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Company Affiliations: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC), Federal Grain

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Summary: In his first interview, retired regional director for the Canadian Grain Commission Rick Bevilacqua discusses the Thunder Bay portion of his career in the CGC. He describes his first grain industry job as a summer employee for Federal Grain shovelling boxcars at Northwestern Elevator and working on the scale floor at Searle Elevator. He discusses his move to the CGC's protein lab, and he explains the changes to protein testing techniques and equipment, as well as the route of a grain sample from the Prairies to the Winnipeg labs to Thunder Bay. Bevilacqua then describes his move into the terminals as an assistant grain inspector during a period of 24-hour operations. He begins to survey the waterfront and discusses features and memories from grain elevators in the Westfort area. He describes various changes over his time in Thunder Bay, like women entering the workforce, the war veteran group starting to retire, and technology modernizations. Other topics discussed include early memories of the Empire Elevator fire, the hierarchies within the CGC inspection and weighing divisions, the movement of CGC employees around the waterfront, the health and safety hazards of grain dust, and the coordination with elevator managers and the Canadian Wheat Board on issues of grain blending tolerances.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: It's Nancy Perozzo conducting an interview on April 16, 2014. The interview is being conducted at Bayview Towers overlooking the elevators of the Thunder Bay harbour. I will have the person who is our narrator for today introduce himself and as he called it give the "tombstone data" of his career in the grain trade.

RB: My name is Rick Bevilacqua, and I have been employed with the Canadian Grain Commission for 37 years. I began my career in the grain industry working for Federal Grain as a summer job. From there, I simply answered an ad in our local newspaper that was recruiting lab technicians for a lab that was going to test protein content in wheat, which was a new thing back in the early 1970s.

I had finished Confederation College and was looking for work at that time and felt quite lucky to be hired as a lab technician. From that point, I left the lab after three years to work in the grain terminals as a grain inspector. I liked the work, quite long hours, and most of my days were in the area of between 8 and 12 hours because of the volume of working grain that was moving at that time.

From there I applied for a position in Winnipeg in 1983 as the National Training and Special Projects Officer and was successful and packed up my wife and young son and moved to Winnipeg, which was a new and very difficult thing for someone not having travelled much.

I worked in that capacity as acting in several senior positions through that time and left in 1989 for Vancouver as essentially the assistant manager. The title was Assistant District Grain Inspector in Charge. My responsibilities there were the grain inspection work on all the incoming grain for the port. After spending two years there, an opportunity presented itself to move back to Thunder Bay in the same capacity and I took that opportunity having a young family and liking the idea of raising them in a small town like Thunder Bay.

I moved back to Thunder Bay in 1992, and after my boss retired in the early 2000s, I applied and was successful for the position as Regional Director and held that position until my retirement in 2009.

NP: Great. Nicely done! What a career. I would like to go right back to the beginning and then as we move through the interview and if we don't have enough time because of the length of your career and the various experiences that you have had, then we will do a couple of interviews, so we won't have to rush. You grew up in Thunder Bay. Was there anyone else in your family who worked in the grain industry or were you the first?

RB: No. My dad was a railroader and worked between Schreiber, Chapleau, and Thunder Bay and spent long, long hours as both a brakeman and a conductor on the passenger train through the city. We are lucky enough to get the odd ride on the passenger train

which was always a thrill or up in the engine of the freight train and again quite a thrill to be able to do that. Actually, in my young days I still recall steam engines, and we have my pictures of my dad working on the steam engines. I had an uncle that worked for Federal Grain, and while I was out looking for work—and pay at that time for someone right out of high school or college was around \$2.00 an hour—and he asked me if I was interested in hard work and a job that paid \$3.80 an hour. I nearly fell over when I got my first pay cheque. The work was very hard, and when you are at the bottom of the shovel, let's say, at grain elevators there is plenty of dirty work to go around. I did a fair bit of that, but there were also some good jobs in the grain elevator and found it interesting and didn't mind the hard work at that time.

NP: What was your uncle's name?

RB: My uncle's name was Peter Campaner. Peter went on to work for the industrial supply companies in town such as Biscoe and Northland Superior and a few of those companies. At that time with Federal Grain, that company managed to own four grain elevators in Thunder Bay and at that time. Also, we were upwards of 23 or 24 elevators and every company that moved grain wanted a terminal in Thunder Bay. We were moving through the port upwards of 8 to 12 million tons annually in that 1970 period. There was plenty of work and it was all labour intensive. Everything from shipping, railroads, grain elevators, and all the associated industries were not very modern in terms of mechanization and automation. Everything was still very labour intensive, including the Grain Commission's work.

NP: Before you go on because one of my life's ambitions is to try to figure out who and what elevators were over the time period when the first one opened. At the time then when you were with Federal you said they owned four elevators.

RB: Correct.

