

**Narrator:** Bill Zimmer (BZ)

**Company Affiliations:** Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR)

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**Summary:** Retired Canadian Pacific Railway marketing and rail clerk Bill Zimmer discusses his long career in grain transportation. He begins by describing his early railway roles in CPR’s Winnipeg office, like junior clerk, diversion clerk, rates clerk, and claims clerk. After a brief time as office manager, he moved into the “Odds and Sods” market analyst group, negotiating contracts for niche commodities. During company reorganization, Zimmer then moved to the forest product group in Montreal and then Thunder Bay before joining the Thunder Bay grain division. He discusses the railway’s responsibility for distributing Board and non-board grain cars to the elevators during harvest season and the winter work of moving grain trains directly to Quebec. He shares some of the changes to the work, like the introduction of unit trains and elevator closures, as well as shares the average volume of grain cars moving through Thunder Bay. He explains the necessity for working with other industry players to keep the system efficient, and the demurrage charges for delayed grain. Other topics discussed include stories of bad derailments and other accidents, working with local P. V. Ltd. to unload grain from damaged railcars, elevator railcar unloading technology, the dwindling grain movement through Thunder Bay, and working with American railroads to move products south.

**Keywords:** Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR); Grain transportation—rail; Grain transportation logistics; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Rail freight rates; Rail clerks; Rail marketing; Contract negotiation; Deregulation; Crows Nest Pass freight rate; Railcar allocation; Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); Grain pooling; Non-board grains; Unit trains; Rail accidents; Derailments; Railcar unloading; Grain transportation—ships; Demurrage; Grain elevators—equipment and supplies; Boxcars; Hopper cars; Canadian National Railway; P. V. Ltd.; Winnipeg; Montreal

Time, Speaker, Narrative
BZ: Then, I think. I don’t have that much to say. [Laughing]

NP: Well, good morning. We are conducting this interview on Scotland Avenue in Thunder Bay. It is March 19, 2012. So I'll ask the person I am interviewing to introduce himself and his connection to the grain trade.

BZ: Okay. My name is Bill Zimmer. I worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway [CPR] from 1961 until 2003, 42 years. I was involved with the grain industry side of it from 1997 until the end of 2003.

NP: We usually like to start by asking people how they started in their career. So how did you end up with the railway?

BZ: Well, I graduated from high school, Grade 11, commercial, and I was looking for a job. I went down to apply for a job as a secretary with Canadian Pacific Railway. I didn't get the secretary's job at the time, but I got hired on as a junior clerk, and I sort of worked my way up over the years to the position I ended up at.

NP: Was there any particular reason you wanted to work for the CPR, or that was the job that was available?

BZ: That was the job that was available. At that time in '61, you could apply for jobs, and jobs were easy to basically get. I thought I was only going to work a year and go back to school, but that didn't quite work out. [Laughs] Once you start making that money, you like to continue to work.

NP: So what does a clerk do with the railway?

BZ: A junior clerk?

NP: Mmhmm.

BZ: Well, back then, we only had mail—real mail—coming and going. It would take weeks to get replies from letters, not like today where it's instant. But there was always kinds of mail to handle because I worked in the marketing office, and it was a large office, so there was lots of mail.

NP: Tell us a bit about the marketing office. What kinds of things went on there?

BZ: Well, in the marketing office, one section is for sales, where the salesmen go out and try to get people to ship their goods via the railway. And the other side, there was a claims department to handle claims. There was another side, which was considered a--.

I guess you'd call it a rate pricing division and that is where they price all the products. If you were to phone up and say you wanted to ship a car load of grain from Point A to Point B, then we would sit down and figure out what it would cost you to do that.

NP: So when I think about marketing for the railways, I'm more likely to think the major centres like Winnipeg, Calgary, and so on, but there was marketing done here related to grain transportation?

BZ: Well, okay. When I first started, I didn't mention, but I started in Winnipeg. I didn't start--. I started in Winnipeg in '61. We lived there until 1988 when I was transferred over to Montreal for five years. I was working in the forest products division at the time, and then we were transferred here in '93. When I came here, I was working in the forest products division here as a marketing rep calling on all the forest products companies in this area.

NP: So where were you born then?

BZ: In Winnipeg.

NP: Ah, okay.

BZ: So like I say, our head office was in Montreal at the time, and they had their division wings, like in Winnipeg, Calgary—whoops—Calgary, Winnipeg, Vancouver. So then you would--. Like I say, in Winnipeg, it was sort of we looked after Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Northwestern Ontario, and we had a sales office in Thunder Bay where we had, I can't remember if it was three or four salesmen here and a district manager. Then we had one in Winnipeg, Moosejaw, Saskatoon, Regina. And in Winnipeg, of course, we had a large one because Winnipeg's a larger city.

NP: Going back, I'm glad I straightened that out a bit because it does make a difference to your experience as well having worked in one of the more major centres.

BZ: That's right.

NP: So working as an office clerk, then, the correspondence would come in from all kinds of people, organizations?

BZ: No, most of our correspondence was just amongst the railway people. A lot of phone calls you'd get from customers looking for information, like pricing information, basically. Like I say, it depended on what they were involved with and that. It's kind of

hard to explain it. But let's say your potash companies, they would come, and you'd be dealing with them. Coal companies, lumber companies, grain companies, of course, and anybody in general that wants to ship products via the railway.

**[0:05:18]**

NP: So would individual farmers also get in touch if they were doing--.

BZ: No.

NP: If they were doing carlots?

BZ: No, not at the time. It was all handled by the grain companies themselves.

NP: Ah, okay. Or the--.

BZ: I was going to say, my understanding is the farmers would sell to the grain companies.

NP: Okay. So you said you moved up within the system within the marketing department.

BZ: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I was always in the marketing department as a junior clerk, and then I did become a secretary for a year.

NP: Now, what does a secretary of that department do?

BZ: Well, as the secretary, you get called into the boss's office, and he dictates a letter to you, and you take it down in shorthand, and you type it up—all his mail, of course. At the time, I worked for one district manager, and then another time I worked for three other fellows in the office. It was interesting. I enjoyed the secretary work, but it only lasted a year, and then I became a rate clerk, and then I was diversion clerk, and then I was a claims clerk, and worked along. I went into, well, originally it was called the freight traffic department, and then they made it into the marketing department.

NP: Now, this is a little bit off-topic, but do you still remember your shorthand?

BZ: Some of it. I use some of it. When I'm running meetings, I'll jot down some things in shorthand.

NP: Oh, good.

BZ: But I don't use it a lot. [Laughs]

NP: I would say quite a dying art.

BZ: Ah, yes. Yeah.

NP: Was that part of your training then at school?

BZ: At school, yeah. I took two years of commercial, which was typing shorthand, bookkeeping, and that. I enjoyed it. The other side of high school, it didn't interest me. [Laughs]

NP: Doesn't seem to have held you back at all!

BZ: No, no.

NP: Well, let's go through those different types of clerks you moved into. Not to do a whole, long, in-depth analysis of what the jobs entailed, but just a little summary of what the differences were between the different types of clerks.

BZ: Well, a diversion clerk, what you would have is someone would phone up and say, "Oh, I have a car," give you a car number and say, "It's moving from Winnipeg to Regina, and I want to divert that car to Moosejaw." So then I would arrange—depending on where the car was, if I was able to—I would arrange to change the destination to Moosejaw.

NP: So how would that take place?

BZ: Well, like I say, the customer, whatever's in the car, he might sell it to someone else while the car's en route, and so then they want to divert it to another destination.

NP: So who do you have to contact in the system to deal with that?

BZ: Oh, I would contact our operating department in order to make sure the car got diverted to the proper destination.

NP: And then they'd transfer that request to the fellows down on the--?

BZ: Oh, yeah. It filters down to the actual engineer who's doing the job, yeah.

