spend a lot of time there, but it was also a dirty place. That is the one that they demolished back in the 1976. I remember.

NP: Some were clean, and some were dirty. What in your mind led to such a discrepancy?

BW: Probably management. It depended on how fussy they were with their elevator. Some cared and others didn't, depending on where you were. Of course, a grain elevator is hard to keep anything clean. There is dust everywhere. But some of them like Paterson were very nice. There was somebody sweeping the floor at any given time, whereas the other places, their grain would be piling up and maybe rats scurrying everywhere. It wasn't very nice. Depending on how old they were too, and the older they were probably the dirtier they were. Because things were falling apart and maybe the guys knew they were not going to be around the elevator that much longer so then who cares.

NP: We have crossed the water there and pick up Searle.

BW: Now Cargill was National in those days, and Searle right next door, side by side. I spent some time there. Searle was a good place to work. They seemed to treat their people very well.

NP: Searle became Sask Wheat Pool.

BW: It became Sask Wheat Pool. It was a co-op actually later on in the '70s. I am not sure how that progression worked. It was a good place to work too.

NP: Anything else notable?

BW: Searle was actually a dumper house. They had a little "donkey" which is actually a little locomotive. It would go into the car shed or behind the car shed and grab a car and bring it into the dumper. They would dump a car, one car at a time. It was a piece of cake. It was a good place to work for a sampler. You could spend more time in the office, which is what I liked because I could ask questions and learn something, so I could try and move ahead. Otherwise, with the WWII vets, you didn't get very far. "Get away kid. You bother me." Some of them were pretty good, and they would take you under their wing. But Searle was a pretty good place to work. I would say it was one of my favorites back then.

NP: Then you move up to Ogilvie.

BW: Yes Ogilvie, Pool 8, it was called after. That was owned by Sask Pool when I was there, and it was a good place to work too. It was a dumper house and again one at a time. On a good day they would unload, eight hours maybe 35 or 40 cars at the most and 40 would be a good day. It was boxcars back then, not rail cars. It was a good place to work because the automatic sampler was right next to where our office was, kind of out in the open and away from the dust. It was an excellent place to work. There was a lot of overtime at that elevator. They liked to work a lot of overtime. So if you wanted to pick up some extra hours and money, it was a good place to work.

NP: Why were they interested in overtime and not the other?

BW: I don't know, but maybe because they didn't unload that many cars at a time. I guess maybe they wanted to pick it up a little bit. Pool 8 was actually a starting house for vessels. Actually, they would either start a vessel or add to whatever the vessel picked up on the river and that would be the last point they would stop, so they wanted to make sure they had a turnover and enough grain in stock in storage to ship. That is possibly a reason, but I don't know. Again, it's management decision whether they work or not.

NP: Do you recall who management there was at the time you worked there?

BW: The general foreman's name might come to me. He has passed away. My dad and he use to play hockey, but I can't remember his name. But it might come to me later.

NP: You were mentioning that as a sampler you would have to work both in the car sheds and on the ships. You have spoken a lot about the car shed on those elevators that we have talked about so far. Anything about the shipping that maybe stands out, or was a ship at a dock pretty much just a ship at a dock?

BW: Some of them were different. The lakers, of course, you pretty well had to catch a sample on the deck, whereas a saltie you would catch up on the D floor, simply because the holds were so big, and they had to put the spouts in the hold so there is no way you could reach it with a hand sampler. That was the only difference. The ships were pretty dangerous at times because the older ships had a lot of cables around the deck where they winch the hatch covers back and forth. So you had to be real careful. The newer ones of course had a crane which would life the cover off and put it down, so you are out of the way. There was a bit to watch, and as a sampler I didn't spend a lot of time on boats because that wasn't your job really. That was a PI 1 or a grain inspector assistant's job. He was in charge of the boat, but if there was a lot to be done on the boats and if there were several spouts loading at once, then occasionally you would go out and give him a hand too and look after a couple of spouts, that type of thing.

NP: Did you prefer to work in the car sheds or on the ships?

BW: In the summer on the ships. You don't want to be on the boat when it is 20 below. It is terrible. There is no where to get out of the wind and the cold. Whereas you are out of the wind a little bit in the car shed, six of one, half and a dozen of the other. But it gave you a lot of incentive to study and get out and try to be an inspector if you could. In those days, there was some opportunity of course, but it took some time. Back in those days, we had so many people working at our staff, maybe 200 people, so that there might be two positions open and 200 people applying. So the competition was stiff.

NP: I think that all of the CPR elevators were gone by the time you started. They were the wooden ones along the Kam, but the Empire would have still been there.

BW: Yes, the Empire was there, and I think the year I started it burned down. I believe that was in 1970. I remember going to work at National or Searle, I can't remember which, and I remember it was on the news in the morning that it was on fire. I never worked at Empire. That was one of the only ones I didn't work at back in those days. Where else do we go from there?

NP: You head to P&H.

BW: P&H was an older elevator. I remember a few of the people that worked there. One guy is still there named Tom Polhill. He is the superintendent now. He has a few people there. I think his brother is still working there, and I can't remember who else. They are a good bunch of guys there to.

NP: Was it an easy elevator to work at?

BW: Yes, pretty easy and laid back. Again, it was a smaller operation, and their capacity wasn't like a 7A elevator, so it was kind of the old folks' home, if you wanted to go rest. If you were going to P&H, you are in for a treat for a week or two anyway. You got a reprieve from the big house, and it was fun to work at.

NP: McCabe's. Was it still McCabe's when you started?

BW: It was McCabe's then and actually the next one was Manitoba Pool 1, right next door.

NP: Right. Leapt over it.

BW: Manitoba Pool was probably one of the best elevators to work at. I think it was John Mallon who used to run that elevator. His two twin sons, Billy and Brian Mallon, used to work there as inspectors. One of them was superintendent at Pool 1 and one at Pool 3 just down the road a little bit. It was a good elevator to work at. They treated their people very well. It was an automatic dumper and a very clean car shed. The samplers had our own little office down there. We could get in and out of the cold. I remember one time at Pool 1 at Christmastime there was a boxcar that got winched in by mistake or the railway pushed it in by mistake. It was full of booze. As soon as they opened the door, of course, the guys knew this isn't grain, so the next thing half the car shed are loaded, and there were RCMP down there because it was a big deal that all this booze went missing. I think half the car ended up in someone's house. But it was a good place to work.

