

Narrator: Janice Andrews (JA)

Company Affiliations: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC)

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Summary: Inspector for the Canadian Grain Commission Janice Andrews discusses her long career in Thunder Bay's grain trade within the CGC. She describes her first role as a temporary assistant inspector, with the primary responsibility of sample grain being unloaded from boxcars and loaded onto vessels. She explains how she studied for exams to become a permanent assistant inspector, and the increasing levels of responsibility as she moved up from assistant to full inspector. She describes the different varieties and grades of grains inspectors had to visually identify, the routine day for an inspector, and interacting with other CGC divisions and grain elevator workers. Andrews also gained the responsibility of training new hires, teaching at out-of-province conferences, and being a guide for international and national tour groups. She shares some of the major changes in the CGC and the industry as a whole, like automation forcing organizations to downsize, new rigorous standards to eliminate regionality in inspection, and changes to the Crow Rate and Free Trade Agreements causing a downturn in Thunder Bay's trade. Other topics discussed include her pride in Canada's global reputation for quality and variety, the CGC's diverse workforce, the struggles of being a woman in a male-dominated industry, Canadian grain export destinations, and the loss of inspectors' skills in the modern age.

Keywords: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Grain inspection; Grain sampling; Women in the workplace; Grain samples; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Grain grades; Grain varieties; Automation; Computerization; Visual inspection; Dockage; Pellets; Downsizing; Grain export destinations; Canadian International Grains Institute (CIGI); Crows Nest Pass freight rate; Free Trade Agreements; Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); SWP Pool 7A Elevator; MPE Pool 3 Elevator; MPE Pool 1 Elevator

Time, Speaker, Narrative
EE: Give us your name and describe how you came to work in the grain industry.

JA: My name is Janice Andrews. My parent's friend worked in the grain industry as a grain inspector. He was probably in his fifties when I started. He gave me a recommendation and told me when they were hiring, so I put in my application. This was in 1978 and I waited until they called me. I did not make the first list.

EE: The Commission was beginning to employ women in those years?

JA: Exactly.

EE: You were not part of the first group?

JA: No, I was not part of the first group. There were five or six women on already.

EE: Were you recommended in a sense by a male grain inspector?

JA: Yes. He was a family member.

EE: Did he have any comment on the fact that he was recommending women, you to become a grain inspector?

JA: No because he was in the environment where there were women, so he thought it would be a good addition to the other women that were there.

EE: And he was still employed?

JA: Yes.

EE: He was inviting you to join him as part of the Commissions group force?

JA: Yes.

EE: Do you think you were number 67 on the list when you applied? It was your list or that would be a priority list I suppose?

JA: Yes.

EE: You worked your way up?

JA: Yes, I worked my way up.

EE: That was 1978?

JA: That was when I first applied. However, I did not actually get on the job until the fall of 1979.

EE: What was the period of employment for a grain inspector?

JA: I was an assistant grain inspector when I came on and because the shipping season ends in December. We were called casual employment or term employees. I was usually on until the end of the shipping season. I was hired in September or the end of August, and I worked right up until the first week of December.

EE: Basically, through the fall of 1979 then you were called back earlier in the year.

JA: Yes, that was around April when the shipping season opens which is when they need extra people.

EE: And you are currently with the Commission?

JA: I am still working another more 18 working days. I am retiring in January.

EE: It will be the end of the season for this year.

JA: Exactly.

EE: It is going to be 30 years and a little bit more.

JA: Yes.

EE: You worked through all of this period serving the Grain Commission?

JA: That I did yes!

EE: The kind of work you did would take us into the stages of your career. You started as an assistant grain inspector?

JA: An assistant grain inspector where I basically did manual sampling.

EE: Describe a typical day at that stage of your career.

JA: The manually sampling was done on the deck of the boat. You had a long piece of metal with a bucket that we called a “scoop” and on the end was welded a cup. You went out with this scoop and took grain samples from the stream of grain as it flowed from the big pipes in the elevator into the hold of the ship. There was a real art to it.

EE: So you had to time it so that you would not get wacked with the stick and your elbow. A good deal of force to it.

JA: Exactly. When you are up on the deck of a boat and look into those big holds into an empty boat, you are looking down about 15 feet which is a long way if you were to fall. There are little railings around there and it was probably not the safest environment to be in at that time. Actually, I liked being outside doing the physical part of it. We had to carry the bags and all the equipment.

EE: You take a sample and put into a bag?

JA: Yes. There was a method to the sampling. You just did not stick out the scoop and grab grain and throw it into a bag because the grain would go into what I called drafts. One draft would be let’s say 50 tonnes so it would shoot 50 tonnes of grain out and then it would stop and then they would weight out another 50 tonnes and it would shoot out. For each draft that would come you would do probably six scoops, the middle, the two sides, and the back. You had to basically have to have a rhythm on how you would do it exactly the same for each draft.

EE: And the samples, the six samples from one draft would all go back together?

JA: Yes.

EE: You were not concerned about keeping them separate?

JA: No. You did want to keep them separate one from each draft. One pipe would go into one hold and then you might have another hold with a bit of grain going into another hold.

EE: Yes.

JA: Then you would keep those buckets separate. So the inspector would actually tell you when they needed the grain. He would say at “500 tonne” he would want a sample. So then you would have to count the drafts so you knew each draft was 50 tonnes. Every draft you would put the grain into a bucket and then once you got the 500 tonne you would mix it all up and then put it into a bag. You always kept your surplus in a separate bag just in case something happened.

EE: The surplus being--?

JA: Whatever did not fit into the bag and then you put it into big cardboard bags that were burlap sacks. That would be your extra in case the bag broke onto the way to the office.

EE: Ok you would be the custodian of the surplus?

JA: Yes.

EE: Each of them had to be labelled?

JA: Yes. We had little tickets that we would tape up or little pieces of paper that you would write on. You labelled what hold you were in, how many tonnes and the type of grain that was going in there and then you took that piece of paper and stuck it into the top of the white cotton bag and tied it up with a string. Someone inside the office would also know when it was 500 tonne. They would be talking to you or the person doing the job and they would come and stand on top of the dock and yell for you to throw the bag over the side. They would catch it down there.

EE: This is where the breakage could occur?

JA: That’s right, which is why you always kept a bit extra.

EE: Yes. How long would it take to reach the 500 tonne point for one bag of wheat?

JA: It depends on the elevator and of course the elevators are faster, and they might have two pipes going into that one hold so each one would be running 50 tonne drafts.

EE: Would you try to sample both of the chutes in that case?

JA: Yes, you have to sample both.

EE: It would become a bit lively at that point. How long would it take to do a 50 tonne drop?

JA: That depends on the elevator. The Sask Pool 7A its name is Viterra, yet I still call it the old name 7A is a very big elevator and fast so that they would run faster and the belts are bigger. If you went to a smaller elevator like Manitoba Pool 1 or the old Pool 3, they would be smaller and takes a little bit slower. But if you had at 7A you always had two people on the deck of the boat not just one person.

EE: It took two people to keep up with it?

JA: Yes because you had two pipes loading a specific type of grain and we had on the other end another pipe that would have another type of grain, so there was no way you could physically go back and forth.