NP: What elevators were they?

RB: They owned Northwestern, Searle, Stewart's, and some of those have been demolished, and Westland D.

NP: Let's stick with what you were talking about. Was it a summer job that you had?

RB: Yes, it was. It was during the navigation period from early May until near the middle of December there are substantial amount of work available. However, very little from the period January to April. Grain never moved in either direction at that time. There was a little bit of work through the winter months drying grain, conditioning grain, cleaning and special cleaning all those kinds of things, but very little work at all.

NP: If you go back to your first one or two days on the job, would this have been the first time you had been in an elevator?

RB: Yes.

NP: Can you think back to how you felt, the sounds and the smells?

RB: That is a good question, Nancy, and some of that I do remember vividly because the first job that I had was at Northwestern Elevator. My job was to shovel grain. To get into a boxcar, first take an axe and break the cardboard barrier that held the grain in the box car. The amount of grain that was around the door of the box car would flow out, and then your job was to take what they call the "shovel" but it resembled a flat piece of plywood, and standing behind it clean the boxcar out.

The first day I did this, I went home, and I could barely walk. Not accustomed to really hard work my whole life. I couldn't get out of bed the next morning, and I still remember my eyes were so infected by the dust and dirt that my mother had to take a warm washcloth and dissolve whatever was holding my eye lid shut because I couldn't open my eyes in the morning, and she was getting me ready for work. Luckily, I did that for a week and after five days of it, I didn't think I could last another minute.

The foreman came to me and said "Why didn't you tell me your uncle was Peter? I have got a better job for you." He moved me to a job in the elevator working on the scale floor weighing grain, and I couldn't believe it and the pay was actually more, and I couldn't believe how lucky I was to get out of that area.

From there I was moved to another Federal Grain elevator, to Searle Elevator. I worked there in the same area on the scales and did that type of work. For the amount of money we were making relative to others in the city, other friends of mine that had other type of work, I found it quite easy. I thought it was a pretty good job given the amount of pay that we earned. The other thing is that it was very labour intensive, and I had so many friends of mine also worked there. Some that own car dealerships now and other occupations in the city and so many I probably represent one or two percent of those people that worked there and ended up staying with the business. So many people left at that time for various reasons.

NP: You mention the foreman or supervisor that came to see you and moved you to a better job and kept you in the industry, do you remember his name?

RB: Yes, his name was Ed Zablonty's father. I can't remember his first name, and I ended up with Ed as a grain inspector with the Grain Commission later. His father was the general foreman or something to that affect. A supervisor out in the track shed area.

NP: I think that you are the first person I have interviewed who actually worked at Northwestern.

RB: Really?

NP: It was one of the first ones to be demolished.

RB: It really was.

NP: That was on the turning basin?

RB: Correct. With all those places the most difficult part of it was to find where it was. Trying to find the access road into the elevator. The signage was very poor, and I had to do--. A day before I had to drive to find where I was going to show for work the following morning. It was quite a novelty for that week, but it is something that I will never forget in terms of hard work.

NP: Think about that area because at one point there were actually three elevators in that area. There probably would have been only one other standing when you were there. What do you recall about that next-door one?

RB: I really don't know or recall much about the others in that area as not having worked there, other than working at Northwestern. I do recall the ships turning in that area.

NP: That must have been something to see.

RB: It really was, but I was familiar with seeing those. They did that quite often in the Kam River at the sheds where they unloaded packages and freight further up the Kam River.

NP: How did you come to see the ships turning there?

RB: We would walk to school on the Kam River from the East End, and we would walk along the docks. While you walk home along the docks, which was trespassing at that time because the railways owned all of that, we had to dodge our way through there going through the rail yards to get to those places. It was a bit of a short cut and a bit of a novelty to walk along there.

NP: Tell me about that. Ron's dad who also grew up in the East End said that at one point you could probably walk from the East End and maybe even down to Westfort by going over these docks. Where were you living at the time?

RB: On MacTavish Street, which was probably the main street in terms of where the two package freighters the *Fort York* and *Fort Henry* unloaded freight in the sheds. I had a grandfather that worked in one of those sheds, and we would go there as kids and ride our bikes there to see what was going on and look at all the activity.

NP: What would they be unloading?

RB: Everything from liquor to usually bags of animal feed, oats those kinds of things. The bulkier things. Sometimes boxes, general freight like that.

NP: Why would they be unloading things like oats, when oats would be coming through on the trains?

RB: These were products that were specialized. They were not the bulk grains. These were things that might be animal food of a certain type that have been processed already into pellets or some type of animal feed.

NP: They would have made their way through Thunder Bay as raw grain and then come back as processed?

RB: That is right, either from corn and also going the other direction. These ships would unload freight and then get reloaded with bagged grains from Ogilvie's and those areas as well. We bagged grain here in Thunder Bay at that time.