NP: Did they ever charge anybody?

BW: No, I don't think they did. I can't remember that they did. I am sure a few of them had a reprimand or two, but I don't think anybody lost their job or were charged, not that I can recall.

NP: It was Christmastime after all.

BW: Yes, it was.

NP: Santa had delivered it.

BW: Things were pretty forgiven back then. I mean booze was rampant, and of course you were not supposed to, but it was allowed basically because the managers were doing it, and our bosses were doing it. So they looked the other way.

NP: Yes, that is a theme that comes up very often in our interviews. It was a big problem. It just wasn't happening.

BW: It was tolerated. I remember many times, and especially working at National, where some of our staff and I didn't drink too much in those days, but I would follow them across the swing bridge, and they would be bouncing back and forth across the bridge. How people didn't get killed or hurt I don't know. I remember one time at 7A, it was Christmas Eve, by 10:00 in the morning they had to shut the elevator because everybody was so loaded they just couldn't work. The managers said we may as well give up for today. And a person or two did die later on. That was the end of the drinking.

NP: How did that happen?

BW: I remember it was 7A. There is a long dock down 7A to get to the offices, and I guess there was a fellow on 4:00 to 12:00 shift. He was coming off 4:00 to 12:00, and he was loaded and nobody went with him down the dock when he walked back to the parking lot to his car. He fell in the water and nobody saw him and he drowned. Of course, there was a big lawsuit and his wife ended up with a lot of money. That was the beginning of the end to the drinking. It was no longer tolerated anywhere on the property.

NP: Who was the person? If it is a lawsuit, it is general knowledge.

BW: You would be able to find out. I can't remember what the fellow's name was, but he was an elevator worker, and I am not sure where in the elevator he worked but that would be somewhere in the '80s.

NP: I had wondered why all of a sudden it seemed not acceptable or was acceptable and the act was cleaned up.

BW: It had to end somewhere, and this is the way it was just the law of averages caught up to everybody. People were getting hurt and one or two people died and that was just the end of it. The public outcry was--. Guys were coming home drunk, and their wives were saying, "Where are you going, to the bar after work?"

NP: Yes, and where is your paycheque?

BW: "No, I am drinking at work." And there was a lot of gambling going on the job, too. I guess one thing led to another and that was the end of that.

NP: Gambling going on the job. Did it cross company and government lines?

BW: Yes. When I say gambling, I don't mean to make it more sinister than it really was. It was betting on this, betting on that. Guys were playing poker at work, and there was a lot of card playing in those days because in the wintertime there was a lot of down time, if you were not laid off. I learned real quick, and I wasn't a card player, but I learned real quick to play cards because if you didn't play cards, you did all the work. [Laughs] I learned real quick. "Deal 'em!" Yes, there was gambling for money. I never witnessed anything high stakes, but I imagine there was stuff going on. I wasn't privy to anything like that.

NP: It is the classic story of a person who bets his paycheque on leaping off the top of an elevator.

BW: Yes, it was done, and I know who the guy was, which was ridiculous. Of course, that is all associated with drinking too in those days. There were rumors that people actually lost their paycheques. It is just a matter of time. It will catch up to you. I wouldn't say it was prevalent, but it was probably the exception not the rule. Not everybody was into it.

NP: We are making our way along. We come to McCabe. It is interesting we are talking about alcohol and now we can talk about drugs because just the other week, we did a tour of the elevators by ship, and one of the former managers at UGG said that they had a grow-op at UGG.

BW: That is news to me.

NP: You did not know this?

BW: No, I did not know that. That was back in the '70s?

NP: In the '70s or '80s, and they had a burn.

BW: That is news to me. I did not know that.

NP: On top of the car shed apparently.

BW: I did not know that at all. It would have not made any difference to me as I wasn't into that stuff anyways. I was not a smoker and never did smoke. [Laughs]

NP: What about McCabe's? What do you recall it as an elevator?

BW: McCabe's was a busy elevator, and the set up at McCabe's was almost identical to National, so it was a very easy place. There was not much of a transition if you got moved from National to McCabe's, as it was the same set up. It was a busy elevator. Our offices again were fairly close to what was going on, and it wasn't unlike the others. I would say it was a fairly clean operation as well and a good place to work. That is about all I can think about that place.

NP: Did they have dumpers?

BW: No, but actually they had bobcats. They had guys running little bobcat machines. The bobcat looks like a mini tractor, and they would go into the car like a frontend loader and unload the car. They can do this pretty quickly. One of the guys that were a bobcat operator ended up on our staff. He is still working now as an inspector whose name is Steve Sidorski. That was a pretty good place to work.

NP: Now we have 7A and 7B.

BW: There use to be an elevator in between there.

NP: Thunder Bay Elevator. Was it still operating?

BW: No, it was torn down before I started or around that time. I didn't know about that elevator at all. Of course, 7A was the busiest elevator in the harbour. It was always going. My uncle, who is still around, was the head trimmer there, Bob Southern. He is still alive. He is 80 years old, and he just retired about 10 years ago after 51 years as a grain trimmer. He would be an interesting guy to talk to. I can give you his phone number.

Elevator 7A was a dumper house. It had four or five receivers or was it two dumpers I can't remember now but three or four anyways, but it was busy. Boxcars, you could do 100 cars in eight hours, unload. It was the busiest place in the harbour, and of course if there was overtime in those days. You had the hour off for lunch then you stopped work at 5:00 and come back at 6:30 and do 75 more after supper. It was busy, and when you went home, you were tired, as a sampler. And even as an inspector, you are not sitting down for any length of time. It was a good place to work, especially if you wanted overtime. Probably it was the place to work for overtime.

NP: And 7A and 7B were they always thought of as one?

BW: They are under the same licence, and they always have been, but they are separate elevators. We staffed them separate and so do the elevator staff, and 7B is about half the capacity of 7A. It was a shovel house, and you would do half the inwards that 7A side would. It was a little less busy but there were a pretty good crew there as well. Everywhere I worked I don't think there was anyone I ran across that I could really say I didn't get along with. They were all good people.

NP: Do you recall who was managing then?

BW: I can't remember the names now. On the 7A side Billy Cole was the general foreman and Paul Naff was the general foreman. There were a couple of foremen.