NP: Okay. So the diversion clerk.

BZ: That was the diversion clerk.

NP: Did that happen a lot?

BZ: Oh, heavens. Every day. Every day you would get a request to divert cars. Oh, yeah. No, I mean, when you're moving hundreds of cars, you're going to get lots of diversions and lots of changes.

NP: So what did your desk look like? Did you have a map or just papers all over the desk?

BZ: No. I kept a clean desk. I was well organized. [Laughs]

NP: Good training! So from the diversion clerk, you then went to--?

BZ: Then I became a rate clerk, and a rate clerk, you--. All the rates, or generally most of the rates, are published in what they called tariffs at the time, and that. Someone might phone you up and say, "What's it going to cost me to ship a carload of nails from Winnipeg to Montreal?" You'd look through your tariffs, and if you could find a rate on nails from Winnipeg to Montreal, you say, "Well, that's going to cost you so many cents per 100 pounds, minimum of maybe 24,000 pounds or 50,000," depending on what the tariff said.

NP: Did you also deal with grain then in that position?

BZ: A little bit. Back then, the rates were quite structured because I remember the one that just sticks in my mind. People would phone up and say, "What's it going to cost me to ship a carload of wheat from Winnipeg to Vancouver?" At that time, the rate was 14 cents per 100 pounds, minimum, I think, it was 80,000 pounds in the car.

NP: And can you compare that to what it might have cost later in your career, or is that hard to do?

BZ: Well, when you leave the department, you sort of--. And so many things change because once the railways become deregulated, everything changed after that.

NP: When did that happen, deregulation, approximately?

**[0:10:01]**

BZ: I can't really remember just when it happened. I could have been the '80s. I'm not sure.

NP: So that was sort of the Crow Rate change?

BZ: That was when the Crow Rate disappeared, yeah.

NP: So we have the diversion clerk, the rate clerk, and then--?

BZ: And then I was a claims clerk, and that's where our billing department might bill a customer the wrong rate because they'll look in a tariff and say, "Well, the rate was \$1.25 per 100 pounds," when actually someone in our rate department had negotiated \$1.10 per 100 pounds. So then that would come back to me, and I would investigate it, and if that was a fact, then we would settle his claim. That was, I guess you'd call it, more of a freight charge claim section versus damage claims. That was a different department altogether.

NP: Did you ever work in the damage--?

BZ: No, no.

NP: No. Now, you keep talking in pounds, so for grain, then, it was shipped in pounds?

BZ: It was shipped in pounds. The rates were all per 100 pounds.

NP: Even though once it gets to--.

BZ: After deregulation it came to per carload.

NP: Per carload.

BZ: And of course, they were in hopper cars then, loading them pretty heavy, so I think the minimum was 100-120,000 pounds in a car. So they were carload rates.

NP: Okay. Moving along past the--.

BZ: After the diversion clerk, rate clerk, and--.

NP: Claims.

BZ: Claims clerk. Where did I go from there? Well, I guess I became an office manager for a year. I was running the office for a year. That was sort of interesting. But you get to hire and let people go and this sort of thing. I didn't care to let people go, but if they weren't producing, you didn't have much choice. You had to let them go. But I enjoyed that, and from there, I went as a marketing analyst, and that entailed you would get a call from a customer--. There again, when I went into marketing the first time, it was called the Odds and Sods groups because we handled all the commodities that weren't handled by commodities groups because at that time, we had commodity groups—a group for potash, a group for grain, a group for coal, a group for lumber—but then all the other stuff that shipped, they didn't have a regular group. So we were the Odds and Sods groups.

You would deal with customers and negotiate rates with them. And because of deregulation, there would be contracts involved. You either set up a one-year contract, they would guarantee you would get so much traffic over that period at that particular rate you negotiated, and it went from there. I was there for, oh, seven or eight years, I guess, in that department, and that was interesting. We had lots of fun in that department. And then--.

NP: Do you recall the years you were in that department?

BZ: No, no.

NP: Just before you move on, you've mentioned a couple of times the change before and after deregulation. So what was the difference before deregulation? You said after they had to have a contract. So beforehand--?

BZ: Beforehand it was no contracts. I mean, I'm sure the bigger companies like your coal companies and potash companies, they might have had contracts, but there again, all their commodities were moving on cents per 100 pounds because that's the only way



we did business at the time. Then after deregulation, things changed a lot, and you got into carload rates for, well, for potash, coal, grain. Lumber still moved on per 100 pounds and that, and some of the other products still moved on per 100 pounds because they're not bulk commodities.

NP: Onward.

BZ: Onward, onward. Okay, then after being as a marketing analyst for about seven years there, they were fine tuning some stuff. The railway was going through a reorganization, and in 1997, they--. Well, I guess I should go back a little before that. When I was in the marketing, I started to do a lot of forest-products work, and then that's when I got asked by the forest products group in Montreal if I would be interested in taking a transfer to Montreal to work down there. I said, "Sure, why not?" So anyways, we took a transfer in 1988 in the summer to move to Montreal.

When I was in Montreal, for the five years I was there, all the customers I dealt with were mainly in western Canada, so therefore I didn't have to learn French. [Laughs] Not that I was against learning French, but I didn't have to learn French.

**[0:15:12]**

NP: And who were your major customers, then, that you'd be dealing with, western customers?

BZ: Well, they were all lumber companies. All lumber companies and that. I can't remember all their names, but there was lots of them. Like I had Alberta and BC for a while, and then I had Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Northwestern Ontario. I never had eastern Canada because the other fellows in the office, they handled them, and a lot of that was in French, so they took care of those. So I was there for five years, and then an opportunity came. They were doing some more changes, and they needed a person in Thunder Bay because of Canadian Pacific Forest Products Company here. They needed somebody here, and when they moved me here, I also looked after Dryden, Kenora, Fort Frances, Manitouwadge, and all of those areas for lumber. So I did some travelling by car, by plane, whatever, into those areas to call on the customers there to look after their requirements.

NP: So you got your feet wet in Northwestern Ontario.

BZ: Yeah, you could say that. You could say that.

NP: You got to know the region.

BZ: We got to know the area, and we enjoyed it here. It's home now and that. In '97 when the railway reorganized again, then there wasn't a need at the time for another forest products here in Thunder Bay, but they needed a grain person here, so they asked me if I would switch over to the grain group, and I said, "Certainly." At the time, I reported to Winnipeg.

NP: So who was in the grains position before you?

BZ: Nobody. The person here, he worked in the operating department, and they felt it was more of a marketing job, and that's why they wanted to have a marketing person in the position.

NP: And how would you market in the grain area out of Thunder Bay?

BZ: Well, marketing and service. It was more service than marketing. It's more service because when I took over the job and that, I almost felt like I was working for the operating department more so than the marketing department because you had to be in touch with the operating department constantly because of the grain coming here and making sure it was delivered and so on and so forth.

NP: So what did you learn—or what did you have to learn quickly—about shipping grain?

BZ: How the railway operated. [Laughs] Because when you're in marketing, and you're sitting in the ivory tower and that, you really don't know how the railway operates until you're actually working with operating people and looking out the window and seeing trains going by your window, and how they switch them, and that sort of a thing. So I picked up a lot the first year.

NP: So name a few of the things that you learned. Somebody like me, who knows probably even less than you do about grain train operation-- . [Laughs]

BZ: Well, with grain trains coming in at the time in '97 when I took over the job, the grain came down here, and depending on the type of grain it was, if it was Board grain, well, we had to watch where it was delivered because they had their percentages that they were supposed to get each month, the elevators. But if it was other types of grain like barley or sunflower seed, canola, it was elevator specific. So depending on how it was put together in the country, the trains would have to come in here, and they would have to be switched.