NP: Why would they bag grain?

RB: The by-products that were being bagged going into the feed market.

NP: Not enough to have a shipload or too difficult to ship in bulk?

RB: That is right. For customers that were buying bags of grain as opposed to bulk amounts.

NP: To continue your little walking trail to school, where was your destination?

RB: I went to Selkirk High School.

NP: You are at the docks with the package freighters?

RB: By the Jackknife Bridge, we would make our way up Walsh Street to the school and I had friends who went to Collegiate as well, and we would all meet up one way or the other. This is before we had a car. Even before high school we occasionally would walk along there just to see what was going on.

NP: I don't even know if you are able to answer this question because things might have deteriorated by the time you were in high school. There were at one point a series of four wooden elevators along the waterfront between the East End and Victoria Avenue.

RB: Right. The only one I remember was Empire Elevator was at the mouth of the Kam River. I remember the fire that brought it down. I remember standing nearby feeling the heat, and I had to be at least a half-mile from it. It was so intense and so unbelievable

because the structure was built primarily of wood and a substantial amount of hard wood in that place. It went down I would say within two hours it was gone and reduced to ashes. I believe it was at a time when they were dismantling the elevator. I think it was a welder's torch or something to that effect as a sparked, that started it. It was unattended and a way it went. It was quite a spectacular blaze.

NP: I would think so because right at the mouth of the river and very close to the houses in the East End. Was it a community event?

RB: Not really. It went up so quick and drew the people from just about everywhere. The smoke that went up from it you could see from miles and miles, and it attracted everyone in the city who was in earshot of it. That I do recall, and I do recall the elevator as a kid taking my bike there quite often. People in the area including my dad had duck blinds before Keefer Terminal was built, and quite often my dad would come out from work in the middle of the night and just before sun up was out with his shot gun and come back home with a bag full of ducks. It was quite a popular spot for duck hunters. After Keefer was built that all ended.

NP: The elevators I was referring to would have been gone. I think the last one probably in the late '40s, even before you were born. You can still see the piles now so I was just wondering if there may have been more of the ruins visible at that time?

RB: I don't recall much of that.

NP: Even the docks were actually still left.

RB: Yes, they were all there and so were the sheds. I think Number 6 shed that was along the river. I actually worked there one day for someone so that I could buy a pair of skates. I had to 14 or 15 I believe at that time, and I think you needed to be 16 to work there. There were so many people employed there and what he told me was that, "If you want to want to work," and I was supposed to work on Saturday, "You can go in for me. My number is 53 or whatever, I don't remember the exact number, and tell them your number and away you go. It is not rocket science, and you just throw bags around all day, and I will give you the pay cheque when it comes in." That was the negotiation, and I worked, and I made somewhere in the area of \$50.00 for the day—enough to buy a pair of skates at that time. [Laughs]

NP: How things have changed!

RB: Exactly.

NP: They would be up before the Labour Board.

RB: Absolutely.

NP: You stayed with Federal Grain, and you said it was a summer job. Were you at Confederation College?

RB: I took General Business at the College.

NP: What year was that?

RB: That would have been in 1972. I was going to school at the same time I was working. I could work nights shifts, as there were more than enough 4:00 to 12:00s and midnights shifts that you could work. I finished at the college in April of that year and the following year I believe in the spring or late spring I started in the lab at the Grain Commission in 1972.

NP: Before we leave your work with Federal Grain, they, as you said, had four elevators—the Northwest, the Searle, Westland D, and Stewart.

RB: This is now Viterra B at that time. Sask Wheat Pool bought all the Federal Grain Elevators in the Prairies as well as the terminals and they changed the names of those to Co-op's and it was Co-op 14, 15, 16, and 17. Co-op 14 was Stewart's, 15 was Searle, 16 I believe was Northwestern, and Westland was 17. I may have those last two reversed I am not sure. But that was the name of the four elevators in addition to other Pool Elevators, Pool 4, Pool 5, Pool 6, Pool 7, and Pool 8.

NP: Any idea why they just didn't call them Pools?

RB: No, I don't. It maybe some financial arrangements that they had with Federal, but I don't really know.

NP: Did you work at the others, the Westland and the Stewart as well?

RB: No, I didn't. The last elevator I worked at was Co-op 15, which later became Pool 15. They did change the names eventually to Pools, and that was the last elevator I worked at, and I left there for the lab at the Grain Commission.

NP: It is interesting to me that somebody who took a business diploma at Confederation College went to lab work. So how did you manage that?

RB: I guess, I had a good interview! [Laughing] I think a large part was the fact that I had worked in a grain elevator and I was familiar with grain. The interviewer was Dr. Phil Williams from Winnipeg, and he and I had quite a conversation about cleaning grain, and I had a basic knowledge and understanding of wheat, and I think that in itself gave me a step up over others who had no

concept about what any of it was. To a certain degree, it was necessary to know about what you were testing, doing and understanding the system and how grain was handled.