NP: Are any of them still around?

BW: No, I think they are all gone now. Frank Fiori was the superintendent, and he is gone now. I think they are all gone. On 7B side, there was a couple of inspectors that are still around. I think Del Archer is still around, and I can't remember the other fellow's name. But the same superintendent and same general foreman. I think there is one other guy that works at MIT now, which would be the old Searle, and his name is Vince Lombardo. He used to work at 7B when I was there. He is now at MIT which is Mission Inland Terminal. I can't remember the other fellows' names.

NP: Then come Canada Malting.

BW: Yes, Canada Malt, we did staff that, and I was in charge of that place in 1984 or 1985. The only time we actually worked there was when they unloaded the special bin barley, which was malt barley. Of course, the malting process we had nothing to do with it. It was the Commission employees. The making the malt, sampling, and inspecting we had nothing to do with that, but we would grade the cars and put dockages on them when they were unloaded if there was barley. It was a nice place to work also. You are done at 1:00 PM in the afternoon and basically the Canada Malt people paid our salary indirectly, but they paid our salary. They required services, so they paid it. I didn't have to answer to our own people, so if I am done at 1:00 in the afternoon, I went home, which is pretty good deal. For two years I did that. We rotated after that. Our people didn't spend a lot of time there. We had two people based there, and that was it.

Pool 3 next door was the next one, I guess. It was Manitoba Pool 3, and it was run pretty much like Pool 1. All good people again. The Mallons ran that. They treated their people well. Every time we worked overtime, they would buy pizza in for us and treated us good. It was a good place to work.

NP: The fact that they had the exterior bins there, did that have any implication?

BW: Do you mean Pool 3?

NP: Yes.

BW: No. In later years they used to unload trucks there quite a bit, and we used to have to sample the trucks. That was about it. But as far as the bins themselves, no, we didn't have much to do with it. We were simply in charge of operations for unloading. If the trucks were unloaded at the far end of the slip, all the grain still passed over the same automatics, so it really didn't mean much to us.

NP: Was it a shovel house?

BW: Pool 3 was not a shovel house. I can't even remember what Pool 3 was. Isn't that strange.

NP: We will find out. What about Pool 6?

BW: Pool 6 was a good place to work, but it has gone now. It was a similar set up to National as well and the capacity was about the same. Our offices were set back a bit, and they were old offices and probably pre-WWII. They were all wood and dirty, and even when it was clean it was dirty. We had quite a staff there. It was a busy place to work. It was a dumper house or a shovel house? Again, I can't recall. I think it was a dumper house as well.

NP: Any people there that you recall?

BW: Elevator staff people?

NP: Yes.

BW: Let's see now, but I can't recall who was there now except for our staff. I know Len Sequin was there as an inspector, and there was Jimmy Innerson. Len Sequin of course ended up chief inspector for Canada. He is my best friend in public school. The elevator staff, I can't recall who was there. I can picture these guys, but I can't remember their names, but I am pretty certain they are all gone now.

NP: Since we are talking about Pool 6, it was imploded before you retired.

BW: Yes, that was back in the '70s.

NP: What was your reaction to the demolition?

BW: It was sad to see it go. My dad actually worked at the airport, and he looked after the guy's aircraft that flew in to set the charges for that elevator. It was \$1 million he got to do that job. I stood there and watched it go up and then down. It was sad, but something had to be done, I guess.

NP: Where were you standing?

BW: I was over on Hillcrest Park or someplace, but I was quite a ways away. I couldn't see a whole lot.

NP: You were not the person with a glass of champagne toasting the demolition?

BW: No, that wasn't me. I imagine there were a few, but it wasn't me.

NP: We come to little Pool 2.

BW: At Pool 2, I was the last, myself and the inspector-in-charge Loris Brescasin, who is still around on our staff. He and I closed the place up. We were the last ones in the building. It was in the '70s, but I can't remember exactly what year it was. I was still an assistant, so it had to be before 1979. We locked it up, and that was it. It has been the same ever since as far as I know.

NP: What is involved in locking up an elevator?

BW: No, it is just a figure of speech. The actual locking up is done by the managers and staff. We were the last ones out of the building, and that was it. Just shut the door and away you go.

NP: What about your equipment and things?

BW: That would come out at a later time, whatever they could salvage out of there. Our dockage testers and the equipment we used in the inspection office would have to come out. But as far as operations were concerned, we were finished. We unloaded the last cars and that was it. No, we were not unloaded cars. We were loading out because they were getting rid of all the grain that were in the stocks. It would have been a good place to work. That was the only time I was there where I spent a week there, and then it closed up after that.

NP: Because of your career later on and the fact that you did work as the supervising inspector or operations supervisor, do you know what happened to old equipment? Because there were, over your time, there were a lot of elevators shut down, and there would have been a lot of government equipment?

BW: A lot of this equipment was sold off to the private sector. Some elevator out west wanted them, and some of the elevators here wanted them. So I guess they made a deal to sell quite a bit of this equipment. Other countries even bought some of it, like our Carter dockage testers, some of our old microscopes, and scales. Even the ones that were becoming obsolete were sold or scrapped some of them. I guess they tried to make a buck out of whatever they could. That is where most of it went. As they shut them down, of course, they would stockpile all this stuff and put it up for bids. Each one has a government serial number, so they all had to be accounted for at some point. They were either registered as scrap or sold.

NP: Moving on the waterfront, we come to Richardson.

BW: Richardson was a dumper house back then and a very good place to work because their automatics were in a little hut overlooking the dumpers, so you could see the car numbers and write everything down for your records. The automatic sampler was right in the office, so it didn't matter if it was 20 below, you are in a nice warm office. You had an elevator person with you. It was an excellent and busy place too.

It had a large capacity, and it was a going concern. Again, they used a donkey to move the cars into the dumper, back and forth. They didn't have a winch. I remember one time back in the '80s, one of the guys that was operating the donkey, he got out of the donkey I guess to do something, and the donkey was in gear and went backwards and went off the end of the tracks into the water in the slip. About a day or two later they were wondering how they were going to get this thing out, so they hired a stationary crane and went to the end, and they were winching this thing out. I walked out to see what was going on, and all these white hats from the elevators were there and managers and stuff. So, they winched this thing out of the water and put it back on the track, and they're walking around and up and down and looking, and I said, "There is no use trying to start it is flooded." These four or five white hats turned around and looked at me, and I thought I had better get the heck out of here real quick. So I wandered away, and there was no humour around that track. That was funny. [Laughs]

Richardson was a good place to work. There is one guy who was a general foreman Ray Buffington, and he is still alive, and he was the general foreman. The guy who was the superintendent actually was the superintendent of Paterson. He just passed away, but I can't remember his name, either. Terrible time forgetting all these names. But Ray is still around.