EE: How many tonnes would you handle in a day? Was it 8-hour or 12-hour days?

JA: Seven and a half and half hour over time.

EE: And how many tonnes might you handle in a day?

JA: They could load 7A which is a bigger elevator for probably 2000 tonnes an hour so in 10 hours.

EE: So 500 would be 15 minutes?

JA: Yes.

EE: If you were to break it down in six samples?

JA: They could do a whole boat load in a day. There would be more samples than that because you are doing six samples per 50 which are 10 minutes and 60 samples for 15 minutes. Sometimes after the first 500 ton then they get it every 1000 depending on the

order. If it is a small order then you would have more bags. If it is a larger order than if it is 21,000 tonne and it is all the same grain then you space it out a bit.

EE: That is what the assistant inspector would do, and how long did you do that for?

JA: As an assistant inspector about four years.

EE: You spent four years on the decks of ships in Thunder Bay?

JA: Yes.

EE: At all the various elevators?

JA: Yes. It was fun. Not only on the decks of boats, but also inside the car sheds where the actual rail cars came in and unloaded. When I started that wasn't automated either. You had to physically go to a sampler that would be running in the elevator and all the grain would go into a bucket. That part was automated and then we would take the grain out of the bucket and bring it into the office. Eventually everything got automated. We were no longer on the deck of the boats or in the car sheds.

EE: The assistant inspector function has been replaced by machinery?

JA: Exactly. However, with that gone, now it's more automated in our offices. There are now more computers with every station having a computer. For the loading of vessels, you now have a board, everything is automated so you can actually see the grain running, how many tonnes you can tell to the point three decimal points you know how much grain is run. So it has taken a lot of guess work out of it.

EE: Yes. Now the move to assistant inspector to what "something inspector?"

JA: Yes.

EE: Would it involve training for proficiencies?

JA: Yes. In the old days when you were a new employee you were delegated to certain jobs such as going on the boats which involved some skill.

EE: Tedious in terms of gathering the samples?

JA: Exactly. That was when I was a casual. Once you became full time as an assistant inspector you had to compete for the job. There was a competition. Once you became full time, then you were given training in a year. So you were given a year of training, and then you had to pass what they called a “barrier exam” to prove that you have absorbed all the knowledge in that year and now you can be a fully qualified grain assistant. Then we did more jobs than just going on the boats.

EE: What was the knowledge that you were expected to know?

JA: We have what we called a "Grain Grading Guide" an official grain grading guide so that was like our Bible, and it had everything in it for every single type of grain that the Grain Commission was responsible for. There are tolerances for foreign material that you could have in a sample of grain, moisture tests percentage, all kinds of definitions that you had to know. Like, what is other material? What is dockage? What are stones in a sample? We had to memorize everything back then. We did not have the luxury of open books or anything like they do now. [Laughs]

I hate to say it but all of senior people we kind of give it to the new people because we not only had to walk to school both ways uphill, but we had to memorize everything, and it was a lot of memorization. We would actually start studying six months before we knew what the deadline was. It kept you sharp though. It really kept you on the ball and interested.

EE: We think of wheat I suppose as the most valuable grain. How many different kinds of wheat were there?

JA: Different grades. Well there are seven different types of wheat. So you had to know all of those.

EE: Mainly what kinds of wheat?

JA: There is durum, Red Spring Wheat, Canada Prairie Spring Wheat, Red and White, Soft White Spring Wheat and Red Winter Wheat which we use to call Utility. We had to be able to recognize them visually.

EE: Was that part of the Plant Breeding Program in Canada?

JA: Exactly.

EE: And is it still?

JA: It still is.

EE: Although I am told that it is under threat. But this visually distinguishes the ability of the varieties.

JA: Exactly. Especially with the wheat that was the big requirement. The criteria was that each class had to be visible distinguishable. Now they have done away with that. I really notice it now that it is getting harder to tell the classes apart. That is a skill that we are losing.

EE: With barley would there be as many kinds of this grain?

JA: There are actually two different classes of barley. You have a six row and a two row and one uses the different classes for different types of recipes I guess for their beer, different tastes and different brewing properties and all that. And then there is also the feed barley where you can just grow any kind of variety basically goes to feed. We get to know all of that also.

EE: Then we have flax.

JA: Flax which was more industrial.

EE: Yes.

JA: Way back it was industrially used.

EE: The seed oil.

JA: Yes the linseed oil and all that. And then the big health thing came out so now it became more prominent and more desirable. So the flax production went up of course.

EE: But as far as grain is concerned or whatever flax is flax?

JA: Flax is flax and the same with canola.

EE: Right

JA: Canola is canola and pretty much all the other grains they are whatever they are.

EE: Sure

JA: Wheat is your big class where you have to know more things.

EE: Yes. So you learned all those things and you passed the test.

JA: Yes.

EE: And you were now a permanent employee.

JA: A permanent assistant grain inspector. Then to become a grain inspector there was another competition. Then you had to apply yourself again. The level was a little bit more detailed because now you are actually grading the grain. So as an assistant, you are not really grading the grain, as an inspector you are. Now you had to know again more memorization and knowing when you are looking at grain and what does it qualify.

EE: In the grading of grain, foreign matter is a part of that I guess. Is it? Do you want to take us into the fine points of grading of a fine seed?

JA: Well now of course with the combines and the amount that they can clean before it even gets to the primary elevator, we are not seeing as much what we call "dockage material."

EE: The weed seeds particularly?

JA: Yes the weed seeds.

EE: Yes.

JA: Anything that can be removed from the grain is called "dockage". So it can and has to be removed before it can have a grade on it.

EE: Yes.

JA: So that is all dockage material which the elevator regurgitates its pellets.

EE: Sure.

JA: And mixed feed oats so nothing is wasted.

EE: Mixed into a by-product in a sense?

JA: Exactly. They don't waste anything in the elevator. What we are left with is the main sample for example wheat and then if anything is still remaining in the wheat that is called "foreign material." There are tolerances for that. In a number 1 grade, you could only have let's for example, 0.4 of a percentage of barley in a wheat sample.

EE: I suppose it is, more or less, an honorable kind of dockage to have where there are seeds of other grades.

JA: Yes. It depends on the end-use of the product.

EE: Sure.

JA: So that is how they determine what the percentages are of foreign material.

EE: Yes.

JA: You can also have different wheats mixed together which is another thing we are on the lookout for because you don't want to mix durum in with your Red Spring because they are so opposite.

EE: No. Quite different purposes.

JA: Yes.

EE: Does that happen very often?

JA: Yes.

EE: Does that happen because of elevators due to the mixture out of the bins?

JA: Yes sometimes especially going onto a boat or onto a vessel is where you would see mixtures like that because maybe a bin was misrepresented. We don't have any control over what happens with what the elevators do with the grain. We just basically just report the news.

EE: You are accessing what has actually happened.

JA: Right. So what they do with the grain is their business.

EE: I suppose you have had experiences and think "God, what is happening here, or rather how did that happen?" [Laughs]

JA: Exactly.

EE: Because you can tell at a glance what has actually happened in some of these cases?

JA: Yes and as soon as you see something that is amiss then you immediately, if you are loading a vessel of course, you immediately tell the elevator.