The science behind it I learned every day, and I had a great mentor, Wally Zarowski. My boss took painstaking time training all of us in what we were doing. He was a terrific person to have as a supervisor. We had a fairly large staff about 16 lab technicians split over two shifts, eight per shift. We worked really well as a team because we were all under 30, and we all worked like racehorses trying to get the job done. We did a great job and I think we were quite proud of the work we did and always inquisitive into ways of doing that work better. Wally was a great person for that.

One of the things that we were subject to was lay off as well during the winter months. There wasn't any work taking place through the winter months even in the lab and the majority of staff was laid off during that time. Wally Zarowski kept me on through the winter finding different things to do which included some training and improvements to the lab, improvements to the equipment and the system and the process itself for testing grain.

NP: The lab that you speak of, it is the same one that still exists on Archibald Street?

RB: Exactly. It still exists. The nature of the work has changed dramatically, and in fact that changed early on when we went from a Kjeldahl system where there was actual chemical testing using some very strong corrosive chemicals to test grain. The work involved grinding the wheat into flour, measuring very small amounts to four decimal places to ten thousandths of a gram sometimes using strong acids and strong corrosive alkalis. Everything from sulphuric acid to caustic soda in the lab including mercury and other chemicals.

That went on for about four years when I started until the late '70s when they came up with NIR, near infrared technology, that measured the reflectance off of the amino acids in ground wheat. Using a primitive computer at that time to calculate the protein moisture of the ground grain and was able to be done at the grain terminal immediately.

The draw back with the testing we were doing was the fact that it was the day later, and the grain was segregated on the basis of protein tests that were done in Winnipeg and Calgary, prior to the grain arriving in Thunder Bay. Our work here in Thunder Bay was simply a confirmation of the first tests that was taken place. That information was phoned or telexed at that time to our admin office who then relayed that information to every grain terminal in the morning as the cars and wheat arrived and the protein content then determined where the grain would be binned. Our lab simply provided confirmation of the accuracy of that initial test.

NP: In your experience did the difference in results occur frequently enough that it was important enough to have the second test?

RB: Yes, it was. Early on it really was. Because of the accuracy of the testing, the mishandling of some of the rail cars not ending up where they should be, and the air is built into the sampling system. There were quite a few reasons that early on, you needed some validation for that test, and you needed to have the confidence that you knew what you were taking in and storing actually was what you were expecting.

It gave Canada quite an advantage in marketing advantage at that time to be able to do that because no one else was doing anything like that. We were miles ahead of everyone. When we could guarantee the protein content of wheat none of the other countries that exported wheat were able to do that. They could confirm the protein content, but they couldn't guarantee it to customers. That gave us a certain advantage in marketing wheat.

NP: Who developed the near infrared system?

RB: Early on was the brainchild of a guy named Robert Rosenthal. He came up with a machine called "Trebor" and Trebor is Robert spelled backwards. The Trebor was the precursor to a machine called the neotech. Neotech was the offspring of the early machine, and the neotech was one of the first that we were able to install in grain elevators and to use to segregate protein right at the elevator as the grain was unloading.

NP: Where did Mr. Rosenthal work?

RB: He is an American. I don't recall. I used to know all of this. I don't recall. A close associate of his was Phil Williams, and Phil really took that technology to the next level. There is no question he was Canada's leading researcher in the development of that and the application for grain handling. Phil really pioneered moving that to the same levels we are using today. He developed the systems using the technology that we had and improved the technology to the point that it was robust enough to use in a grain elevator setting and to do it quickly and accurately.

That was part of the other issue was the accuracy of so much of this equipment. We were not the only ones to have it, but he had it to the point where the accuracy was very good and able to guarantee shipments of grain on the basis of that non-chemical test. We still maintained the Kjeldahl to verify that the near-infrared equipment was accurate, and we maintained backups of that for that very reason of monitoring all of the equipment that went on for years and years.

NP: How do you spell Kjeldahl?

RB: K-J-E-L-D-A-H-L I believe.

NP: I just want to step back to Mr. Zarowski.

RB: Z-A-R-O-W-S-K-I.

NP: Right. Do you know anything about his history?

RB: Yes. He was a technologist working in, I believe, he started with Ogilvie's and Industrial Grain Products that produced raw gluten from wheat. Ultimately Edible Oils, which was on the island across the Kam River. It was a crushing plant that produced oil from rapeseed. The company folded or moved, and he left to work at the Grain Commission and took the job as head of the lab.