NP: We come to Pool 4A and B.

BW: I didn't spend a lot of time there, but they are both busy places and dumper houses, at least one of them was. One of them was a shovel house, I believe 4B which was a good place to work again. I don't remember too much about the elevator staff. I remember some of our guys that used to work there I remember. I don't know if you need their names or not. I think Garth Craven was there on our staff. He was a sampler. Norm Bowers was there. He was a sampler. It was a good and busy place to work.

NP: That was the place where the two major explosions took place. Was there any kind of mystique or aura to the places because of the history?

BW: I didn't learn about that until much later. One of the guys that survived that I remember, he worked at Pool 3. He has passed away now. I can't remember his name either, but I do remember he had burn marks all over his arms, chest, and face. A really nice guy. There are a couple of us talking to him one day. We tried to get out of him what exactly happened. Apparently, he was a real hero. He carried a couple of people out of there. They had the fire escape outside the building, and he went back in the building and got them out of there. It was really good, but I can't remember his name. He wouldn't talk too much about what really happened. That was back in the '40s or something.

NP: It was in the '40s or '50s. There was a '45 and a '52.

BW: That is before my time, but no one really spoke about it that much, so you probably know more than me.

NP: Now Alberta Pool was still in there at the time.

BW: Pool 9 was there, and I think that is where I met George Marks, and he was in charge there the year I started maybe. He was just leaving, or did he pass away that year? I am not sure.

NP: No, I think he had a heart attack that year.

BW: I remember meeting him.

NP: It depends what year you were there.

BW: It was in the '70s that I would be there.

NP: He was still there until 1975 or 1976. He retired but not at Alberta Pool,

BW: No, they moved them quite a bit. Every year they got a different elevator to work at. I only worked with him the once for some reason. I guess because there are so many elevators, we just never got to work together. But I did the one, and I was there for the day. That was a special-bin barley house. They only unloaded special-bin barley, and that kind of thing for malt. That place didn't last long either. They tore that down fairly quickly. I can't recall when.

NP: Was it an old place?

BW: Pool 2 was the oldest in the harbour. I believe that was in the 1800s somewhere. It was the oldest. But Pool 9, which was Alberta Wheat Pool Elevator, so I am pretty sure it was probably one of the oldest ones. That one and Westland would probably be the oldest back then, and then the ones on the river of course.

NP: Then there was UGG.

BW: Grain Growers was a busy place to work. It was a dumper house, and our automatics were in the basement right below the dumper. There were two receivers and two cars at the time. I remember on one receiver wherever our little hut was where the automatics were, it was a real dirty place to work. But occasionally they would unload screenings, which would be basically dust with some seeds in it. They would pelletize the screenings, and it would be used for animal feed. It was just basically dust they were unloading, and you couldn't walk outside the door. You could cut it with a knife, it was so thick. Choking and coughing and throwing up. It was horrible, but fortunately it didn't happen that often, maybe just once a week. It was a dirty place to work. I guess it was an older elevator as well and also very busy. Actually everybody was busy in those days and everybody had work to do.

NP: You started in the '70s, and it was the decade of the '70s that was really--.

BW: All through the '70s, it was busy. The '80s actually were very busy because I think we went on strike actually at one point in the '70s and '80s, so to make up for that time they were working seven days a week. Back in those days, you worked two, three, four or five nights a week in addition to the eight hours or seven and a half that we worked, and you would work Saturday and Sunday if there were no unloading cars on Saturday, there may be a boat at the docks, so you would have to come in and load the boat. It was busy, and there was a lot of money to be made although comparatively to the elevator staff we didn't make a lot of money. But if you wanted to make any money at all, you could do it real quick.

NP: But you did have to work long hours?

BW: Long hours and you didn't have much of a home life either. I ended up getting divorced. My first wife had had enough. We had two young kids and two days before Christmas that was the end of that. I still figure that had a lot to do with it, as I was never home. I hardly ever saw the kids. In those days, you had to work overtime as you were obligated. You were not covered under the Bill of Rights. You had to work, and unless you were sick and could prove you were sick, you had to work. You were on the hook for it or find somebody to work for you. But that was almost impossible because everybody was working, so you might find somebody one day, but the other three nights you were stuck. That was the way it was then and of course things tapered off in the '90s, and things were not quite as busy, and the elevators closed or were knocked down etc. Now we are down to basically bare minimum now.

[Audio pauses]

NP: We have had a brief pause. Now I would like to just go back to how your career progressed, if you could take a few minutes to talk about moving through the different steps and the major responsibilities.

BW: I started in the '70s as a sampler and since then that position has been done away with. The next progression would have been a PPI, Primary Products Inspector 1, which would be a government inspector's assistant. Basically, your job would be to help the inspector do his job. You would be responsible, in charge of, loading the vessel, obtaining representative samples while the boat is being loaded to give to the inspector-in-charge who would certify the grain, that it was clean and load it as requested.

You spent a lot of time in the office going through samples with the inspector, hand picking samples, ascertaining dockages. Dockages is a percentage of material that--. All the grain unloaded at the terminal elevators was dirty, so you would have to obtain a dockage which is material in the grain foreign material that can and has to be removed before you can accurately put a grade on that car lot of grain.

There were a couple of competitions that came up while I was a sampler, but of course I didn't have the experience. As I was saying, if you wanted to learn you were not going to learn a lot at the elevators. You pretty much had to learn on your own time. I did spend some time up at the grain exchange, at the post office building, learning. The inspectors that were posted there were pretty good. If you wanted to learn, they would teach you about varieties and grading and that kind of thing, but you had to do it on your own. There wasn't time in eight hours, so if you were working a 4:00 to 12:00 shift you might be able to come up a few hours before your shift. There were a few competitions, but I didn't do very well with them right off the bat. That would be in the early '70s.