EE: And do they then stop the loading process?

JA: They have a choice, they can. [Laughs]

EE: Depending on the customer I suppose?

JA: Yes and I guess it's all their logistics, too.

EE: Yes.

JA: If they can find it or shut it down or whatever. In most cases they will of course.

EE: Yes.

EE: Durum for example, would not be easily cleaned or removed from let's say spring wheat?

JA: No absolutely almost impossible.

EE: So you would have to sell it as a mixture?

JA: Exactly. A mixed grain and then that is when you get other political entities involved. You get the Wheat Board involved because they are representing the customer. They are actually the buyer and the seller, so they are representing the customer. They do the talking and like I say we just basically report the news, basically.

EE: So becoming a grain inspector that was the ultimate step achieved at one point in your career or are there further steps?

JA: The grain inspector is what we would call a PI3. Mostly we did the inward cars that came in. So the unloads that would be our basic duty would be grading those cars that came in.

EE: Right.

JA: On occasions we would do the vessels. But the vessels were basically the realm of the supervisor--the PI4 actually.

EE: So it went up?

JA: Yes exactly and there was another level.

EE: It reads up. One, two, three, four. The larger the number the higher you are.

JA: Yes.

EE: What is the highest?

JA: Let's see. My boss is a seven, a PI7.

EE: The seniority part of that or is it primarily skill levels?

JA: No. There is no seniority when we compete that was taken out. You are basically on an even playing field with anyone who competes.

EE: It is a measure of knowledge, of skill and so on and so forth?

JA: It is yes basically.

EE: And the higher level is closer to the customer I suppose. In the sense of the ones who are involved in the ship as against from the cars?

JA: In the PI7 case yes because he is actually the supervisor of all the PI4's and he is basically responsible for the shipments that go out and he gives his okay to that. My final level is the PI5 and I am the regional trainer so my job right now for the last 20 years was training grain inspectors in how to grade grain and the finer points.

EE: So you were the right one to press the distinctions about these various varieties and so on and so forth? [Laughs] How long does it take an assistant to be ready for the various stages?

JA: Yes I am training them for the various stages. For someone brand new and off the street right now to be able to pass the barrier and to be fully qualified Assistant PI1, we are looking at between six and eight months. Now we are much more flexible because we do it according to the person. Whereas before, we had this length of time and either one passes it or doesn't. So now it is related to the person.

EE: According to one's skill levels?

JA: Exactly.

EE: Why was the change made and how did the flexibility come in?

JA: I am not really sure how it happened. I guess it was just now the 21st century, we should...

EE: I see it was actually recent.

JA: Yes it is that recent. There was quite a while where in Thunder Bay we were pretty stagnant as far as hiring, so we did not really pursue any new ways of doing things.

EE: You became permanent staff in 1983?

JA: I passed my PI1 barrier. When I came on I was casual and just seasonal and then when I came on full time that was another level, but still an assistant PI1 grain inspector. Then I became what is known as a seasonal full time which was at the end of 1980. Actually, it happened pretty fast for me. Some people could be casual and just come back seasonally for 10 years.

EE: Is it a reflection of ability or capacity?

JA: No. I don't want to say politics were involved, but how many permanent job openings do we have and how many people we have retiring that kind of thing, to backfill.

EE: Personnel management has been a fine art I take it!

JA: Exactly. [Laughs]

EE: To bury it less than one phrase?

JA: Yes. It was actually very recently. We had a big glut of people that in my generation within the next five years will be retiring. Finally we realized that we have to start hiring young people again. I think prior to two years ago was when they first started hiring new people right out of university and promoting it as a career that you could advance in the government. Prior to that I don't think we had hired anyone in 10 or 15 years.

EE: I am guessing that the decline of the grain trade which was around 1984 or 1985 will have had just this impact and there was not a need to increase the staff?

JA: Exactly.

EE: In fact the question would be retaining positions?

JA: Exactly. As you will recall the number of grain elevators we used to have and we would have staff at every single elevator. So not only staff where the cars coming in but you also had what we called “the outward gang crew” that were the vessels and that was an extra two or three people plus the people on the boat. So your outward crew would be maybe three people, PII's assistant grain inspectors plus the inspector in charge, which would be four people just for the boats. And at that time you would get the boats fairly regularly. Every day you would almost have a boat. Plus your inward crew, which would be six or seven people at an elevator.

EE: And there were maybe 10 or 15 elevators?

JA: Exactly. So I think we had at one time for inspection 160 to 180 people. It was huge when I first came on. Now we are down to 50.

EE: Every time an elevator closes it would be a matter of distributing the inspectors who worked there into the rest of the work force?

JA: Yes. Although with automation and everything else we have had it reduces people. But then in some aspects one is gaining because now the automation means that you are not out in the plant, but you are still have to do more things in the office.

EE: How did the automation advance? What were the things that were done and what kinds of machinery were brought in to change the way in which inspections were carried out?

JA: The samplers would now come into the office so it was now more of a pneumatic sampling system. It took a while but it actually became very consistent with the types of samples that the elevators had to have. Before they would be responsible for their own samples. They would have the old bucket and chain kind of thing. Now that has to have a certain type of sampler and pneumatic system of delivery so that the samples all now come into the office.

EE: So they are moved by air, sucked in and inspected?

JA: Yes.

EE: Is this equipment that is sold by someone or is it a company that everyone is required to buy from the same company?

JA: I don't think so.

EE: But do they have to be specific quality?

JA: Yes and we test them and have to give the okay that they pass our tests and that they are good to go.

EE: So that was one part of automation. Were there were other parts of automation as well?

JA: The same thing happened on the outward side. Whereas before one would stand on the deck of the boat and now they have put in these sampling systems that collect the sample in the elevator and it goes through the same pneumatic system that comes into the office. Now instead of on the boat, you are just standing in front of a screen with a bucket and you see the grain come in.

EE: Does it do a better job of the actual sampler?

JA: We were very resistant to the change. [Laughs]

EE: You can never beat a human being in doing this by eye and by hand!

JA: For the inward cars where you unload a car we would actually be in the car shed, and we would be writing down the car numbers because the car is right in front of you and you would write down the rail car number and you would actually see the grain coming out; whereas once we were removed from that we are relying on this method. Let's say they missed a car in between and we don't catch it because someone doesn't tell us, now all our samples are out of order. There were things that happened like that. Everything worked out.

EE: I can certainly understand the uncertainty and uneasiness about the sampling.

JA: You are losing your sight, your confirmation.

EE: So you now became much more dependent on the company and the work force of each of them.

JA: Exactly. We do have another component of the Grain Commission is the weighing division, and they still have people in the car shed because they still write down numbers, so they would now be our eyes in checking things out. We are working together.

EE: The Commission, we had been discussing a moment ago simply in terms of grain inspection was that there was another section involved in the weighing. Were there additional sections or were there two components of the commission staff?

JA: The inspection and weighing were the two biggest sections here. We had another department that was part of inspection called entomology and then they were the ones that would look for infestation.

EE: The little insects?

JA: Yes, in the cars and the vessels going out. Canada has very stringent rules about insects.