He was quite a scientist because there wasn't anything that we did without thoroughly researching everything. He was a stickler for details and was quite inquisitive and had a real strong work ethic. I think I owe him a lot. He was very good in developing a person's interest in the work. He made it fun for all of us and found ways to continually try to improve that lab to do the work better. I really appreciated and enjoyed working for him.

It was a hard thing for me to leave that lab. It was quite a decision to go from the work there to the work in the terminals. I started working there, and I do remember some numbers, and the number I remember is my annual salary there which was \$5,721. I remember seeing that, my paycheque, and that was your annual salary \$5,721, and at that time people in their terminals were earning around \$11,000 annually because of the amount of overtime, et cetera. It wasn't long before I thought, "This is fun, but it is time to make some money."

NP: Before we leave the testing lab a couple of things. Briefly, because you have already discussed the equipment, take us through for historical purposes, when the grain car comes in what happens to it and how do it get to the lab. I want you to answer the question what happened to all those toxic chemicals?

RB: Let me deal with the chemicals first. We had a number of different pieces of equipment to remove things. As a catalyst, we used mercury for a brief period of time, and had mercury scrubbers in the basement of that building on Archibald Street that would remove the mercury before any chemicals were allowed into the sewage system. That was cleaned out. We then went into a non-mercury catalyst to use in the testing process. We also had things like caustic soda and sulphuric acid that were just flushed down through the sewage system. But both of those can be diluted quite a lot with just plain water and would render them fairly harmless. One being an acid and the other being an alkali and when you mix them together the PH between the two of them was balanced. It was in very small quantities. I am not sure if that would be allowed today. However, at that time, we used huge amounts of water. I don't believe that we had a meter on the water that went into the lab, but the lab ran water to use as cooling for the distillation process. We would heat the contents of the digested sulfuric acid in wheat to release ammonium and we measured the amount of

ammonium and that was what the Kjeldahl testing method involved. The amount of ammonium represented the amount of nitrogen using a calculation that gave you the reference as to the amount of protein in the wheat.

Because the water coming into the lab ranged in temperature—and I am going back to Fahrenheit—we would range between 43- and 49-degrees F and no more than that even in the middle of summer because the water never stopped. It cooled the distillation unit to the point that allowed us to collect the distillate. Again, no issue with the volume of water that went through the lab. That was never a concern, and at that time I don't believe anyone in the city had water meters either. I think we just used as much as we could.

NP: Of the people you said that there were 16 or 17, how many stayed on with the Commission? Were there very many?

RB: Very few actually. Because we ended up converting that lab from a chemical testing lab to support for the NIR machines, people started to leave and the amount of staff that we needed in that lab was no more than five, I believe, and the amount of work diminished over the years and so many people left. One another thing I recall, there was one mass migration from the lab when new fire halls were being built, and four of my friends that I worked with in the lab all were hired by the fire department at the same time including myself. I recall the application form being circulated around the lab and everyone filling them out. I didn't fill one out but most of those who applied ended up getting jobs in the fire department and went on and finished their careers there and were quite happy to do so.

NP: Were you there from 1972 to 1979?

RB: From 1972 to 1975 in the lab and 1976 to 1983 in the terminals. In 1983, I left for Winnipeg.

NP: 1972 to 1975 and 1976 to--?

RB: To '83 in the terminals, and I started as an assistant grain inspector, grain inspector, and grain inspector in charge.

NP: Right. What happened to Mr. Zarowski?

RB: Mr. Zarowski went on to head the lab for quite a number of years, and I believe he retired around 1991 or 1992.

NP: He stayed all the way through?

RB: That is right, yes. The last time I saw him would have been about seven or eight years ago.

NP: Other changes, you eventually became the regional director. Since we are talking about the lab, we may as well finish off what happened there.

RB: You also asked me earlier about the process for how grain was handled.

NP: Thank you for keeping me on track.

RB: I will give you a brief idea of how that happened. When the grain was loaded in the Prairies a sample was taken and special envelopes with the Grain Commission address on them were collected by the primary elevator managers and sent to either Calgary or to Winnipeg where the two labs existed. The test was done, the protein content determined, and then the results telexed to the Lakehead or to Vancouver depending on where the rail car was going. That was another issue because sometimes you didn't know the railways would move grain one way or the Wheat Board decided, "Those cars, we need them in Vancouver." It was a little difficult tracking down the cars. You would get a string of cars in an elevator and with no information. In the morning before start up at 8:00 AM, someone would go in--.

NP: Before you go beyond that because I am just trying to see the envelope leaving the primary elevator, so it would leave at the time a car was loaded?

RB: That is right. Now the cars are in transit, the grain is being tested.

NP: Expecting it to go to one place or the other?

RB: Yes. The elevator manager knows the grain is destined for the Lakehead, for example. Sometimes things get changed in midstream, but for the most part that is how it worked. The test would be done in Winnipeg. The information on a telex machine sent to Thunder Bay, and those would be waiting for the information to be given to the terminals. We had what they called a "pri-pro desk, primary protein." It was called a primary protein because it was the early protein that was done on an envelope.