So what would happen is you'd get a train of maybe 100 cars of grain cars in here, and depending on how they're blocked, they would have to go through them and maybe get five or six different tracks and start switching that train to say, "Well, okay. These are for Richardson's, these are for United Grain Growers, these are for Sask Wheat Pool." Then once they get it all switched, then

during the night, they're able to switch and deliver them to the elevators. So that was a learning curve for me. I thought it came in, and it was spotted at the elevator, and that was it. But that wasn't quite the case when I first started.

NP: So where do they do the switching?

BZ: In the yards.

NP: And where is the major yard for C--?

BZ: They could do it in Westfort, or they could do it in the Intercity area. We have a big yard over there as well and that.

NP: Could you describe a typical day on your job, let's say, about a year into--?

BZ: No, there's not a typical day. [Laughs] But anyways, no, basically how it would work is they would put the grain trains together out in the country, and they would come to Thunder Bay, and with computer systems, I could see what trains were coming, what trains had grain on them because sometimes they ship grain on general freight trains as well, but when they're blocked on a grain train, it comes in. Then I would give the instructions to the operating department, "Train so-and-so that's coming in tonight or tomorrow, whatever, here's how you have to split it up for delivery." And they would pass that down, make up switch lists for the crews to switch the train when it gets here. I would talk to the elevator managers and their staff all day long, from 7:00 in the morning until 4:00 in the afternoon.

**[0:20:41]**

NP: And what would those conversations be about usually?

BZ: They would be saying, "Bill, is there any grain coming in for me today?" [Laughs] So you had to be very careful because--. Now, on the other hand, the CNR [Canadian National Railway] on the other side of the city, and they're doing the same thing, so you have to work closely with them as well because they could have a grain train coming in for Richardson's. We could have one coming in for Richardson's, and it's up to Richardson's to tell us which ones they want to take first. So everything had to be coordinated.

NP: Was any negotiation involved? What did it mean to you if there was a train coming in from CN and yours was coming in?

BZ: Ours would be held up 24 hours, that's all. It wasn't an overly big deal because we know that that's going to happen, and it's going to be the reverse other times. We will have a train being delivered, and the CN will have one coming in. Just have to wait. [Laughs]

NP: I'm just going to step back a bit. You mentioned that you had to be in communication on a regular basis with all of the elevator managers and their staff. Do you recall the first time you were ever in a grain elevator?

BZ: I tried to stay away from grain elevators because I am allergic to grain dust. So it was ironic when I took the position that I had to tell the managers that I couldn't come by too often because I'm allergic to grain dust. So I had to be very careful.

NP: Did that allergy to grain dust ever create a problem, or was the air pretty clean?

BZ: No. It's not too bad. It wasn't too bad. There was just a couple times when I left that I would feel a bit choked up and that, but I had my inhaler, so I was okay.

NP: And that was mainly from just the trains with the grain on them?

BZ: No, no. The grain being handled in the elevator because when it's being unloaded, it's running through the various conveyor belts and so forth, and it raised a lot of dust.

NP: And you had to be there?

BZ: No. I mean, if I was going there for a meeting and that, or if someone came to town and they wanted to—like I say from the Canadian Pacific Railway—and they wanted to see an elevator in operation, well, then I would make arrangements, and we would go to the elevator. I would tell the person, I'd say, "Okay, you can go on the tour. I'll just wait in the office." [Laughs] So I let them go on the tour. I never did take a tour of an elevator.

NP: So can you recall any of the impressions of the people who did take tours?

BZ: Well, they were impressed as far as I could tell. They never really spoke too much about it. They just said it was a very efficient operation. I always found it interesting just talking to them and saying, "Okay, this type of grain goes into that bin, and that one goes into that bin over there." They have to know what bins to put it in, of course, because they don't want to be mixing grain grade. [Laughs]

NP: So if we go back to being in the office—and a large part of your day was communicating with the various elevator companies—you said you started in 1997, was it?

BZ: '97 in the grain, yes. On the grain side.

NP: So describe the changes that took place in the people that you had to communicate in between then and 2003.

BZ: Well, when I first started in the grain side, the grain cars would come in here not particularly blocked that well, but over the course of a couple of years—because of all the innovations they were coming up with and the deregulation side of things—they were offering incentives to ship cars in 50-, 75-, 100-, 120-car blocks. The bigger terminals out in the country that could load 50 or 100 cars in a day, they would get some pretty good incentives to load and ship their grain. So you would have stuff coming into Thunder Bay--.

And like I say, as times changed, there was no such thing as Board grain anymore. All the grain that came into town was elevator specific. So it was a lot easier for the railways to switch it because you didn't have to say, "Oh, we need 10 cars over here, 15 over there, 25 over there," to meet the percentage quotas that the Board grain called for. So by being elevator-specific, I could look at the train coming in and say, "Well, okay, there 75 cars on there for Sask Wheat Pool, and there's 50 on there for Mission Terminals." I'd tell the operating department which block to set off in Westfort, the other one went downtown, and this sort of thing. So that made it a lot easier. Made it easier on switching and improved the handling of the grain as far as I was concerned.

**[0:25:45]**

NP: Was there any downsizing of the elevators during your time as far as--?

BZ: Staffing?

NP: Well, staffing and elevators closing down.

BZ: Yes. When I started, Manitoba Pool Elevators was in operation. They closed down. Who else was there that might have closed down? Well, actually, both Manitoba Pool elevators closed down, and then just after I left, United Grain Growers [UGG], well, they changed names to Agricore, and then they shut down. I think those are the only two that actually shut down in my time.

NP: A lot of changes since.

BZ: Yeah. Like I say, depending on the amount of grain coming here, I mean, the elevators would have to lay off staff or bring on staff and that, depending on the volumes. As you read in the newspapers, volumes are up this month, oh, they're down next month, or they're down for the year. So they have to staff accordingly and that to get the grain unloaded, or if there's nothing coming in. If an elevator got full for whatever reason—no ships coming—then they would maybe lay some people off for a couple of weeks while they waited for some ships to come to start getting rid of some of their grain.

NP: And would the cars, would there always be some place to send them?

BZ: Yes, because the elevators, they would make their own deals to say, "Well, okay. I've got 50 cars coming in. I can't take them. They're going over to Cargill Grain. Instead of going to Agricore United, they'll go over to Cargill." And they would switch back and forth. They would pay back another time and this sort of thing.

NP: Were there any penalties at all for holding grain in cars not unloading, or that never became an issue?

BZ: It depended on the circumstances. There were demurrage charges. If things got out of hand, you had to start setting up demurrage charges and that, and that's so much per day, per car. Like I say, depending on the circumstances.

NP: So describe how that might happen.

BZ: How that might happen? Well, too many cars come in. They can't unload them in a specific period of time, because usually if you get 50 or 100 cars coming in, we would want them unloaded within 24 hours. And if they had two trains come in, and it was going to take a couple of days, one train might go on demurrage. I know it's even stricter now. They don't have a lot of time to unload cars when they come here because there's the demand for turning stuff around, the equipment around, but that's just what I've heard. I'm not involved with it, of course.

But demurrage, yeah, not only on grain, but on all products. If your cars are delayed too long, they go on demurrage. And just like if a ship comes into port here and the grain's not here yet, I think it's something like \$10,000 a day waiting for grain to come.

NP: So what happens in that case? It's not an insignificant amount of money on a large shipment to be paying on a day. So describe the cut and thrust of deciding--. Let's say a ship is here and the grain isn't, and it's on a train somewhere. Who pays? How do you negotiate?

BZ: I have no idea how the grain companies work that out with the shipping lines, or the Wheat Board, or whoever looks after that. I have no idea.

NP: But as far as--. What if it's a train delay?

BZ: They're phoning us and asking us to get that train here ASAP.

NP: But there's no liability on the part of the--?

BZ: On the part of the railway? No.