EE: Yes. Infestations and these could be living things?

JA: Yes. There are certain types of bugs that will eat grain and there are different conditions that will cause them. These could start on the Prairies when there are high moisture conditions or hot weather. Generally here in Thunder Bay the cold weather basically kills everything.

EE: Another good reason for winter storage of grain! [Laughs]

JA: We had another part of the Grain Commission in Thunder Bay, which was our Protein Lab that checks all of the grain going out, for example Red Spring Wheat for protein levels. They would be responsible for the machines that we do the protein testing on at the elevators. Then we have the back-up support staff.

EE: The protein would be important to the customer. The customer was promised a certain level of protein I suppose?

JA: Exactly.

EE: What is the relationship to the Wheat Board? You had described the Wheat Board as an agent for the customer. Can I use that phrase?

JA: We are not part of the Wheat Board. People get us confused but the Wheat Board is the buying and selling agent for the farmers basically. They also advocate for the farmers and they will go out and seek customers. They are the ones that are promoting Canadian grain to customers.

EE: Yes. The grain companies were in the transportation and storage and service business. They did not own the grain but just provided the grain. Could they own some of it?

JA: Not Wheat Board gains because the Wheat Board grain is owned by the Wheat Board. They purchase it from the farmers. For example, Paterson's would have an elevator out in the Prairies and they would purchase feed grain and move it to a Paterson's Elevator here, and that would go on a Paterson's boat when we had Paterson's Elevators.

EE: Yes it was knocked down just before you began working. [Laughs]

JA: Yes.

EE: I moved to town in 1978 and one of the shocks was seeing the Paterson Elevator on the Kam come down. My father sold all of his grain in the years that I was growing up to Paterson in Culross, Manitoba

JA: I believe they still have elevators.

EE: Yes they do have a big elevator somewhere just down the road.

JA: Yes.

EE: And other parts of automation such as the grading function itself has that been automated as well?

JA: They are trying to replicate the human eye. The idea is to pass the grain through some kind of a filter or sensor that would sense the condition of the grain and any defects in it and give you a grade at the other end. But I have heard that talk for at least 25 years. I have not seen anything that comes close to it.

EE: A well-trained human being is what we want here!

JA: Exactly.

EE: You have enjoyed the training function. If you had been grain inspector, what would your day be like? Or what was the day like of those you watched doing the job?

JA: I was a PI3 grain inspector and had passed all the exams so I was a grain inspector on the waterfront for three or four years. It is a routine type of day. You are tied to the loads coming in. Your day would begin with a good cup of coffee! [Laughs]

EE: Lots of good days start with a good coffee I find! Speaking as a tea drinker myself but conceding the fact. [Laughs]

JA: There are certain things that you have to get set up right off the bat such as the order of cars and everything else. You want to make sure that all the machinery is working and functioning. Once the cars start coming in then it is just a matter of your doing the grading and doing your analysis of the car.

EE: You might receive one of these bags? This is one from the cars that were on the ships.

JA: So everything is automated now so through the pneumatic system. Let's say that by Viterra can unload three cars at a time there would be three rail lines coming in and three receivers would have three sampling units that would come into your office. So you would have three buckets with little tags that tell you the car that is unloading. We are not quite to the point where there are TV screens into the car shed. So you would just wait for the sample and you get beeps and lights when the sample is all finished and then you pull your sample and start your analysis.

EE: Actually closed-circuit television would have made good sense.

JA: Yes.

EE: Was it too expensive?

JA: I am not sure who would have been responsible to put that in. I know at Cargill they have a closed circuit TV so that you can see the grain being loaded onto the vessel. Where our office is and where the boat is tied up is a little awkward to see. They are the only ones that have that.

EE: It certainly makes good sense so that you would have your eyes on what is being done.

JA: Exactly. You can actually see the cars now coming up.

EE: You would have a sample from one car and what do you do with it?

JA: First of all you have to look at the sample and you have to break it down into a number of a workable amount that you are going to do the analysis on. When you get it is a big pile of grain because you let's say you get 10,000 grams from the sample so you have to divide it down. Everything we do now is very consistent right across the country. We all have procedures that we do here that you would do in Vancouver.

EE: That makes sense. The ability to replicate.

JA: The equipment that we use is tested because we are also under ISO or QMS standards. We have standards that we have to keep up and everything is certified. We would take the sample and divide it down to a workable size, about 900 to 1000 grams. Then we would do our analysis on that sample. I would start looking to see if it has dockage material. If not then I would do some shaking to see what comes through and what stays on top and any foreign material, rocks, stones, ergots, mercury and anything contaminating the grain that should not be there. Then I would take smaller portions of that about a size of about 100 grams and go through it, not kernel-by-kernel but almost kernel-by-kernel, looking for something that is not uniformed that is sticking out from that sample that is odd. That is when you are looking for wheats from other classes or heated wheat or anything that is detrimental to that grade. From that analysis it may or may not, depending on the tolerances, may or may not degrade it. But you are always looking to get the best grade of course. Then you visually look at the grade and decide if there are environmental factors that are affecting the grain like frost, mildew or immaturity. That also helps determine the grade.

EE: At the end of it all, how long would this take from the 1000 grams that you separated out from the rest?

JA: It depends on the sample. If it's a really good-looking sample or even one that is not really good looking but doesn't have a lot of factors that needed to be what we call picked. If it is just a visual assessment it could be done from start to finish between eight to ten minutes. If it is something that you actually need to pick and go through it could take longer depending on some of the things we have to go into our book for, or because we have not seen them before. We have certain amounts that we have to pick for certain factors so that we have to make sure that we are doing everything exactly the same.

EE: The intention then is always to give the farmer the very best grain that he deserves?

JA: We are objective and unbiased so it is basically whatever is in front of us that is how we grade it. But you never want to start looking for things.

EE: No magnifying glass? [Laughs]

JA: You are just looking at what is in front of you and giving the grade based on that.

EE: There have been interesting cases of adulteration quite recently and evidence in canola seeds with the genetically modified seeds. You are not looking for that kind of thing?

JA: No because you cannot tell. That is a chemical test.

EE: I wonder how the Europeans decided that there were such genetically modified seeds in some of these samples.

JA: I think it is a chemical test.

EE: They must have almost planted or doused them because it is very often there are herbicide tolerances.

JA: Exactly. The Round Up-Ready canola and all that. I noticed a big difference from canola from when I started on the job till now. When I first started on canola you would get all kinds of weed seeds and dockage material.

EE: An enriched canola. [Laughs]

JA: Dockage of 10 percent and 12 percent was quite common; whereas now the weed seeds that you would get through it were amazing. There would be 5 percent or 6 percent of just weed seeds.

EE: Could they be cleaned up?

JA: Yes we could clean them.

EE: With some costs?

JA: You would have the sieves and you could pretty much get everything out.

EE: I mean industrially in terms of the cleaning?

JA: Yes at the elevator their sieves would replicate our sieves. It is just that we are doing it by hand and they have the big machines that do all the shaking.

EE: What do you think has happened? Are the combines more efficient in terms of separation?

JA: Yes and the Round Up-ready canola. The genetically modified canola.

EE: The weeds are being batted down by the Round Up?