The people who worked at that desk manned a series of telephones manned by all ladies at that time. They would get a phone call from the terminal early in the morning at the terminal before the cars were unloaded. There is a tag on the car called the I-90 tag, and a Grain Commission employee would walk along the cars that were about to be unloaded and pull all the tags off the cars, phone the car numbers to the Grain Commission office, and a person at the Grain Commission would tell them what the protein level was. On that basis of that information, they would know the actual protein of the envelope the early test and they had what we called "banding" where if the rail car showed the protein was 12.8 it would go into all others that fell between let's say 12.0 and

13.0, and the blending of all of that would produce a 12.5 level on the shipment so the Wheat Board could guarantee that they would 12.5 percent protein. That is how the system worked.

At unload another sample was taken to go back to the lab in Thunder Bay to confirm that that original test was correct. At first, there was quite a spread between the initial protein and the second protein, largely on the basis of the sample drawn, the accuracy of the testing and all of that did not work very well. There were quite a few bugs in the system that needed to get worked out, and it took about a year and a half almost two years to improve the accuracy of it. Finding where the problems are, the sample collection methods in the primary elevators are not the best, there was a certain variability in the protein content even in one rail car, in one field, the difference between the lowest protein you could get in a rail car and the highest was quite a bit. It was not a very homogenous at that time.

One rail car may get loaded with three or four little pockets of grain at that time. They were not the large 90- to 100-tonne cars like they have now. They were smaller 40-, 50-, 60-tonne boxcars that contained a pocket of grain from one guy and a pocket grain from another of very different protein levels. That is where some of the inaccuracy of the system originated. It improved over time.

NP: How did that improve over time? What do you think changed?

RB: I think just because of the size of the shipments. The type of railcars that went from the boxcars to the larger tank cars, the greater volumes that were being handled and better attention to the sampling that they were doing.

NP: What would happen if you had this tag coming off at the rail yard saying this is what it is supposed to be? The lab in Thunder Bay would have already done an initial test, then you have got the sampling on unload at the elevator. There was quite a discrepancy between what the initial sample showed and the test at the elevator, what would happen to that grain?

RB: The grain would compromise the system and those inaccuracies were built into it and we always aimed to shoot higher than what we would guarantee. For example, if we were going to guarantee 12.5 percent protein, your target was 12.7 or 12.8 percent to give you a buffer to allow for those inaccuracies. It was okay to give a little bit away protein wise. However, you had to make sure you met that guarantee because that was the basis the grain was being sold at. I am sure if there were issues that they didn't meet the protein contents on a shipment that the Wheat Board had to pull their cheque book out in those cases. They were quite adamant that we had to meet those guarantees. One of the differences that the Wheat Board had over other countries that they were guaranteeing this.

NP: Did they have to pull their cheque book out very much?

RB: No not to my knowledge. I think we met the protein 99 percent of the time. It was rare.

NP: You would then be testing it again when it left onto the ship?

RB: Exactly. Again, at the transfer elevator the whole process was repeated again. We did not load a lot to salties out of Thunder Bay. Possibly 20 percent of the wheat leaving the country went by direct export on the saltie. That was rare. Most of the grain left Thunder Bay by laker to transfer elevators. Again, the process was repeated. The feature of bulking larger amounts of grain reduced the variability and gave you greater confidence that you were going to meet the level you needed.

NP: When you went to the elevator, were you doing this test at the elevator?

RB: Yes. That's right. One of the first jobs I had when I went out to work in an elevator was with this new equipment that we had, the Trebor machine. Having some elevator experience from Wally Zarowski, I was the first one to get shipped out to a grain elevator. We had ladies working with us at that time.

NP: Some names?

RB: Nancy Ellard. Patty Roy became our entomologist in Thunder Bay. Those two names stick out. There were quite a few others that escape me, but women didn't work in grain elevators at that time. There were no women's washrooms nor facilities for woman. Grain elevators in the '60s and '70s had not advanced beyond the '40s or '30s. It really was not work for woman. However, the Grain Commission hired lots of woman and that slowly changed over time.

Having gone out there with the equipment, that again was because of some of the background that I had from working in the elevator. That is where I learned how much money those guys were making relative to what I was working in the lab and saw the type of work they were doing and got an interest in and in fact helping them do their work and learning a bit of what they were doing. That is how I suppose I was given an introduction into the grain inspection work.

NP: A couple of things from what you have said. The lab, just up to the time that you left the lab, were they doing the bug testing there too?