NP: No?

BZ: No. It depends upon when it was loaded. If there was--. There shouldn't be--. Once it's loaded and starts moving, there really should be no extreme delays on it.

NP: Derailment?

BZ: Well, you can always go around a derailment with another railroad, the CNR or whatever. They work things out when there's trains to move.

NP: Was that something part of your job was to--?

BZ: No. That was--.

NP: Who--?

BZ: If there's a derailment, that's all handled by the operating department. They decide how they're going to reroute traffic and this sort of thing. I mean, I would ask, "How's my train coming?" And they'll say, "Well, it's coming, but it doesn't have priority," unless it was a prioritized shipment of grain, then it might be prioritized to move it, to get it here because there's a ship waiting for it.

**[0:30:20]**

NP: So correct me if I'm wrong, but my understanding is, let's say, the manager of Richardson's, through their grain department, would contract with the railway for a certain number of cars to be delivered to the Thunder Bay terminal on a certain day.

BZ: It may or may not happen. [Laughs] It may have changed now because I know they're trying to be more efficient and just-on-time and this sort of thing, but when I was working there, the grain would be loaded in the country, and the trains would be put together, and I would watch for them to start coming out of Winnipeg, and then I would take action from there and that. You might get a call from Richardson's saying, "I've got 50 cars of canola being loaded today somewhere in Saskatchewan. I'd like to have it here by the weekend if I could." Well, I would put the word out, and most of the time we would get it here and have it in place for him. But there would be the odd time that--. Like I said, I know there's been ships sitting out there waiting for grain to come. There's been cases where the ship's here and the grain hasn't even been taken off the field by the farmer. So there's a real good case for you. [Laughs] They had to wait for it to be harvested. Whoever made that sale made a mistake, and it may cost somebody money. [Laughing] I don't know how that works.

NP: So even if they've ordered hopper cars for a certain day out in Neepawa, Manitoba, and the crop isn't off, as you said, by that time, is that all part of the contract?

BZ: I would say it probably is. It more than likely would be because those cars would be put on the track at the elevator waiting to load. If there's a delay getting them there, I don't think the railway's going to go and pull them off of there. It's not like we're short of hopper cars and that, because there's thousands of them out there.

NP: So it was not an issue as it was many years ago of a shortage of hopper cars?

BZ: Yeah. Yeah, that's not as bad as it was at one time.

NP: Let's go back to your day in the office, dealing with the operations people on your side to get things coordinated, and then the elevators on the other side. What other kinds of things were part of that job?

BZ: Well, that was pretty well part of the day. I mean, you would have lapses over the day where it wouldn't be terribly busy because you've sort of got things organized. Before you leave at the end of the day, you would put together what we called a grain log of what you wanted the operating department to do overnight. They had some sort of 4:00 at night until 8:00 the next morning to get the elevator tracks, pull the empties off, and put new loads back on again if we had some in town for them.



NP: During your time, '97 to 2003, were there 24-hour shifts?

BZ: At the elevators?

NP: Well, on the rail.

BZ: At the elevators, sometimes. At the railway, it's always 24 hours, except for on Christmas. [Laughs] I think they take six or seven hours off on Christmas day so that the staff can all be at home with their families and that, but other than that, 24 hours a day.

NP: Did you see any changes in numbers of cars coming through in your time?

BZ: Oh, heavens. Yeah. Oh, yeah. There was some years there would be--. Like I say, I can't remember the exact numbers, but even in a week, some weeks CPR would bring in over 1,000 cars a week. Sometimes it would be 1,500. Next week it might be 500. It all depends upon how it's going out west and the orders for grain, if it's coming this way or going to the West Coast.

NP: Do you have any warning of whether it's going to be slow or fast or busy?

BZ: There's always forecasts as to what they think might happen and that. So you always have a forecast. Sometimes you're under, sometimes you're right on, and sometimes you're over. You know what forecasting is like. [Laughs]

NP: What's a—and I don't know if you have this number off the top of your head or even an estimate—what number of grain cars would typically be dealt with in a week? Or is it better to say a month?

BZ: Well, no, a week is good. Between both railways, you could probably do a couple thousand quite easily. If they're here, and if the elevators--. I mean, they know if they have to work more than one shift depending on the amount of cars that were in town for them. So if they have to work two shifts or three shifts to get the cars unloaded, they will. But you could do that.

**[0:35:22]**

NP: Was there seasonal differences?

BZ: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Usually after the end of December when they close the locks further south of here, the grain slows right down coming to Thunder Bay. You might only have one elevator stay open in January, February, and that. They'll stay open to take anything that might be coming here. They make agreements with the other elevators that one will stay open, and the other ones shut down, lay off their staff. They might keep some staff on for repairs and this sort of thing, but that happens regularly.

NP: So busiest season is when you saw the 1,000?

BZ: Oh, I'd say probably starting in April to the end of July, and then the new crop comes in, and you might be busy September, October, November. Those would be like the busier months.

NP: And what would be your tasks, on the slower times?

BZ: Well, one of my other side jobs in the wintertime was I coordinated the movement of winter grain trains from the country to Montreal and make sure that they get handled very smoothly outside of Winnipeg when I hand them off at Sudbury. So I would keep those moving through our territory here without too many delays, and I would talk to the elevator in Montreal and other customers down there because they're phoning, "Where's this train? Where's that train?" So I had to keep track of the winter trains as well. So that was my job in the wintertime. Part of my job. [Laughs]

NP: Did that change over time?

BZ: That's still going on today.

NP: Did it grow during your time?

BZ: Yes, and it's even grown since I've retired. Actually, I know it's probably not referred to as winter grain trains anymore. It's probably just solid grain trains going down east rather than being unloaded here. Just the way of doing business.

NP: And why do you think that change has taken place?

BZ: Well, in the wintertime, of course, the elevators down in Quebec and that, they need to get grain, and they can't get it via ship, so it has to go rail direct.

NP: And previously, it just waited in storage here until the ships were--?

BZ: No, there was always grain moving down to eastern Canada. Always. It's always been moving there. It's just that, like I say, in the later years when I was still working, they put together these whole grain trains to go down to the elevators in Quebec.

NP: How big is a whole grain train?

BZ: Well, usually 120 cars, 100 to 120 cars.

NP: Pulled by one engine?

BZ: No, generally two. Since I've retired, I've noticed that they'll have one on the head end, one in the middle maybe, or one on the back end pushing, one pulling. They've learnt how to distribute power a little differently and that, to make it more efficient, save on fuel. That's just stuff I've learned that I wasn't involved with it. [Laughs]

NP: So what can go wrong in--?

BZ: Well, an incident happened here I think sometime in the late '90s where a grain train was heading east out of here, and for some reason, the engineer was going a little too fast, went off the tracks on a curve. They put about 50-75 cars in the ditch. So that can happen. Those two employees were laid off for a year before they could come back to work and that was because they were speeding.

NP: So what happens in that case? What's the actual process that's in place to--?

BZ: After a train derails?

NP: Mmhmm.

BZ: Well, the railway has a contract with an outside firm from the US, and they send up all the necessary equipment to repair the tracks, move the cars. You either cut them apart--. If they're salvageable, they'll salvage them, put them back on the rails, and that. They usually come, and they'll get that done ASAP.

NP: And what do they do with the grain?

BZ: Well, there's an outfit in town here called, I think it's P.V. Ltd. He has two super-suckers, and he comes, and his machines will suck the grain up and put it either back into grain cars. He can put it into trucks. He can put it wherever you want it, basically. He also does work for the elevators. If the elevators were to maybe dump the wrong grain into a ship, they have to get it out of the ship because it's the wrong grain, so they'll call him, and he comes and sucks it out of the ship and puts it back in the elevator.

**[0:40:25]**

NP: Like a big vacuum cleaner.