JA: Yes. At one time you would see wild mustard for example in canola which you cannot clean out, and you would need a microscope or a ten-power optic to see if there is any wild mustard in that canola.

EE: It is a very little seed isn't it?

JA: The same size as canola and dark like canola so it doesn't stand out. So there are certain characteristics that you look for between wild mustard and canola.

EE: That may have been one of the ones that would have been very attractive to the farmers and the company would have known this?

JA: Yes like Monsanto.

EE: Infamous Monsanto would have focussed that.

JA: I don't want to talk about Monsanto.

EE: Let the record show that the witness was shaking her head with horror. [Laughing]

JA: I would go out west to teach at Olds College in Alberta which was good for me because then you are with people who grow the grain. I learned a lot from that.

EE: What were you teaching as a grain inspector?

JA: Grain Inspection at Olds College.

EE: Which College?

JA: Olds College in Olds Alberta. This went on for about 10 years. They have not had it probably the last five or six years.

EE: Where were the graduates going and who were the employers? Was it the Grain Commission?

JA: No. Well some would come to the Grain Commission, not that many but they would go to the grain companies. At the very beginning it was the grain companies that would send their inspectors to the classes, which were the first few classes that we had.

EE: So you had a privilege for creating these classes?

JA: Yes, I was out there when Percy (Note: Schmeiser vs Monsanto) was involved with Monsanto. You have to sign documents basically signing your right to your land away, and Monsanto can come onto your property in the meantime and check to see that you are not growing it.

EE: I think what struck many of us was the outrageous suit against him was because he claimed at least that he had not planted any of their seed. And if it was his crop, clearly it was pollution from the neighbours; it was transmission.

JA: Probably cross pollination.

EE: I guess Monsanto wanted to resist that conclusion which is I guess why they pursued it the way that they did. Because of course if that were the case, then something was going to adulterate all the canola growers of the Prairies. There would not be such a thing as organic canola grown.

JA: Exactly and especially with organic crops be such a big niche market we don't want any of that genetically modified stuff for sure.

EE: No the Europeans for canola and I guess the Japanese for flax had similar problems of course I think with alteration.

JA: I just read somewhere that they have approved the first genetically-modified wheat to be grown. I know they have been growing it on test plots, but I guess for production and for the general farming.

EE: It would probably have the same affect that the genes get around.

JA: I think they proved it in Mexico with corn.

EE: Yes, they did.

JA: I don't know how he lost the suit in Canada.

EE: He really should not have, but the economic interests along with all of this were very strong.

JA: Exactly and big company and big corporation you have there.

EE: Have we encompassed most of the typical days by now?

JA: Yes.

EE: What would you like people to know about the work that you will be doing for a little while longer?

JA: It is a very important job where we're basically we are certifying Canadian grain for the world. I believe our output, and don't quote me on this because I am out of touch with those numbers, but we export more than what we use domestically. Our quality has always been the best in the world. That is why we keep having repeat customers that come back. It is backed by science. We back up everything we do. We have all our analysis that we use. It is all backed up, which is great. It is not like the United States where you basically get whatever is on the boat. A customer in Canada can order a specific type of grain with a specific protein level, and they know exactly how it performs each and every time fifteen years ago to today. It is very consistent.

EE: It is an astonishing achievement in its way in terms of growing things and plants that that's been achieved.

JA: Exactly and that is why the people that farm are so important to Canada. To me it is just amazing that people live on the Prairies and farm and do that. It's a hard job.

EE: For the limited returns they all too often had to endure.

JA: Exactly that is right. My hat's off to them.

EE: Have you been to any farms?

JA: Through Olds College there were a lot of the younger people who would come in through the years were from farming families. That was the best part of the job!

EE: I suppose in a certain sense my heart would still be with the farmers. In fact I have entered into a very loose contact at the moment with a young man determined to farm with horses rather than machinery. I think that is an astonishing thing to undertake. I said immediately I hope you are keeping careful records because at some point and not that far hence I suspect there will be issues of mechanical high costs inputs into agriculture. That kind of agriculture will become more and more questionable. If you use animals then you have to grow the feed so immediate some part of the farm land would have to be devoted to that. It is a matter of, if we are producing a surplus anyway what the heck if some of the land is used to grow feed for the animals so you don't have to buy petroleum products.

JA: That is true and I guess we are seeing the demise of the smaller farms over the years with auctions and selling off of land and everything. So now the people that are farming have big tracts of land and are renting out sections.

EE: Townships I suspect are farming with huge machines that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. What might interest or surprise people most about the work that you do?

JA: I guess that it takes such a level of technical ability to do it. People do not really know what we do. Thinking about grading grain and how hard that can be. There is a level of visual ability. You need to be a visual person basically to see things in the grain and just that technical ability that it takes. That is learned. It is not something that you can read in a book. It is a real hands-on job that is how you learn.

EE: Are there competitions amongst inspectors to see who is better at it or not? [Laughs] Does that sort of thing happen?

JA: Yes. Let's say a car comes in and you just want another opinion what it is. So you will call Harry over to look at it and he might say something, but we don't agree with what he said. We just want somebody to back up what you are saying. So then you have a little competition, because we might take that car and send it to our downtown office where our senior inspectors would look at it, and they will give their opinion on what it is.

EE: It comes back and you can compare notes! [Laughs] I used to belong to a 4-H Seed Club many years ago. I remember more about wheat identification than I do about anything resembling grain grading and that sort. Although you would be expected to know something about the grains and identifying wheat plants.

JA: That was one of the best parts about going out to Olds was being in the farmland and actually seeing it growing, whereas here in Thunder Bay where I have spent my whole life, you are not really exposed to the agriculture part of it. You are seeing the products coming in.

EE: Appreciating the challenges that the farmers face.

JA: Exactly.

EE: I have seen the machines obviously by driving by but you made a reference to the quality of the combines, which is a bit of a novelty for me. Do you want to say more about that? I know they had a separator 50 years ago there was equipment involved with dropping wheat seed and getting rid of stones and so forth.

JA: I think it has gotten a little more refined now. I know with canola it actually takes the temperature of the canola and gives you a moisture content as it is coming in off the field and into the truck. It can actually clean a lot more of the seeds out and everything. It is really high tech with GPS and everything.

EE: With GPS of course the potential of that is you really have information on your fields. They are assessing the yields of various areas of the fields and they can then work that into your seeding and fertilizing and what not for next year. A very sophisticated business now.

JA: It is amazing.

EE: Any other interests or surprises in here?

JA: I cannot really think of any right this minute.

EE: What are you most proud of the work that you have done over the years?

JA: I take more pride in giving out the information that I know to touring groups that come through Thunder Bay.

EE: That is one of your privileges to meet with touring groups?

JA: Yes.

EE: What kinds of groups do come to the city?

JA: We will get groups that originated in Winnipeg through The Canadian International Grains Institute. CIGI will bring in international groups from say millers from Brazil and just from all over the place. Sometimes they will take them right across the country so they will go to Vancouver and will visit different ports. When they are on those tours they will come to our office so we get to show them around.

EE: Millers from Brazil now that sounds like an interesting designation. You said with knowledge I presume?