RB: Yes. That really had not changed much since day one. The sanitary conditions of the terminal were the responsibility of the Canadian Grain Commission and still are in terms of insects, the grain itself, the facility itself, and all of that fell under the Plant Health Act as well as the Canada Grain Act. We collected the samples, and we did work on behalf of the Plant Health by monitoring

the physical structure. We did perimeter inspections that we would report to the elevator management areas that needed improvement and cleaning and that kind of thing.

NP: That raises extra questions, which I will come back to. Since you raised the question of the women working in the industry, and I have heard from others that if you actually look at elevators now, there are not very many women working in the private part of the industry, and the women that you do find are working for the Grain Commission.

RB: That is right.

NP: Even though they were not working for the elevator companies, they were working in elevators. Was it a smooth transition for women to move into working in the elevators?

RB: No, it was very difficult because of how unique the elevator was. It was not traditional work for women and early on quite a novelty for a woman to put on a pair of coveralls and a hard hat and work gloves and have to do some physical work. While the Grain Commission's work was not overly physically demanding, it still required you to crawl around spouting and the building itself and be exposed to all kinds of weather conditions, collect samples, to inspect parts of the elevator, to work in that environment, that dusty and difficult environment. It was quite a novelty.

One of the things that I do recall was when I first started working in the terminal there was a large number of post-war vets that worked there all within a year or two of retirement. It seemed that my start there coincided with their departure from the Grain Commission. All of them just longing for one more year to put in before they could retire. So many of the vets that were there saw the young girls in the same light as they would see their daughters and didn't want them doing any physical work and made sure they didn't get dirty and did the work for them or delegated the work to another young guy because their feeling was these girls were not really meant to be doing this kind of thing. And I suppose given their background, they have never had any contact with women in industry and really understand how they should be doing this. The girls themselves did not want that type of treatment. From my memory, they wanted to be treated just like everyone else and some resented the fact that they were given special treatment. They wanted nothing to do with it. That was just an observation of mine from that time.

NP: Very similar to issues that arise with any kind of affirmative action program where if you are given special treatment whether it is out of kindness or favouritism, it doesn't usually work to your advantage.

RB: Exactly.

NP: In your experience then the women who managed to survive, what do you think are the characteristics of those women that helped them through difficult circumstances?

RB: I don't think they were any different than anyone else. The first were really pioneers and were quite proud of themselves having to put up with the kinds of things that they would have to. The language was an issue, the fact that you were working in an environment where it is all men and in an industrial setting. They were quite proud of that fact. However, it wasn't long before the numbers grew and accommodations were being made at every level. The novelty very soon wore off. Women were just another part of the work, and no one considered them any different than anyone else.

NP: What kinds of accommodations would need to be made?

RB: Washrooms, first of all. To their credit, they made things better for everyone because we were given cleaner areas to work in and safety was something that we had to look at and the fact that lifting heavy loads, for example, became an issue and it should have always been an issue, but it took women to say that there should be a limit to the amount we are expected to lift and to carry. Different techniques for carrying and different bags of grain and apparatus and whatnot to haul things around. There is a certain amount of physical work involved. Certainly, they made improvements having women on the job!

NP: You made a comment about the war vets that were there, as you said, as you came on stream they were starting to go off stream.

RB: That is right.

NP: They were trying to put in another year. They were not happy with the job?

RB: No, for the most part they saw it as a sentence. They really did not like the work. They did not see it as a career. Some did. I got the impression that they were putting in time. They really longed for their retirement and the attitude was not good. The morale among those people who were in charge was bad. None of them had any skills in managing people. I shouldn't say none. Very few had ever had any training to do so, other than military training. You saw that coming through in how they managed things. You can't manage people in the work force like you did in the military. They took some of that with them. I'm not saying everyone. There were quite a number of really good people. But I did get a sense that they saw their last few years at the Grain Commission as a sentence and wanting to be done with it.

NP: You have since had a very long career yourself, and as you look back, as you were in management, is that just wanting to get out more of a symptom of being that long with an organization?

RB: No, not me. I was always a person—no matter what it was—I always put my hand up. If they needed someone to do something, I was never afraid to do it.

NP: I am not thinking so much of you, but people that you managed that were getting to that stage?

RB: Not to the same degree. I think in every occupation you do see people who want to leave. We had a number of opportunities over the years that you could leave with some retirement incentives. Because of all those incentives, anyone that really wanted to go, there were more than ample opportunities for them to go. That helped weed out people.

One thing that I will say near the end of my career was a real emphasis in training supervisors in how to supervise. That was something that I always found to be an issue. I don't think I had any more skills in that than anyone else, but I did get an opportunity to get a considerable amount of training in that area, that I felt our supervisors did not have. We promoted people to supervisory level based on their abilities to grade grain and their skills in the technical work that they did. When they got into those positions, the technical work wasn't as important as their supervisory and management skills, and they had none of that. Our human resource branch with Agriculture Canada helped considerably to improve that. I think they realized the deficiencies that were there in this grain business. Not only in the grain business, but that existed in our grain research lab and existed in other areas of our business. It probably is the same in other branches of government that people were promoted based on their technical ability to positions requiring supervisory skills and not having those capabilities.