Then finally I got a break in 1973 I think it was, where there was a competition that came up for an assistant. I think they were going to promote two or three, and this one I did make it. I got promoted. It was a bit of a bump in pay. I believe I was making a little over \$3.00 an hour then and that was good. Then I had the chance to be in the office and work with the inspectors. They got to know me, and I got to know them. Interestingly enough, one of the things that went with that job was, as I was saying earlier, these guys were WWII vets, and they were hard-drinking guys. One of my jobs was to take a list of what they wanted to drink, and I would be at the LCBO at 10:00 AM to pick up what they wanted to drink and bring it back to the elevator. Sometimes they would pay me and sometimes they wouldn't. That was a part of the job back then. Of course, that has gone completely now.

I learned quite a bit and moved around and learned about all there was to learn about the job. In 1978, I believe a competition came up to be an inspector, and I put in for that job. An inspector in those days was not a PI-3, it was a PI-2 job. You entered on the PI-2 level job. As an inspector, you did the same thing, but you are on probation for two years. Then you had to re-write an exam to qualify as a PI-3. If you got the job, you were promoted as a PI-2. I studied and finally got on a list. I think I was seventh or eight on that list. Then I got the job as a PI-2 in early 1979.

That was great. Now I am in the office all the time. I don't have to go out in the cold. Everybody else can do that job, and I can tell everybody else what to do. In 1981 two years later, we had to do a written grading and an interview for a PI-3. It was more or less a formality, but you still had to pass. Then I was promoted to a PI-3. It was around that time that unfortunately I was going through a divorce and the competitions came up to be a PI-4. That was the inspector in charge of each elevator. There was a PI-4 at each elevator. After going, and in the process of going, through the divorce, it was impossible to study. I didn't make the list and placed second or third. There were only openings for only one or two, and I didn't get the job. The competition came up again and the same thing I just didn't want to study, and I ended up doing the job anyways in an acting position, but I never really got promoted to a PI-4. I wanted to, but I couldn't go through it. It was unfortunate.

In the '90s, I got really sick in 1996/97 and it was life threatening. I had already put in almost 30 years, so I was looking to get off the job. I wanted to get my pension somehow out of it. So, I started to get a little better in 2000. The managers promoted me to this operations supervisor's job, which was an excellent job. I loved it, and it was a PI-5 job. I did that job for two years. Then the government at that time wanted to eliminate some of our staff, reduce our staff, so they implemented something called workforce adjustment, which allowed me to-- I'd still take a penalty for my age and my years of service—I was two years short on both—but I would get an extra year's salary and severance pay. There was no cut off on it. I was actually getting full severance, so I figured it out. I would be working for about \$2.00 an hr, so I thought there is no point in sticking around. I may as well go, and my health was getting a whole lot better, so I decided to leave, and there is where I ended it in 2003.

NP: Let's go back to the PI-2 was almost like an in-training for PI3.

BW: Yes, you are doing the same job.

NP: The PI3 was the person who was a full inspector?

BW: Yes.

NP: Then you moved up and now you were able to tell PI-2s what to do. What was the difference of the job of a PI-3 level?

BW: A PI-3 you could, if there was overtime available and if there was no PI-4, you could actually be in charge of the shift, which was the only real difference. As far as the job was concerned, it was identical. That is exactly why they eliminated that position after a while because there was no need for a PI2. You are basically the same person doing the same job for less money. One of the guys on the job appealed it. Yes, I think they called it an appeal, and he won it, so they had to eliminate that position all together. If you were promoted to an inspector, it was a PI-3. A PI-2 didn't last all that long.

NP: The PI-5?

BW: A PI-5 was a managerial supervisor job.

NP: In charge of the various elevators?

BW: When I was there and before I got promoted, there were three PI-5s doing the same job I ended up doing by myself. There would be one person in charge of operations, which would be staffing. They would all take a turn at re-inspections. They were based out of our central office, so they would take a turn at doing the re-inspections where producers would send in a request to have our people take another look at samples that were already graded. They would look for a promotion in grade, that kind of thing. It was a manager's job, and it wasn't a union-paid job. So it was a big step between a 3, or a 4, to a 5.

NP: The PI-5s were at central office?

BW: They were based out of central office.

NP: The PI-4s were the ones in charge of the various elevators?

BW: Yes, that is right. They would be on strictly day shift, whereas the PI-3 would be in charge of 4:00 to 12:00 or midnight and that kind of thing. Then in later years, of course, that was appealed as well, so the PI-3 in charge of a shift would actually be an acting PI-4 and rightly so. You are in charge of these people. You are doing basically the same job, so why not get paid the same money.

NP: That is right, and you are also doing the worst times.

BW: Exactly and whereas a PI-4 could sit there—and you ran the show—like God!

NP: As a young inspector in training, what did you see as qualities for a good grain inspector?

BW: You had to know your varieties, of course. You had to re-qualify every year. You had to pass varietal examinations. You had to be a seed analyst, and you had to know your oil seeds. You had to re-qualify every year. They would give you a test. For to be a seed analyst. You were given a couple of packages of mixed oil seeds, and you had to look at them through a microscope to separate them all and identify them. The other grains, of course, you had to be a varietal expert. You had to know what you were doing. If you didn't qualify, you were uptown studying until you did qualify.

Your judgement had to be there. You had to be kind of a part politician, part policemen, and part everything because you are dealing with multi personalities. You are kind of the boss, and a lot of people are coming to you asking questions. You had to be part public relations, too, because occasionally we had tours come through the elevators, depending on where you were at. Pool 1 was famous for having tours. 7A. And if you were there, it was part of your job—but not the PI-4's job—but your job to explain to them what the operations was. So you had to be a little bit of everything.

You could not be a slob. You were expected to be presentable and to look the position. It was a position. It wasn't a rank-and-file job like a rat out in the elevator collecting samples anymore. You were in the office. It was an office job, so you were expected to behave yourself accordingly. It was good. And we had a lot of fun in those days. It wasn't all work. It was nice!

NP: Did you have a lot of fun in those days?

BW: Yes, I think so. You got pretty close to everybody because you are working so many hours together. I knew these people as well or better than my own family. Card playing was still there, I guess, on occasion but it got less and less. Like with Bob Ekholm and myself, we would go fishing and hunting off the job. We were a big family, and it was lots of fun. At times it was really nice to go to work. It was a pleasurable job.