JA: We also have opportunities to join those CIGI groups as representatives of the Grain Commission. I was on one the durum millers group from South America, from Brazil and Latin America. It is kind of nice because you are meeting with international customers.

EE: This is partly work and development I suppose? Is that part of what CIGI is about too?

JA: The Institute is called the Canadian International Grains Institute.

EE: The International Grains Institute.

JA: So they are promoting Canadian grain and they work with the customers on technology. For example, let's say a miller in Brazil wants to set up his plant for a certain type of grain or whatever. We could send in technicians and help them set it up.

EE: By the time that they come here and you meet with them they have already been apprised about Canadian systems advantages and qualities?

JA: Exactly but they learn a lot of it while they are here because they are seeing it firsthand now.

EE: Do they express their satisfaction, their pleasure, their astonishment at what they are seeing?

JA: Yes it is quite good.

EE: Do you see Canadian groups from the Prairies very often?

JA: Individual farmers will come through and producers will come through who just happen to be coming through Thunder Bay, so they will stop.

EE: Will they call the Grain Commission here in town?

JA: Yes we have had that happen. Or they will talk to Viterra and as they deal mostly with Viterra. Then Viterra may contact us and tell us they have some people there that would like to tour the Grain Commission.

EE: You the tourist department for the grain companies. Or do they look to you to do it, or are you part of it and they will show them around and also give them a talk?

JA: Yes they will come to my department and I will give them a bit of a talk. Right now the biggest thrill for me is to see brand-new people come on, and passing on my skills, so to speak, and seeing them get it.

EE: Were you a lead teacher or were there others?

JA: In Thunder Bay and then I would have people that would help me because there were a lot of people.

EE: Would you want to speculate as to why you were chosen person to do this?

JA: I have a good rapport, an easy-going rapport with people.

EE: Bright and pleasant! [Laughs]

JA: She has to know her stuff and she does that obviously. [Laughs] And probably just being able to show different aspects of the job and explaining things and being a mentor.

EE: Could you say something about the variety of people that you have instructed over these years? You were close to gender balance, maybe that is one way of putting the 50/50. That may not have been a goal, of course.

JA: I think we are pretty close now.

EE: Reflective of the population in gender terms of the work force?

JA: I think so.

EE: Did employment equity and other objectives ever come into play?

JA: Yes. We have aboriginal people and visible minorities, and it is good to see that diversity.

EE: So there are some aboriginal inspectors as well?

JA: Yes. In fact we just had a PI3 competition and we have not had successful candidates probably in the last three times we have run it. I was getting very discouraged, questioning is the exam too hard or is the teaching methods not good enough or are people just not applying themselves. So this time we had seven people pass which was great. It was a diverse output which was great.

EE: Yes I can certainly agonize with you over the question of the quality of the teaching, the rigor of the exam and the end result.

JA: Well just to refer to the going uphill to school and back because we had to memorize everything when we did our exams. Now everything is open book.

EE: They can flip fast enough!

JA: Open book plus when we had to grade grain we have standards which is the standard of quality for a certain grain and that is what we are always comparing grain too. We actually had to visually visualize the standards before we wrote the exam because you had to compare it in your head. Now we actually give people what physical standards to use while they are doing the tests. [Laughs] What are we doing wrong that people can't pass these exams, but we worked it out.

EE: When did the open book policy come in?

JA: That came in about four or five years ago. Just very recently had our head office department in Winnipeg that oversees the training for the whole country. Before it was regionally so I would be in charge of the training for Thunder Bay and now with this national component the training is all consistent. Every region has the same type of training we follow very rigid learning plans and outcomes and all that kind of stuff. It is good.

EE: That would be an improvement over the old ways?

JA: Yes over the old way because now we know that in Thunder Bay we are getting the same as people in Vancouver and vice versa.

EE: As you near your conclusion of your career, do you have any thoughts about the way in which the Commission has functioned over the years? In such things of the possibility of regional idiosyncrasies for example? That is the other side of what you are describing?

JA: No doubt things did exist regionally just because of the type of grain that came in or how Thunder Bay has lakera whereas Vancouver deals mostly with salties. So there was always regional differences, and Montreal would be taking in corn and all things that we wouldn't see here so there are always regional differences that would come into play. It is actually good now because it is national now, so when you do an exam the inspector has to know corn and buckwheat and to know everything, which is good.

EE: Open book or not.

JA: Exactly.

EE: I suppose if everyone has to know everything a little help wouldn't hurt!

JA: True [Laughs] It has been fun.

EE: I guess that I hardly have to ask you if your work contributed to Canada's success with the international grain trade.

JA: Oh yes. Absolutely. Because of our very rigorous standards with Canadian grain going to customers, they have come to expect a certain quality. So, Canada we're elevated in the world of grain quality.

EE: Would you have seen European millers at any point on these tours?

JA: I personally have not but in Winnipeg they would have.

EE: I understand that millers in Europe and perhaps in other places would be well aware of the high quality of what they would be buying and quite capable of mixing in some other grains in the process of achieving the grain that they want?

JA: For sure. I know Italy imports our durum so that is cool for Canada. That is such high quality and very consistent. A lot of millers anywhere in Canada or in Europe I am sure they buy different grades of grain. It is a recipe that they use. So they are not always buying the top quality but they may blend in.

EE: Yes I suppose that would be the way to go if we have the opportunity to interview a miller, and what are the different mixes of grain that you would want for the various kinds of grains for baking.

JA: Exactly. I know Warburton but I don't know if that is the name of the company in England a big bakery place, but they would import Canadian Red Spring--only certain varieties and we always called them Warburton shipments because we knew they were going right to England on purposes. I know that they would blend certain varieties together.

EE: That would reflect many years of experience on their part to produce the right kinds of breads?

JA: Exactly.

EE: All these multi-grain breads these days must really be a joy to put together at the bakery?

JA: We don't see stuff like spelt or kamut, because they are not officially Canadian and one of our 21 grains—not an official grain—so we don't really see them coming through the port. They could come in containers and be shipped out but we don't officially inspect them.

EE: No doubt, but there are various grains about. Describe any connections you see between your work and the work of farmers growing the grain handle and the grain trade? [Laughs] We may largely have answered that question.

JA: I think so. [Laughing]

EE: What major changes did you see in your job and the trade over the years that you worked?

JA: Just the changes in the consistency of our own Grain Commission job across the country, where we are all now doing exactly the same thing; whereas before you know you might do a little short cut here and there or whatever. But now everything is very rigorous but controlled. It is consistent, so you are always getting a consistent result in the end. It only makes sense that if I do an analysis in Thunder Bay why I wouldn't get the same result if I did it in Vancouver, following the same procedures.

EE: But that is something that was brought consciously into the policy of the Grain Commission. Did a commission--. The top dog is a commissioner.

JA: I think it was evolving maybe through ISO because we did not always have the equipment that was tested all the time. We always have grading lights that run a certain distance from the bench but maybe in the old days we didn't have a certain brightness that there had to be. They had to be a certain kind of bulb, but maybe they didn't have brightness so then my bench would be darker than another one at a different elevator could be different levels of light. So now all that is consistent. We actually go to the light meters and check.