BZ: That's what it is, yeah. Yeah. So that's--. He started that job a little before I started on the grain side. So he's been in it since, I'd say, the early '90s, I guess.

NP: And what is his name?

BZ: His name is Paul Vandenberg.

NP: And was it P. V.? Oh, I guess that's where the P. V. comes from, right? [Laughs]

BZ: Yeah. P. V. Ltd.

NP: So then what would you do? You have a customer waiting, and you have the train flopped over.

BZ: Well, I would just phone him and tell him that his train ended up in the ditch, and it won't be in Montreal or wherever it was going on time. He'd have to wait for another train, that's all. I mean, there'd be delays. I don't know whether he had a ship waiting for it down there or not, but anyways.

NP: And then what kind of communication did you have to have with Winnipeg?

BZ: Everything's handled by operating after that. I would just mention it to Winnipeg that the train went in the ditch, and we lost 75 cars or whatever.

NP: And they would let you know when they were re-shipping?

BZ: There would be another train coming another day. [Laughs]

NP: Wheat is wheat!

BZ: Yeah, that's right. If it meets the grade, away it goes, and that. After P. V. Ltd. would clean up the site from the grain, and I know there's a big one that happened east of here. They actually ended up sucking up the grain and putting it in dump trucks, and it was brought back to Thunder Bay to an elevator here, and they cleaned it all. Then they were able to sell it and get rid of it that way. We, of course, the railway paid a claim on it because they lost quality for the grain, but that's generally what happens with derailments for grain trains or grain cars.

This P. V. Ltd., he also--. Of course, equipment tends to break down. Hopper cars, you can't get the gates open for some reason—they're buckled or whatever—so the elevator phones me up and says, "I've got a car here, car number so-and-so, can't unload it, can't open the gates. I'm going to run it out tonight." So then that's fine. So then I'll tell our operating guys that we have a car with stuck gates. They'll switch it out and put it on a designated track, and then I let P. V. Ltd. know where it is, and he'll come over with his equipment, and he'll suck the grain out of the top. We'll usually put an empty hopper car next to the one that's loaded, and he'll put it into the other hopper car. So then that car will go to mechanical for repairs and that. So that's sort of what happens with stuff you can't unload.

NP: Are there pictures of that being done anywhere that you know of?

BZ: P. V. Ltd. might have it. There's some interesting things that have happened since. [Laughs] I know one morning I got a call. I think it was from Agricore United or United Grain Growers. I can't remember who it was at the time, but anyways, during the night when our guys were spotting the elevator, they pushed a hopper car off the end into the lake, and there was one also hanging over the side. Of course, we got P. V. Ltd. involved, and he went over there, and before we could lift that car off that was dangling over the side, we had to get the grain out of it. So he climbed over there and sucked out as much as he could until he got down to the area where it was in the water and he couldn't. Of course, the grain was wet there, so he couldn't get that out and that. So anyways, he took out as much as he could, and then a barge came along and lifted it off the track from the lakeside. And they also had to go down and get the one that was in the water.

NP: How did they get that out?

BZ: With a barge. They had to get it--. A barge with a crane on it and that. They went down and hooked onto it and lifted it out of the water, and they took it over to Keefer Terminal to put it back on the track over there.

NP: And then what happens to it?

BZ: Well, we have to get the grain out of that car because the car's still usable. [Laughs] I can't remember how they got the grain out of that one and that because, of course, it would be soaking wet, eh?

NP: A soupy mess!

BZ: Yes, yes. I mean, they might have opened the gates and let it come out and then scoop it up and take it to the dump or whatever. But anyway, that was an interesting one. I think they did that at Richardson's one time as well. It's probably happened at all the elevators at one time or another, but anyways. But that's what P. V. Ltd. does, and he does other commodities as well, not just grain. But most of it is grain and that.

**[0:45:15]**

NP: So I've often wondered about the handoff of responsibility for the cars. We have the sidings that go off to the various elevators. Are CP employees always in charge of the cars until they come to a standstill, or do you hand off?

BZ: No, when we're switching, we're responsible until we unhook that engine. We've got to make sure the brakes are on so they don't run out of that elevator and that. We're responsible for that when we're delivering cars.

NP: So if--.

BZ: Because--.

NP: If something gets pushed off that edge, it's--.

BZ: It's the railway's fault.

NP: Ah, okay.

BZ: Yeah. Because sometimes, like I say, the elevator might leave a couple of cars at the end of their track at the end of the day. We're going in there, and we figure, "Oh, that track holds 30 cars." So they take 30 cars, and they push. If the guy isn't at the back of the train and sees those two cars back there, he'll push those two into the lake. [Laughs] So.

NP: Make work for the barge companies.

BZ: That's right. That's right. It's not a common thing, but accidents happen. Human error. And it's the same with elevators running out cars after they had dumped them. They can run them out to a certain area and that, and they've got to make sure that the brakes are set, otherwise, the rail might block traffic or cause an accident, because there's roads over by the elevators, and they can't block the roads. So they have to make sure. I'll get a phone call, "Bill, we had a runaway. It's blocking the traffic on--." Whatever that street is over there. Then I've got to arrange to get a crew to go over there and get that car out of the way.

NP: On Maureen Street?

BZ: Yes. Okay, that's the street that runs along the elevators. That's blocking the traffic over there. So like I say, just things happen. [Laughs]

NP: Any other things happen?

BZ: Well, not in my time. I heard a lot of horror stories about how it used to be with boxcars, when they were unloading boxcars of grain way back when. These are just stories I heard. Guys getting arms torn off, legs torn off because they used chains and big boards to pull the grain out of the cars and this sort of the thing. You'd have to talk to some historians who worked at that time, but I've heard a lot of horror stories.

NP: Safety seems to be really very much improved.

BZ: Oh, extremely. Extremely.

NP: Even in your time?

BZ: I don't think there was any safety back then, by the sounds of it anyways. [Laughs]

NP: Yeah.

BZ: No, no. Lots of safety things. And you'll still hear of accidents happening and that, but that's mostly human error. They just forget about something. Like that passenger train that went off the track down in southern Ontario, speeding, trying to go through a switch, and then switching from one track to another at three times the speed limit. I mean, human error—not paying attention—unless there was something wrong with the engine. But no one's alive to tell. You don't know.

NP: So anything else happening during your day that we haven't talked about yet?

BZ: Not really. I think we've covered pretty well all the jobs I had. I enjoyed them all. I enjoyed my 42 years at the railway. I had no complaints at all. When I first started, I was a little youngster, 17 years old, and the freight traffic manager said to me, "Bill, if you're going to make a career working at the railway, you'll work with people you can't get along with, and you'll work with people you can get along with. But those you can't get along with, persevere because either you will move or they will move." And that is so true even to this day. [Laughs]

NP: Good advice.

BZ: Yeah, yeah. That's one thing I didn't forget. That was a long time ago.

NP: When you were working in Thunder Bay, were you working with people who had long-term careers in the railway?

BZ: Oh, that's a yes. Most of them had long-term careers. There were some young people here starting out and this sort of thing, but most of the people had been around for a while. Your elevator people, they were all well-experienced people as well. I'm sure you'll be talking to some of them because some of them have retired since too, so.

NP: Do you have some names possibly that might be--?

BZ: Well, Bill Green from formerly United Grain Growers. Brain Mallon, Manitoba Pool Elevators. Jerry Franklin, Cargill Grain. Those are all former managers. Bob McKinnon from Sask Wheat Pool. What was the other guy's name? Gene from P&H [Parrish & Heimbecker], but I can't remember his last name right now. It doesn't come to me, but his first name was Gene from P&H Elevator. [Laughs]

**[0:50:31]**



NP: Yes. His last name starts with a P as I recall. So we've both forgotten. [Laughing]

BZ: Yeah.