But then in the late '80s and '90s, it started to be more do as you are told, and you were more of a robot. You had to do the job accordingly and everything had to be correct and politically correct. You couldn't say this, you couldn't do that. You had to be very careful. And of course, by this time, we had a lot of women on the job. When I started there weren't any women. It wasn't till the mid to late '70s when we started to hire some women. It was more regimented, I think, if I had to use a word. It was a collection of guys having a good time back in the old days. That was the way it was then. But now it is not.

NP: Speaking about women coming on the job, because a lot of people we have interviewed retired before women started on the job, just how did that come about and just anything you might have to add to the general comments that you make? It wasn't all sweetness and light from what I understand?

BW: No, it wasn't. There was a lot of resentment. Of course, the WWII guys, they loved it because, "Oh, we have women on the job now." That was something else. Some of them didn't like it. But I think most of them kind of liked the idea. I think the way it all started was Confederation College had a program out. I can't remember what they called it, but it was getting woman involved in traditional workforces. I can't remember what the terminology was.

They allowed us to hire these girls on a part-time basis, just to see if they would work out in the grain industry. A lot of them didn't. A lot of them didn't like the dirt and the dust, but some of them did, and some of them stuck it out. There are one or two of them that are still on the job and have gone through the ranks. One of the first girls we hired is now in Winnipeg, and she is a staff-training officer for all of Canada. She did really well.

Most were accepted. There was a bit of favoritism as far as some of the PI-4s—the guys in charge of the elevators, the older guys—we would all try to take turns to let's say go out and sample a boat, but when it came to some of the girls' turns, the guys, the inspectors-in-charge would keep them in the office. They wanted to keep them out of there. There was a bit of favouritism, and that bred resentment back then. It carried through a lot of years. These days of course, it is nothing. They are hired just the same as a guy. The job is cleaner than it used to be. When they first came on the job, it was rough. But now of course everybody is in the office, and it is just like an office job. So there is no difference to anything else. And that is about it for there.

NP: In circumstances like that—I was working in a non-traditional field as well—did women quit because they didn't feel welcome?

BW: Some did, although I don't recall anyone actually saying that. But I am certain some of them did. They resented the fact that they were resented, and they just couldn't hack it. Or they felt maybe they should try something else. But that was the whole idea of

the program. It was to give them a chance to do it, and some were suited, and some were not. It was just the way it was. A lot of them liked the job, but they didn't like to do certain types of it, but they didn't want to go on the boat. They didn't like climbing up the ladder with all these buckets and scoops. They just didn't want to do that. In those days, you couldn't pick and choose. It came with the job. You either did it, or you didn't do it. A lot of them did actually pack it up because they just couldn't handle it.

NP: Physically. There were physical aspects to it.

BW: Physically and mentally, too, because there was a lot of stress. If you had four or five eyes looking at you, at everything you are doing, a lot of them were self-conscious about that, too. It was a real novelty back then to have women around the job after staring at these old timers all day, you know, you get these nice-looking women around you. This is a real treat! A lot of them didn't like that either. They didn't want the attention. They just wanted to fit in. For whatever reason anyway, a lot of them didn't make it. They didn't last.

NP: Who were some of the successful ones and the one that you mentioned?

BW: The one I mentioned her name is Louise, and I don't know if she is married again, but her name is Louise Christenson. She was a really good lady. A lot of guys on the job would say that she got some preferential treatment and maybe she did. There were a couple of others. One retired just recently as our staff-training officer. That was Jan Andrews. I am sure you are familiar with her. She came on quite a bit later I think in about 1980 or so, but she climbed up the ladder. I still say that some of these ladies climbed the ladder because they were women, and no one will convince me otherwise because I know for a fact senior management wanted women in higher positions. They did climb the ladder, but there is not much I can say about it. They were nice people. Janice is a good friend of mine. There are not too many around here. Debbie Jellicour was another one. She ended up as an inspector, and I think she just recently retired.

NP: Janice Trush?

BW: Yes, Jan Trush is another one. She was an assistant. She stayed as an assistant and worked in our office for quite a few years. She just retired and her husband Barry worked at Richardson for quite a few years. There were quite a few.

NP: The same time as women were coming into the job, the number of positions was shrinking?

BW: Yes, they were. Some of the girls that were on the job, they either didn't want to go any further or for whatever reason they were not promoted as quickly as some of the guys. I don't know why. That was in the early years. In later years of course, they moved up the ladder fairly quickly. I am not sure why. But that was the way it went.

NP: Change?

BW: Yes, change is good they say.

NP: And change is a challenge.

BW: Yes, change is a real challenge that a lot of guys resented. This is the way we have always done it and we don't want it done any differently. Some of them didn't get promoted because of that. They just couldn't accept change, and if you didn't, you fell by the wayside. You were not going anywhere.

NP: What major changes did you see on the job over your years there?

BW: From the start?

NP: Yes.

BW: Automation I would say was a big part of it. Our automatic samplers were moved into an office-type facility, so you are out of the harsh weather conditions and out of the dust. That was a big change right there. We went from boxcars to rail tankers, which were a big change which meant that they were still unloading the same amount of grain but in fewer cars. As far as our jobs were concerned, we had a little less to do because the tankers would hold approximately one and a half boxcars. So even though you are getting the same quantity coming in, you are doing less work actual grading and that was a big change.

Loading boats was another one. They eliminated the need to go out on the boat to catch a sample because it was also automated. That sample would come directly into our office where the inspector-in-charge and the PI-1 could do their thing with that. That was a big change. Basically, getting out of the elements, I think, was the major thing right there. You could breathe a sigh of relief and people's health improved because you were not hacking and coughing up dust all the time.

NP: Dust systems would have been improved over your time too?

BW: Probably, but I am not part of that.

NP: But you were gradually getting out of the dusty areas anyways.

BW: Exactly. The dust collection systems were improved. I would imagine that over the years they were more sophisticated than they were originally, if there were any. Some of the old elevators, I am not even sure they had any dust control on that. These days with government standards, they have to meet certain standards, so I would imagine the filtration system is a lot better than it used to be. I remember when I was a kid looking at the elevators you could see dust billowing up from these elevators. Now you rarely see anything like that because it is all collected. That was a major change too. Our management has changed quite a bit, and the way we do business has changed a lot and is going to change in the next year or two.

NP: What kind of management changes?