EE: Do you have knowledge of how these ISO standards were developed for the Grain Commission? Were they developed in the Commission or given to it?

JA: I am not exactly sure but it was a head office thing that would have been made.

EE: See if our interviewers in Winnipeg would come close or think of asking the question. We may have to pass that question onto them and it is something to ask.

JA: My old boss was involved in getting that thing started here. I don't know if you have interviewed him?

EE: Who is that?

JA: Jack Robertson.

EE: I think so.

JA: He would have been with the Grain Commission in Thunder Bay. So he would have been the regional manager for Thunder Bay. He retired about five or six years ago. He is very knowledgeable, and he would have seen those changes and would have been a part of it because of being in his position of being head of Thunder Bay.

EE: Sort of see the value of conformity with such matters of lighting benches. Ever one sees at the same and of course testing of eyes could follow and I am sure they are all equally acute. [Laughs] Was your vision an issue?

JA: That was one thing that was taken out, and now we might be putting it back in. There was a requirement when I started if you were under 30 or 35, you only had to get your eyes every seven years or so. But once you reached 35 or 40 or if you wore glasses originally when you were hired then you had to have your eyes tested every two years or maybe three years. After you were 50 you had to have your eyes tested yearly. But in Ontario because the health policies like OHIP is different from what you would have in Vancouver, so in Ontario we can only get our eyes check every two years, whereas maybe in Vancouver it may be different. They could get their eyes tested every year. There was too much discrepancy so they just scrapped the whole thing. They are thinking of bringing it back though. [Laughs]

EE: Someone was short-sighted! You mentioned the automation earlier.

JA: That was a big change for us.

EE: The change in work force, employment equity. My memory is that employment equity being our term for affirmative action is about 1983 or 1984 when the policy changes were being contemplated, and I guess they probably came into effect gradually through the latter 1980's. The Grain Commission too would face the challenge of having its work force be more reflective of the local population.

JA: Exactly.

EE: Was that consciously addressed in those terms?

JA: Yes.

EE: With the Aboriginal people in the community there should be some Aboriginal grain inspectors?

JA: Yes. We would go out and recruit specifically Aboriginal people, women.

EE: Are the numbers public or not? I am just curious how many Aboriginal people there would be in the local workforce now?

JA: That would be voluntary.

EE: Self-identification, I think, is the Canadian policy?

JA: I am not sure if that would be public information or not.

EE: I remember me a dozen years ago chairing the Indigenous Learning Department here for a year as acting chair in a meeting with the advisory committee. Someone on the committee said, "There are more Aboriginal people on as students on the campus these days." And a number of the Aboriginal people around the room was almost simultaneously said, "How do you know?" I thought to myself they don't always look--. All those blue-eyed, blond Aboriginal people. [Laughs] The impact that these changes have on your job and the industry, do you want to add anything to what you have said about the changes?

JA: No, but I would probably say we used to rely on the book—I guess is was basically a binder.

EE: Well if it is open-book, they still do.

JA: Everything is now on the computer, and you can access it though the computer, and the computer is now a part of your workstation. You can access the Grading Guide through a PDF file on the computer. But it is just not the same as opening a book. chuckles

EE: Not opening a book is the Internet making us stupid?

JA: You have to turn the page to know what was before it and what was after it. It was that physical thing of turning the pages.

EE: So there are these feelings about the senior grain inspectors?

JA: Yes that was a big struggle especially when we have about 15 years ago when we started with old Apples.

EE: We are talking about Macintosh Computers and things of that sort are we?

JA: Yes the old computers.

EE: The classics and through the 1990's.

JA: Those were the first ones that were used.

EE: The first Mac Plus more than 20 years ago.

JA: So these would be around that time that was our first computer and try to get Senior Inspectors who were just about to retire and who actually could type instead of writing things out. That was a big challenge.

EE: Old dogs can learn new tricks! When they are two legged dogs I discovered! [Laughs] I never learned how to type but I am astonished how well I can process these things.

JA: Okay.

EE: The fingers have learned that with over 20 years of doing this. I did not get any instructions at all and sort of played there with the fingers, but I am using most of the fingers for processing.

JA: That is good. [Laughs] With that initial resistance to the big changes and it was a big change.

EE: My brother who is an electrical engineer depended on staff as I did as a Member of Parliament through the mid '80s. Those four years of course, the staff did all that. When I came back to the university that is when I bought my Mac Plus. He was learning the computer from a daughter, actually, because he had not actually used one for all those years and he retired in the '90s. Besides dealing with change what other challenges have you faced on the job over the years?

JA: When I first started I was one of the first women on the job, so you had to be pretty tough with thick skin.

EE: People said things?

JA: Yes, but not from the Grain Commission people, but when you were working in the plant with elevator people.

EE: Yes, the grain handlers and what not?

JA: Yes. Because they were not enlightened, some of them. [Laughs]

EE: Better not get in characterizing them here! [Laughs]

JA: I cannot say all, but some. You are in such a big population you are going to get a few that are going to stand out. [Laughs]

EE: Those who did it briefly, but you have remained with it. Your working years and you are pleased to have done it.

JA: Yes it was a good job. I think because I was able to progress through promotions. I wasn't always kept at one level. Whether by choice or not, but there were opportunities for advancement, which I think really helped.

EE: You said you had to be thick skinned in terms of the surrounding workforce. The workforce, your fellow inspectors, were more respectful in the fact that change was taken place and more accepting of it.

JA: I think so. There were things that with the advent of woman on the job that we definitely addressed like the nude calendars on the walls. You would see them everywhere, and then they were gone after we brought it to light. Within the union we had a women's group that was specifically working for women in the union. That was new.

EE: Your union was--?

JA: The Public Service Alliance of Canada.

EE: A section of it?

JA: Exactly.

EE: You were the beneficiary of the Women's Committee of the Public Service Alliance.

JA: Yes, but not anymore. I have been out of the union in my current job.

EE: How long have you been out of the union?

JA: Twenty years.

EE: Was this from the time you became an instructor?

JA: Just a job classification.

EE: You had not been such a pushy union type that they promoted you up? I don't suppose.

JA: I did have a few grievances, in my day. No I don't think so. [Laughs]

EE: Plenty a workplace that the able union person does get promoted to supervisory staff. That is designed to end grievances that there is ability and energy being shown. So the management gets the advantage of it.

JA: That is true.

EE: It does have that silver lining I suppose. Oh what a thought! [Laughs] What major challenges do you think the grain industry has faced over the years that you have been aware of?

JA: The free trade opened things up. That is when I saw the port starting to decline.

EE: So the FTA in 1989 left a following on that?

JA: I think it was even before that when all those things started falling. You could see it, and that was going to be the beginning of the end--the Crows Nest Pass Rate.

EE: I was just going to say as a historian with the Prairie routes I can think of knowledge of the Lakehead and I could say that there was perhaps a glorious century of the grain trade from perhaps the first CPR train from the Prairies in 1883 through the Western Grain Transportation Act taking affect just about that time in 1983 or 1984—almost exactly 100 years that changes began to take place. And those have been there as a challenge through the last 25 years.