NP: Prystay? Or I'm probably saying it incorrectly.

BZ: Gene Prystay, maybe, yeah. Gene Prystay, maybe that's what it is, okay. So those are all the managers that I worked with when I started on the grain job, and most of them were still there when I left. I think Bob and Gene were the only two that actually retired. Billy Green retired after I left, and same with Jerry Franklin.

NP: Who was at Richardson's at the time?

BZ: When I came here, Mike Coghill was there, but he got transferred to Lethbridge. Gerry--.

NP: Heinrichs.

BZ: Heinrichs, yeah. He took over and that, but that was just when I was retiring.

NP: So what would you say brought you the greatest satisfaction in the grain position that you had?

BZ: I enjoyed working with the customers and that. I really enjoyed the customer contact. And I'm still involved with the GEAPS [Grain Elevator and Processing Society] organization as a retiree. I go to their dinners that they have, their meeting dinners and that just so that I still have contact with these people. So I enjoyed that.

NP: And what presented your greatest challenge in that position would you say?

BZ: Keeping them happy. Telling them the truth. Don't try to give them the gears and say, "Oh, yeah, the cars are going to be there," when I knew they weren't going to be there. They thanked me for being truthful with them and saying that, "Don't count on those cars being here." I guess I didn't have faith in my own company. [Laughs] But no, it's just you get to know after a period of time how things move and how they happen and don't happen.

NP: You're not God.

BZ: That's right. That's right. So no, be truthful with your customers, and they'll appreciate you more.

NP: Would you say that it was always possible to work out a satisfactory solution, or did you ever come across a situation where you just couldn't satisfy your customer?

BZ: Not in the grain side of things. Everything--. We were always able to work out something. I had some other problems when I was in the lumber side of things, but that was a different core of people to work with.

NP: Grain people seem to be practical, people with a lot of experience in dealing with not getting it all of the time, right?  
[Laughing]

BZ: That's right, yeah. No, I'm sure these people would have lots of stories for you as well about how the railway serviced them and this sort of thing, and how their elevator was run and this sort of thing as well. Some of them are naturally more efficient than others. It's just the way they're managed.

NP: If you were running an elevator, okay—now that you know it from the side of the railway—and you could design the best system or be a good manager, how would you manage an elevator operation to make the rail part of it run smoothly?

BZ: It's hard to say because I think it runs pretty good actually. Like I say, I don't know how it's changed since I left, if it's any worse or any better, or about the same. I really couldn't say. So I really can't comment on that.

NP: Well, what would you--.

BZ: I don't know enough about the grain elevators.

NP: But you made a comment about some were more efficient than others. What made the difference between a more efficient and a less efficient--? And if it was equipment or management or set up?

BZ: Yeah. It would be the equipment in the elevator for unloading. Some of them unload faster. They have different--. I think some elevators, well, I know Richardson's, they have their own engine for pulling cars. Other ones have car pullers, and I would think an engine would be more efficient than a car puller, but that I'm not 100 percent sure on.

**[0:55:03]**

NP: What's a car puller?

BZ: It's a big wire, and there's a pulley at one end of the track, and it pulls the cars as they're pulling into the house, as far as I know because, like I say, that's how I visualize it. I don't know how they advance the cars if they don't have a car puller.

NP: And is there anything in the scheduling of cars that an elevator manager could concentrate on to do it more efficiently?

BZ: I doubt it. [Laughs] As far as, you mean, getting his grain here?

NP: Not so much, but once it's here, just dealing with it in a more efficient manner.

BZ: Not really, not really. There's nothing else they can do in that. Once they're on their tracks, it's their responsibility to get them unloaded. They generally do a good job of it.

NP: Are there certain elevators that, for whatever reason, are faster at unloading than others? Can unload more cars in a certain period?

BZ: Oh, yeah, because some of them have more tracks than otherst. Like P&H can only do, I think, 25. They've only got space for about 25 cars at a time, whereas Sask Wheat Pool you could probably put 100 cars on their tracks. So that's a big difference.

NP: And can they unload 100 in a day?

BZ: Oh, easily. Easily. Yeah. Usually in an eight-hour shift. Yeah.

NP: I find that really interesting because you're talking about--. I'm reading some history, and back in the really early days before the 1900s, they were unloading—and feeling quite pleased that they unloaded—three boxcars a day, and it was because it was the wheelbarrow and shovel approach too. So what a difference!

BZ: Well, like I say, the history that I hear from some of the people is that at one time in Thunder Bay there was 35 elevators here, and they would unload 5,000 cars a week, and those were boxcars because they didn't have hopper cars back then. That's a lot of work. They were probably working 24 hours a day to do that. That's just amazing when I hear that because back then, of course, there was a lot more grain moving through here too.

NP: Did that change at all, the amount of grain moving here over your period?

BZ: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Because I had different years. I mean, if you were talking to Lakehead Shipping, they'd tell you that some years there's, whatever, 6 million tonnes goes through here. The next year it may be 4.5 million. So it's just less coming this way. It's the way they sell it. If Russia's not buying grain, it's not coming through here. If Russia is buying grain, then it's coming through here. I know when I first started, we were moving quite a bit of grain to Russia through here, but then I guess they started growing their own more efficiently, and they didn't need ours. Now there's lots that goes through the West Coast. Lots. I guess you're not doing a study on the West Coast. [Laughs]

NP: Well, actually, eventually we hope to interview people on the West Coast and also on the St. Lawrence. And in fact, we have interviewed a couple of people related to the Canadian Grain Commission. Now, this leads me to just a series of questions about any connection that you had with your grain position with the Wheat Board. Did you have--?

BZ: I just met them when they came here to have a meeting. I would just sit in on the meeting. No real connection.

NP: What would they meet here about?

BZ: Well, they would come down once a year to sit down with the elevators to give them an idea of what volume to expect for the next crop year, give them some ideas of where it's going, and then as far as other countries and so forth. Like I'd sit in on the presentations and that, just like I say, for information purposes.

NP: And was that information useful to you in some way?

BZ: I absorbed it. I mean, it would be more informative to the head office of the grain group for sure and that, but they would get the same presentation in Winnipeg, so.

NP: Sort of gave you a general impression of what was expected.

BZ: Yeah. What was happening in the grain industry, yeah.

NP: Canadian Grain Commission, did you have any connection at all with them either here or at--.

BZ: Well, when I first started the job, I did because that's when the Board grain had to be divvied up amongst the various elevators. So there would be a once-a-week meeting with the Grain Commission, looking at their percentages, saying, "So and so needs three more percentage to make up for what they lost last week." So both CP and CN would be sitting in the room there, and we would make note of that. We would work with the elevators to make sure that a few extra cars went over to another elevator of Board grain and that. But that was only maybe the first, I don't know, six months that I was on the job, and then they changed things, so we didn't have to meet anymore. That's when they went to more the elevator direct stuff.

**[1:00:12]**

NP: So if a car was found to be half empty, would they deal with you, or was there another group that they deal with?

BZ: They'd deal with me.

NP: Any other issues that sort of the inspectors or the weigh staff would have to contact the railway about?

BZ: No, no. They would just deal with the elevators and that. If they found something wrong, they would tell the elevator. The elevator would tell me.

NP: And then what was the process that you would--?

BZ: Well, once they ran the car out, then I would take it from there depending on what the problem was. There could have been wet grain in the car. Maybe the top was left open, and it rained, and it got wet grain, so then I would turn it over to the claims department, and they would look after the claim on it. Then they'd hired P. V. Ltd. to empty it.

NP: So was there a claims department here in Thunder Bay?

BZ: No, no. No.

NP: So where was that?

BZ: They would have to deal with Calgary. When we reorganized in '97, the claims department ended up--. We used to have one in Winnipeg, Vancouver, Montreal, Calgary. They used to be sort of all across the system in the major cities, but when we reorganized, it was just one, and that was in Calgary.