BW: Apparently, they are doing away with all the positions under a PI-3. Anybody less than an inspector will be losing their jobs. That was a big change. I think we are doing away with one commissioner or two commissioners where there use to be three. Chief grain inspector of Canada will be more responsible for a broader range of what goes on in the upper management. Everybody is going to have to accept more responsibility with less people and that is basically it. Our job here is going to be, I don't know if you have heard, but there will be no more inward inspection in Thunder Bay. It will be done away with.

NP: Unless the company chooses to hire?

BW: If they want it, they request it, but it is my understanding—and I am guessing and I have only heard this second hand and I really haven't heard from the top—but there will be no inward inspection and no outward inspection either, which means that the only things our guys will be doing would be supervising the loading of salties. There will be no supervision of lake vessels and no official grading of the car lots coming in, mostly because there are a lot of elevators that are being built and have been built that have cleaners in them, so they are shipping, actually instead of dirty grain from west to east, it is clean. So a lot of these tankers, unit trains they call them, are bypassing Thunder Bay anyways, and they are going right to southern Ontario or on the Seaway somewhere—Quebec City, Baie Comeau or Montreal. The grain that is coming in here basically has been pre-graded, and it is just unloaded into the terminal and out onto a ship. Our guys won't have any part of that, which I can see some problems with.

NP: What problems do you see with that?

BW: With the Wheat Board, the Wheat Board had a major control on marketing grain. Now when they don't, they are not going to be in control of everything. The producer will be allowed to market their own grain to a point. Up to now, as I said before, our guys when they inspect grain are variety experts, and we would catch problems before everything has been binned at the elevator. The elevator would bin on our grade. Everything would be caught. There was a sample or car that comes in would mixed inferior varieties. So it would not contaminate a high-grade bin and that kind of thing. So we'd catch it. If there were a problem, we would catch it.

But now with the producers able to go back and forth to the United States, I can see what is going to happen. These producers are going to get together with their counterparts in the States, and they are going to say, "Well here is a variety of wheat you can grow. It has a better yield, even though it's not sanctioned by the Canadian Government." It hasn't been run tests on it. They are going to grow it, and it will be harvested and end up right back into the terminal elevators here for shipment.

The elevator inspectors are not anywhere near as qualified to catch all this stuff as we are. We are trained every year on it, but those guys are not, and I can see major problems in the end-used products such as breads and pastries. The quality is not going to be there. We are basically the quality control system for the grain industry is being eroded now and I don't like what I see. That is what I think anyway. There is probably more to it, and I haven't talked to anybody recently.

NP: Time will tell.

BW: Yes, time will tell, but is it worth it to gamble? I don't think so myself. Basically, we are the police force of the elevator system. To have us gutted to the point where you are letting the wolves in charge of the sheep, it is not going to work, and eventually somebody is going to pay for it, and it will be the consumer.

NP: Or the producer?

BW: Yes, right off the bat the producer is not going to get the best grade possible for their grain. Whatever they are producing, we try to give them the best grade possible, and now they are just giving them whatever the elevator operators want to give them. If they tell them it is a [No.] 2 Red and it is actually a [No.] 1 Red, they're are losing, right off the bat. There are going to be problems and all for what, to save a dollar. It doesn't seem worth it.

NP: Having read history about why the Grain Commission came about in the first place, it is an interesting scenario.

BW: It is.

NP: Any other changes or challenges? What did you find most challenging in your career?

BW: I guess the most challenging for me was when I was promoted to this operations supervisor. It was something totally different than I was used to. I was no longer really an inspector. I was more of a manager, managing staff. I was basically in charge of staffing elevators, making sure the elevators had enough of our people to run it. That was a major change.

As far as the grading industry over the years, in the old days we didn't see much in the way of lentils and fava beans and all that kind of thing, but it was traditional things like barley and wheat. Recently in the last 10 or 20 years maybe, there have been big changes as far as the amounts of those other crops that are being grown out west now, and we are seeing more of here. That is basically the changes.

NP: Just keeping up with the changes?

BW: It is difficult because it was a different way of grading those types of things and if you are not used to seeing them all the time, it is hard to keep abreast of the varieties, that kind of thing. That's about it really.

NP: What might interest or surprise people most about the work you did? You are not familiar with it, what do you think?

BW: The lack of money. When I tell people what I was making up to the second year before I retired, I never made over \$50,000 a year ever, unless you are working a lot of overtime. People are pretty surprised when you say, "Government worker not being that well paid?"

NP: What started out to be, because you mentioned when you started, it was big money?

BW: Yes, it was big money for us, but then the elevator staff seemed to go way ahead of us. That is why we lose a lot of people in the grain industry—government staff to the private sector. They were just paying more money. I did consulting job for Saskatchewan Wheat Pool while it was still Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in 2007, and I went out to Regina to do some teaching and staff training out there. I was really shocked to see what their systems were out there. When I say they don't know a whole lot, they don't know a whole lot—these people in the elevators out there. They are doing all the shipping and grading for the elevator companies. Millions of dollars being lost that I can't. That is why our people are going there because they are paid big bucks. I was making big money. More than I ever made on the job to go down there and show these people what we are doing. What was the other thing you wanted to know?

NP: What people would find surprising?

BW: About the job itself?

NP: Yes.

BW: I have had some friends of mine that were wondering what I did. I took them down to the elevators and showed them what we are doing. A lot of people would be surprised exactly what our job was and how big a job we had in the grain industry. We were again the police force of the elevator business. What we said goes, and we are the quality control system.

NP: That leads into my next question. Do you think the work you did contributed to Canada's success as a grain trader?

BW: Oh definitely, definitely. Our grain and the grain system is the most highly regarded in the whole world or has been up to this point. We play a major part of that in the marketing, research, training elevator companies, working with the producers, working with the companies. To have that eroded now I think is a big mistake. I am trying to tell people that are willing to ask me what I think of it, and I don't. I think it is a big mistake to let our people go like that. Anything to do with control, if you eliminate something there, somebody is going to pay. It's like having the meat inspectors and having no more meat inspectors, and you are eating steak, port and chicken. I mean who knows what you are eating. That is going to be the same thing in the grain industry. If you buy a loaf of bread you are going to be saying "Well gee what is this stuff in there?" It is full of ergot, that kind of thing. That is our job to make things right and keep the quality as high as we can.