JA: I remember one of the old grain inspectors who was my boss at the time, it was just during the time of the free trade when Mulroneu was in power and I remember him standing up in the lunchroom and saying, "This is the end of the Grain Commission,"

he said. "Mark my words the Grain Commission is going downhill from this day on." Actually in terms of shipments, numbers of staff, elevator closures.

EE: There is much truth in that observation. The Commission has survived to the present day although I understand it may be under attack these days?

JA: It seems like we have always been under scrutiny from Parliament or the elevator companies or someone, just because of the nature of our job.

EE: Sure and scrutiny is one thing. Certainly the people in the trade watch Inspectors like hawks because of course the Inspectors are watching them like hawks. [Laughs] At the workbench levels, the inspection bench, what have the relationships with the grain company been like? Amicable enough?

JA: Of course, because you see them every day there is no butting of heads or anything like that. That all happens at the higher levels.

EE: Do you share coffee rooms?

JA: No.

EE: No fraternization with the enemy? [Laughs] And you have your own coffee lunch facilities?

JA: Yes. Because we are on their property, we might still go down to the lunchroom to get a chocolate bar or something like that.

EE: And their lunchroom might not be as effective as employment equity activities as yours?

JA: This is true.

EE: How are these challenges met with the decline of grain trade in a sense with the last quarter century?

JA: In Thunder Bay it translated to that we were not hiring the staff. In fact we had a couple of instances where we downsized full time staff because of elevators closing and reorganization of the Grain Commission from larger staffs. From them saying, "Well you can do the job but X number of people instead of 10 and we can do with 4." Things that were out of our control.

EE: What were your most vivid memories about the job?

JA: The people that I worked with and having a lot of laughs. We had such a diverse group, personality wise.

EE: Was there much socializing amongst the inspectors?

JA: When I first came on the job, there was a bunch of us that were very young that were all hired together so we moved up the seniority thing. We had Christmas parties, and we had a baseball team and summer picnics for the kids.

EE: Was it the cohort who was doing this?

JA: It was us the cohort group and we would do all this stuff. There was an era about 10 to 15 years ago because of the downsizing and the turmoil and the scrutiny of the Grain Commission we eliminated totally all that kind of stuff. So there was a lot of turmoil. People didn't really want to be socializing anymore. It was more when you went to work and all you would hear would be bitching and complaining. So that sort of took over.

EE: Morale would have suffered through those years?

JA: Exactly. And we are slowly getting out of that now, and now with this advent of the last two years of hiring new, young, vibrant people, it has just lifted us up. It actually makes me really happy because you see them now organizing social things and doing things together, and you can see there is hope for the Grain Commission.

EE: It is tough for an institution to endure for a time without additions to it.

JA: Yes. You are spending so much time with everybody. It is eight hours plus overtime. A lot of times you might work overtime every night and five to six days a week sometimes. Sometimes seven days a week you are spending with this group of people.

EE: Those lovely French phrases "esprit du corps", that would be true for inspectors as you know your skills and appreciation for your superiority over other parts of humanity, or am I wrong? [Laughs]

JA: Yes kind of.

EE: Do you think it is important for us to be preserving and sharing the history of the Grain Trade that we are endeavouring to do by plumbing your memory this afternoon?

JA: I think it is great! Very worthwhile especially as things change here in Thunder Bay, and we lose sight of how great this waterfront was at one time, or how vibrant it was with the number of elevators there were. I think there were 30 or whatever and the trains coming through and the ships coming through. I think we need to capture it while we can.

EE: Capture that great century and the years that followed on afterward.

JA: Exactly.

EE: Do you have any aspects of the history which we should really concentrate on preserving?

JA: If you are doing an overview of everything that's good.

EE: Is there other questions about any other questions that you think I might have asked you? This where we have learned to bring our "chief engineer" in who has been listening quietly for a long period of time and he probably has questions of his own. [Laughs] Do you want to lead Owen?

OM: What had you seen your life offering you when you were 25 years old?

JA: I was an inspiring artist you see. I am looking at that 30-year break and now I am continuing on. I had worked for Chapple's in the window department and was part-time working there making \$3.25/hr, just part time. I had recently gotten engaged. This job came up that was paying \$8.00/hr, and it was ok so there is a big decision here. [Laughs]

EE: Easy to make?

JA: Easy to make yes. That was it and once I got on the money was good and the people were good.

OM: What media do you work in?

JA: I am a painter.

OM: Any painting that reflect your work or that relate to the grain trade?

JA: Starting in 2000, I finished my degree here in Visual Arts which I started back in 1972, when the first Visual Arts Program opened here. I can't say "no." I am an abstract painter now and when I go out to the Prairies for the job, and I was just out there recently, and it was harvest time and the picture I have in my head with [inaudible] harvest of a huge beautiful sky, and that gives me a lot of impressions that I put into my paintings. Not specifically detailed landscape.

OM: What are the changes you as a person?

JA: When I first started and all through the years?

OM: And looking back?

JA: It has given me more opportunities. Being a government job you are also involved in different courses for goal setting and conflict resolution. I have acquired different skills that I probably would not have gotten if I had stayed with Chapple's. That has allowed me to expand my repertoire of people skills, so to speak, so that is always good thing.

EE: Are there any other questions that we might have asked that come to mind? Are there aspects of your work life that we didn't think about up to this point? [Laughs]

JA: I think you have covered quite a range of things. I am just sorry to see a lot of the technical aspects and skills that we have that separated us from other countries, say the USA or Australia—very technical skills like varieties—have gone due to government policies and privatization and restricting scientist too much so that we cannot make new breeds of wheat. So it is affecting us and not our skills.

EE: What do you think is driving that on? It would obviously be a gut sense. You said policy of course which has not been entirely peculiar to the present Conservative Government. Was it happen earlier under the Liberals too?

JA: It probably started then or even before that where, because of restrictions of varietal distinguishability—the visual distinguishability—that was the biggest single restriction that I see as the wheat scientists had against them. It restricted them from producing a type of wheat that was resistant to midge damage. It took them too long.

EE: Do you think this came from the plant scientists themselves.

JA: For sure.

EE: The plant breeders said “We just can't continue.”

JA: Too many restrictions.

EE: There is an excellent article in Equinox if the plant breeders were still alive it would be fun to talk to him about it.

JA: Was that the one about the wheat?

EE: Yes. It must be 20 years ago that article. It was a marvelous account of what went into the varieties of wheat. (Note: They might be referring to article featuring Dr. Ron DePauw. See DePauw interview in Voices of the Grain Trade collection)

JA: It must take years and years of effort.

EE: Yes it does take years and years of effort.

JA: So I think they wanted to see it shortened, so that they can get the varieties out in a shorter time. Again that reduces our skills.

EE: It's not necessarily progress—speaking somewhere between the historian and the politician.

JA: And I guess that the next step will be when they actually do come out with a machine that you put the grain in and it scans it and does away with the human computer.

EE: There are skeptics out there. [Laughs] I think Sir Roger Penrose is the great British mathematician who thinks artificial intelligence is an oxymoron. I have got a copy of his theory, *The Road to Reality*. It is a fat book with 600 pages. [Laughs] Thank you it was a very interesting interview and I quite enjoyed this.

JA: Thank you that was very interesting.

End of Interview