NP: During that reorganization, was anything left in Winnipeg?

BZ: There's still some grain people in Winnipeg. They're slowly taking a few of them to Calgary, but they're still, I think, one of the--. Well, I know the VP of grain is in Calgary, but there's some general managers or whatever still in Winnipeg. They still have a staff there of probably I'd say maybe 15 or 16 people because the grain companies are still there in Winnipeg, so we have to keep a presence there.

NP: Mmhhh. We do interviews in Winnipeg. We've had them almost evenly split. So anybody you recall from your time that may have retired who was with the grains group? They're not easy to track down.

BZ: Yeah. One fellow, his name was John Falk. He was in the marketing side of things doing most of the pricing and that. But like I say, he's retired, lives in Winnipeg.

NP: So if I were to try and track down the grains group, just call the CP number and--?

BZ: I don't even know what that Winnipeg phone book looks like for the grain office, and I don't know any of the phone numbers either. [Laughs]

NP: Or contact head office and--.

BZ: Oh, yeah. Well, if you had a Winnipeg phonebook, you might find something there for Canadian Pacific grain office. Or even if you were in contact with some of the grain companies in Winnipeg, they would maybe have a phone number for the Winnipeg office.

NP: True. Yeah. So I could track down John perhaps that way.

BZ: Yeah. Some of them might know where he--. I think he lived in Charleswood of Winnipeg, the area there and that. I mean, there's probably more than one Falk in the phonebook, that's the only problem.

NP: Yes, it's a very common name in Winnipeg.

BZ: [Laughs] His middle initial was G.

NP: Okay. That'll narrow it down. Okay.

BZ: [Laughs]

NP: Any other groups that you dealt with on a regular basis? We talked about the Grain Commission, the elevators.

BZ: I never talked to Lakehead Shipping, never had to deal with them for the ships and that. I would talk to them the odd time, but nothing really to speak about. I got to know the fellow there, that was because he would attend some of the meetings, but no real direct connection.

NP: So as you think back to your typical day, we've pretty much talked about everybody that you would need to communicate with?

BZ: Yeah. Elevator companies and the railway operating people. That's pretty well my day.

NP: And who would be a retired person in the operations group?

BZ: Well, that would be Rod Medwick, the fellow whose name I gave you there.

NP: Okay, right.

BZ: He was a yard manager here, and like I say, he's long-term. Always in Thunder Bay. Spent a few years with CNR to start his career, and then he came over to CP. He knows every inch of track in town. I think he would give you a real good interview on his side of things of the operating of the railway.

NP: And who was your counterpart with CN?

BZ: I can't even remember because he left shortly after I took over the job. He moved to Edmonton and that because CNR decided they were going to handle Thunder Bay from Edmonton. So I would exchange, usually, messages with him, emails and so forth, with the CNR in Edmonton because sometimes there would be an issue between who was going to spot an elevator.

**[1:05:19]**

NP: So then you'd have to contact them and make arrangements?

BZ: Yeah.

NP: Now, when you say "spot" an elevator, what are you saying?

BZ: Spotting cars, delivering cars. Spotting.

NP: Delivering.

BZ: The operating call it spotting cars at the elevators.

NP: Do you know the origin of that term, "spotting cars"?

BZ: No. [Laughs] Sorry.

NP: I have a bit of a vision of anybody who works on a railway. They have to have some kind of map up on the wall, or they have to have some visual system for watching the operation work. Is that a misconception on my part?

BZ: That probably happens somewhere, but not in Thunder Bay because all the people that work here, they know all the tracks. I mean, you get to know them when you're out there everyday. They're all numbered, eh? I don't know the different numbers, but they're all numbered, and each yard has its own designation. Like Westfort might be A, and another yard will be B, and C, and then they had their tracks all numbered in there. I'm sure the switching crew, they can--. Probably the stacks with the actual switch is numbered, so they can see, "Oh, that's the track I want." I'm not sure because I was never out there watching.

NP: And your office was at the CP Station?

BZ: Yes, on Syndicate Avenue. That's where the office is, and then we've got a mechanical office down at Pacific Avenue there and that is where the diesel shop is. They do mechanical repairs in there. They repair cars in there as well and repair locomotives. Actually, I think a lot of locomotives are being repaired in Calgary, but if it breaks down here, it's got to be fixed here.

NP: And where is the closest next place to fix?



BZ: Winnipeg. Close to here would be Winnipeg. They have a fairly large shop there as well.

NP: And the other side? Sudbury? Sault Ste. Marie?

BZ: No, I don't think so. You'd probably have to go to--. No, not even North Bay. You'd probably have to go down to Toronto or Ottawa, Montreal and that for the--. And now, we only go as far as Montreal. The CPR doesn't go any further east. We quit going down east. I mean, if we got stuff to go further, we'd give it to the CNR to take, and that was always joint operating agreements in that. That would be two-line rates as well.

NP: Did you ever have any connection with farmers at all, producers, in your jobs?

BZ: No, no. Nothing there. [Laughs]

NP: Have we discussed your biggest challenges in that grain position in particular?

BZ: I didn't have any what I would call big challenges doing the grain job. I had bigger challenges doing the forest products job because I was involved in helping negotiate large contracts for millions of dollars and that, so that was a big challenge. This is when I worked in Montreal. There was sometimes when we were working on contracts—like they're yearly contracts—and you'd be working 18-20 hours a day trying to get this stuff put together. There'd be a team of people working on it. I can remember one time there was four of us working on this one big contract for Canadian Pacific Forest Products, and man, oh, man, the room was just littered with paper on the wall, spreadsheets and that sort of thing. That was a challenge. Sleeping in the hotel overnight. Even though I lived in Montreal, we stayed downtown so we'd get back in the office early in the morning. That was a challenge, but I enjoyed it.

NP: Just on the off chance that you have some thoughts, the CPR Station itself, you worked there for a few years. Did you learn anything about that station building?

BZ: Not really. I know that it had terrible air conditioning, but they've since renovated it. They've got good air conditioning now. [Laughing]

NP: Now that you've left and can't enjoy it!

BZ: Yeah. You'd open up the window on the track side, and you'd get all the dirt as the trains went by blowing in your window. So that wasn't very healthy. But not, like I say, it's an old station, but they keep making changes to it. They've done a lot of renovations to it. The last time I was in it, it was looking pretty good actually.

**[1:10:05]**

NP: Do you know who's the manager there now? Or is there a manager?

BZ: Oh, yeah. There's a manager there. His name is Matthew Oliphant. He's been here now, oh, quite a few years actually. Let's see. He came here before I retired, so he's probably been here for 10 or 12 years now. He used to work here as an engineer, and he moved around and that, and he came back as a manager. I think he's classified as a service area manager. I think that's what they're called now.

NP: Where is he originally from, do you know?

BZ: I think he's originally from Thunder Bay.

NP: Oh, okay.

BZ: I think. I'm not sure, but I think he is. But he's the manager here now.

NP: I have a a general question to ask you about your place in the overall scheme of things. There have been people who have said that given Canada's geography, and its climate, it's really quite remarkable that we have become a world leader in the grain trade. In your part in the railway, can you see how your job fit into making that possible?

BZ: Good question. Just making sure that the grain, when it came here, it was handled efficiently, delivered, and off of our hands. That's about all I can say.

NP: If you had done a bad job, could you see any consequences for Canada's reputation?

BZ: If I had done a bad job?

NP: Yeah.

BZ: I would have got fired. [Laughing] It wouldn't have changed Canada's reputation for handling grain. Somebody else would have stepped in and did it. How's that? [Laughing]

NP: That's a great answer! So your answer to that is somebody cared whether it was done properly or not. [Laughs]

BZ: Oh, yeah. Somebody always cares.