NP: What is ergot?

BW: Ergot is a fungus that actually was used in the making of LSD years and years ago, believe it or not. It is found in all grains, particularly rye, and it is a little black kernel that looks like mouse droppings actually, and they get bigger than that. It is actually a fungal that grows on the plant itself and it is actually a poison. You don't want too much of that. There are limits in each grade of grain of the amount of ergot you can have. Most of the time it can be cleaned out because it is in bigger chunks, but the smaller pieces. There is of course a limit on what you can have in the grain, top grades of grain. That is part of our job, too, to make sure the limits are abided by.

NP: What connection did you see between yourself and farmers growing grain?

BW: Directly between myself?

NP: Or even indirectly?

BW: I spent a lot of years on the job before I even met a farmer. I knew why I was there and what I was supposed to be doing. But I knew that I was trying to do my best for them as far as grading's concerned. Our job is under the different sections of the Grain Commission is to market his grain and make sure we sell all the grain we can. Again, that goes back to the Wheat Board. That was the major job of the Wheat Board, to market their grain.

NP: Were there any changes in the equipment in the inspection side over the time of your career?

BW: The automatic samplers were a big change. The Carter dockage testers, which I referred to earlier, are still be used as far as I know. Microscopes and computers of course were instituted in the late '70s and early '80s. The scales are now automatic, and they are linked up to the computers. There are a lot of fewer calculations since everything is done for you with the computer and the scales. That is about it. The basic procedures hasn't been changed for years and years.

NP: Did computers create any consternation and difficulties with some of the older staff?

BW: Again, we were told change is good, but there are always people who object to it. I liked it because anything that is going to make our job easier. But computers took a little bit of getting used to because they had to write specific programs for our job. Basically, all it is just filling in the blanks. Right now, it is even easier than it was originally. It made the job easier.

NP: When you think back on the lengthy and successful career, can you think of one or two vivid memories that stick with you, highlights, lowlights?

BW: Other than to what I related to you about the fellow in the elevator that got killed, we lost several young people on our staff, which bothered me greatly. They were younger than me when they died in their thirties and forties. One lady on the weigh staff Susan Gallivant had breast cancer, and I remember going through her sickness with her. We were all a pretty close family, the weigh staff and inspection staff. We all knew each other and what we liked and didn't like. There were a lot of guys that died that should not have and most of it was cancer.

NP: Are you saying there is a connection?

BW: I am saying it is possible. It occurred to me like there was. And a lot of it was breast cancer for the woman and a couple of guys. They were smokers mind you, but I am sure the dust didn't help that either. Some had emphysema and some had asthma, so the dust contributed to their short life too. But losing them was a big thing.

The highlights? Like I say in the early days every day was lots of fun. We would joke around and do our job and kibitz back and forth. That was about it. And as I say it was a little more stressful towards the end. I would say there was less stress when I started, but more stressful because you had to do your job, and there was always somebody looking over your shoulder. You were treated more as a number.

In the old days, we had our parties, our Christmas parties. They were fun. The girls when they came on staff, they would decorate all the offices up according to the season. We had pumpkins at Halloween, et cetera. Some of the guys said, "Nah," same old stuff. "We don't need these girls around. Get rid of them." It was fun. I don't think I would have traded it. I mean there was something maybe I wish I had done, but I think I had a pretty good staff. It was a pretty good job overall.

NP: Things you wish you had done?

BW: I actually wanted to be a cop. During the '80s I joined the OPP as an auxiliary officer, and I was thinking about joining them, but it didn't work out. I was getting a little older by that time to and of course leaving a job I am used to and established on, it was hard. My daughter is now a city cop, and my son is with the OPP. I am living vicariously through them. [Laughs]

NP: Do you feel it is important to preserve and share Thunder Bay's grain trade history and if so, what aspects of that history do you feel we should concentrate on?

BW: Just what you are doing. I think it is a good idea. I have been down to your display at the Marina, and I think it is an excellent job. I think it is important like any history. You have got to preserve what you have. This city is not famous for preserving its history. There are a lot of things we should have here, and we don't. Having interviews like this preserved so the kids can listen to what actually went on and how things progressed and why we are here—basically why this town is here because it was around the grain elevator business and the pulp and paper. Those two things have to be preserved. Just like Canada Car, we should have something here for those people that worked during the war. The railway, I would like to see them have a display here of an old steam engine, so people can look at it and say, "Gee that is what they hauled cars around with." To have something like this. And it is too bad we can't get some photographs to have in the archives and put them up too in your display. It is real important to preserve history to know where you are going.

NP: Are there any questions that I should have asked but I didn't? You were hoping I was going to ask you, so you had a chance to say something about it.

BW: No, I think you covered everything. I can't think of anything. Maybe to the average person this all sounds boring, but to me I had a pretty good run at it. I don't think I would have done anything differently.

NP: You mentioned talking about pictures and things. Do you have anything things like that?

BW: No. I looked through photo albums, and I had one or two pictures I mentioned to you, but I gave to another fellow. It was a picture of some of the guys. I think one of his names was Tom Goodfellow who was a PI-4 on the job and it was taken at Pool 5 elevator on the river or at Paterson. All of the guys are all gone now, and I gave those pictures away. If I had of known, I would have hung onto them. The only thing I can think of, there are two fellows on our staff that use to be photographers and took a lot of pictures at the Commission and around the elevators. One guy his name is Wally Zarowski. He worked on our protein lab for many years, and he is quite a photographer, and he is still around. He would be a guy to talk to. I am sure he has photos. The other guy, Charlie Clayton, he did a lot of photography, including some of the photographs for the phone book. He passed away, but I am sure his family has a lot of the shots. I can't think of anybody else that would have them. Back in those days, of course, nobody carried a camera around which is unfortunate.

NP: So, if I found Clayton?

BW: His wife is still around I think or did she pass away. No, his wife and his son are around. I don't know his son's name.

NP: If you could find that for me that would be good.

BW: Yes, I could try.

NP: Maybe it was passed onto him?

BW: I am sure he is around somewhere.

NP: Thank you very much. It was a very worthwhile 1hr and 49 minutes.

BW: Gosh, I didn't think I had that much to talk about. [Laughs]

NP: That is what everybody says. I am just officially thanking you before I shut off the machine.

BW: Thanks very much for asking me. I appreciate it.

End of interview.