NP: Well, let's take it broader then. How do the railways contribute to Canada's success as a--? How do the railways, in their—what's the word I'm looking for—in their striving to do a good job, how do they contribute to Canada's success as a grain trader?

BZ: If they didn't produce, you wouldn't have a grain trade in Canada. You wouldn't be able to move grain if you didn't have railways. So I mean, they have to produce. They have to do their job. I won't get into what's going on right now with the CEO of CPR and trying to replace him with a former CEO from CNR and stuff like that, but it's been in the *Globe and Mail* and this sort of thing. I just keep hearing rumours and that because some shareholder of the railway, a company, they own about 14 percent of the shares, and they want to replace the CEO of the railway. They feel like he's not doing a good job.

NP: The CNR owns 14 percent of the CPR?

BZ: No, no. An outside company, an American company, owns 14 percent of the shares of CPR, and the head of that company wants to replace the CEO of the CPR with a former CEO of the CNR. So that's going on right now.

NP: Well, I wonder with a lot of changes—I don't know if you've been keeping abreast with the changes with the Canadian Grain Commission and inspections, inward, outward, and how that's really changing—in your time, did you see a--. How can I put this? I'm going to go back even further. When the railways were built, there was a definite intention that they go east-west rather than north-south.

BZ: Yes.

NP: In order to unify the country.

BZ: Right.

NP: And to populate the west, and so on. And to keep BC in the confederation. Have you seen a shift in your time between less of that east-west and more of a north-south focus?

BZ: Not for the grain, but for other commodities, oh, yeah, because, I mean, the CNR, they have amalgamated and bought up or taken over a lot of the US railroads, eh? They run right down to New Orleans now. That was never that way before. The CPR, well, the CPR, we've owned the Soo Line for so many years. I don't know how many years we've owned the Soo Line, and we just not too long ago amalgamated with the DME, Duluth, Minnesota, and Eastern Railway, whatever it is. And in eastern Canada—or in eastern US—we've got all kinds of deals with different railways, the D&H down there in eastern US.

**[1:15:19]**

NP: What's D&H?

BZ: Delaware & Hudson. And with deregulation, you've got all kinds of contracts with all the US railroads for moving traffic north-south and this sort of thing with its paper. I mean, we moved grain to Mexico and that, so that's just an example of working with different railroads to get it there and that, so.

NP: So you contract to use their lines, is that how it works?

BZ: Well, yeah. Say, you would deliver whatever it is—25, 50 cars—to the Union Pacific Railway, and they'll take it to Mexico for you, or Southern Pacific, or whatever railway is running down there.

NP: Did anything come from the south-north to be moved east and west in Canada?

BZ: There's probably a little bit of stuff that comes that way. It's not as prevalent as our stuff going down there. I mean, even so, we have trains that will move down through Windsor, Detroit, and then down through Chicago, and then back up through southern Saskatchewan and take it out west.

NP: Do the engines go, or just the cars?

BZ: Well, sometimes the engines go because you see when we go Windsor over to Chicago and up from there, the only section from Windsor to Chicago is not ours. The rest is all ours. It belongs to Canadian Pacific Railway, so.

NP: Do you see a time where the CPR would not go through Thunder Bay?

BZ: No, I think it will always go through Thunder Bay. CN might be another story because they run north of here. Their mainline is north of here. Coming into Thunder Bay is like a branch line for them. But I think CPR will always run through Thunder Bay.

NP: It'll be interesting to listen to this 100 years from now, right? [Laughs]

BZ: Well, you've got to have it for--. I mean, if the company's still around because you've still got to move stuff east and west. I mean, yeah, the CNR could handle it on their north line, I guess, sure, and then eliminate the CP line, but then how are you going to get stuff in and out of Thunder Bay? By truck. That would force the closure of all the elevators here maybe. And that can happen, too. You never know. I mean, they're all amalgamating and joining together and this sort of thing. The latest thing there last week, someone's trying to buy Viterra, so there you have it. [Laughs] You might just have one elevator company in town owning all the elevators.

NP: Something was coming to mind. Because you're a railway person, do you know what happened to the Grand Trunk Pacific?

BZ: No. I don't know what happened to it.

NP: It was early in the day, and then it wasn't. So I just wondered what--.

BZ: It could've been taken up by the CNR because a lot of those old short line railroads were taken over by the bigger railroads.

NP: We are hoping still after all these years to have a national historic site established in Thunder Bay to commemorate the grain industry, including the elevators, the railways, and the shipping. If that is to happen, what part of the railway experience from where you've been should we try to commemorate, preserve, as part of that centre?

BZ: Well, there probably isn't much there. I think you'd probably want to preserve more of the actual operating of the railway in town to service the elevators. That would probably be more something that you'd want to preserve, the actual--. Physically, the way it was done versus someone sitting in an office. [Laughs]

NP: Making the system work.

BZ: Trying to make it work, yes.

NP: On that note, if we're looking at--. And that could be partially the rolling stock, right? The change in grain cars, size of trains--.

BZ: Boxcars to hopper cars, oh, yeah, for sure. And trainloads versus individual cars and that. Oh, yeah.

NP: Are there boxcars around anymore?

BZ: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Well, we still use--.

NP: Of various sizes?

BZ: Oh, yeah. The forest products still use a lot of boxcars for shipping their paper and wood pulp and that. If you go anywhere close to former Bowater there, you'll see them on their tracks.

**[1:20:01]**

NP: Did boxcar size change over your time?

BZ: Oh, yeah.

NP: I mean, not once we got hopper cars, but even the boxcars themselves?

BZ: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Because I think at one time, I think, the boxcars were like 40 feet long. Now you can get 50-, 60-foot-long boxcars. Higher up ones and that. There was a standard size, but now because of Bowater, we redesigned some and made some bigger boxcars so they could get more rolls of paper in the car and that. So you have to watch how high you go because there are restrictions. I mean, you know that on the mainline there for double stacking your piggybacks and that, that's the size they can go is two. Otherwise, you'd see three or four piled up on top, but two is the limit because of tunnels and bridges and what have you.

NP: Something you said was raising a question in my mind. Oh, well. Any questions I should have asked you and didn't?

BZ: No. I think you pretty well covered my career quite well and that. Like I say, I can't think of anything that I've missed. But if you contact some of these other people and even P. V. Ltd., if you want to talk to him, he can fill you in on what he does for the grain industry. It's something different that wasn't done before because, at one time, if you had a car with a stuck side on it or gates

that wouldn't open, the only way that they could get the grain out of them, they would get the mechanical department to come over with a welding torch, and they'd cut a hole in the side of the gate and unload the grain that way. Then they had to ship the car over to mechanical to be repaired. So that was before P. V. Ltd. came along.

NP: A very pricey option.

BZ: Exactly. Exactly. Or they'd send over a team of fellows with big bars to try and crank that gate open one way or another. So there again, you're taking men away from what they're doing to do that. So that's just one of the small changes that I've seen and that for getting the grain out of the cars.

NP: Mmhmm. Any other changes?

BZ: No, not that come to mind right off the bat.

NP: Yeah. It was a--.

BZ: We've covered pretty well everything.

NP: Yeah. That span from '97 to 2003, to have any change is--. And the degree of change has just ratcheted up considerably.

BZ: Yeah.

NP: Oh. As far as people to contact, people on the operations side, even the guys down moving the cars, can you think of any names of good storytellers within those ranks that--?

BZ: Rod Medwick could tell you. He knows all the guys that have retired and could give you some good stories.

NP: Okay. Great.

BZ: I knew a lot of them just to see them. I didn't know their names. Yeah.

NP: Well, thank you very much. I enjoy these interviews.

BZ: Well, I'm sure you learn a lot!

NP: Every person has put another piece in the jigsaw puzzle. So thanks very much.

**End of interview.**