NP: Now, did you actually find-- Because there are always people who figure that training is just a waste of time. I know I'm supposed to do something.

RB: Oh, Nancy.

NP: I learned I'm supposed to do this, but when I actually go back to the workplace-- Did you actually see the training in the workforce?

RB: Oh gosh. To this day I still think of things that I did wrong where trying to train people and get them to learn some management techniques was met with such resistance and skepticism. How I handled it was not right. I coddled people. I tried to push them along, and at that time, I should have made some hard decisions and just moved people out of those areas and put other people who were better at it in those positions. I think that would have gone a long way to make my job a little bit easier. That was always an issue.

NP: Are good managers born or are they born and trainable?

RB: Yes, I think so. I think people can be trained to do that type of thing. It is not rocket science, as I said. I think you learn how you should behave at work, what is permitted and what is not and what is accepted and what is not. To a certain degree, yes, you can be trained to behave properly and to manage people well. Yes, you are right, certain people have inherent skills at that and others not so much.

NP: We finished off that last session with a transition to your job as an inspector. You moved, crassly, because of the better pay. You would have been an assistant inspector at that point?

RB: When I left the lab?

NP: Yes.

RB: That is right. I was an assistant grain inspector and part of the process is to pass at that time what they called a barrier exam. A barrier exam meant that after one year of training, you were given a written exam in theory, understanding, and provisions of the Canadian Grain Act, things involved in grain inspection, knowing the basics of grain sampling, grain grading, and then being able to accurately grade 25 different samples. If you failed that, and very few people did, you were given a second opportunity I believe in six months to do that. Ultimately, you could be out of a job. That happened on rare occasions, but it did happen where people after one year of probation failed their barrier exam.

For other promotions to grain inspector, for example, they were held in a competitive basis and the person that had the highest marks on a grading and written theory, coupled to an interview, were ranked and given jobs as grain inspectors on the basis of your rank on that list. I recall lists being 40-50 people deep and hiring as many as 35 inspectors in one period of time. Because there was a time in 1983, for example, when the Grain Commission employed 450 employees in Thunder Bay. The grain terminals themselves at that time were outwards of 2,500 employees and that was the peak when we were shipping over 16 million tonnes of grain out of Thunder Bay. Terminals were working 24-hour shifts and the Grain Commission supplying service for all of those shifts. They needed people and they needed lots of them.

NP: The same time you have a parallel system of sorts in the elevator itself, the companies having--. What kind of movement back and forth would there be?

RB: What they did to accommodate that was to work seven days a week and 24 hours a day. Most would unload grain on two shifts and clean on three and clean grain seven days a week, loading ships through all of that period as well. The ship loading happened on an 8:00 to 5:00 basis. 8:00 in the morning till 5:00 in the afternoon, one hour for lunch, and then come back at 6:30 in the evening and continue on either till 9:30 or 11:30. The shipping hours were largely to accommodate the grain trimmers, the

stevedores that worked on the one shift only. They never had enough people to accommodate loading on two shifts and didn't want it. Ships were only loaded on an 8:00 AM basis. They did not load around the clock.

NP: Eight to load?

RB: Eight to the very latest 11:30 at night. The way it worked the collective agreement of the grain handlers required that they worked no more than five hours of overtime in one night. At the Grain Commission, however, we did not have those provisions in our collective agreements, so we had many staff who worked 16 hour days. They would work a double for example, 8:00 in the morning at one elevator and a second shift which was overtime from 4:00 until midnight, and that happened quite often when people would call in sick for example or there was a boat that had to be loaded or what have you.

The Grain Commission employees worked the 7-and-a-half-hour day, the grain inspection people did, the grain weighers worked an 8-hour day but the inspectors worked the 7 and a half day, and the rest was all overtime. The amount of overtime was huge during that period. People worked and made almost a third or more of their annual salary in overtime. Some even more than that. It really was a supplement to everyone's income, and some people would be working for 21 days straight. I recall myself doing that for a period of time in May and June in the late '70s. It was extremely busy, and the Grain Commission just could not hire enough staff to meet the demands. We were always shorthanded and always shorthanded in trying to find people who wanted to work.

Back then one of the issues--. Because we had a lot of post-war vets who didn't want to work any additional overtime. There was always a battle to whether or not someone was forced to stay. That was an issue of being forced to work overtime that did not sit too well with the vets. People like myself, who were young at that time and had a young family and a mortgage payment and everything else, I looked forward to making some extra money.

NP: Do you think there was any downside to the efficiency or the safety of the organization with those long hours?

RB: Probably in terms of safety. I would think that compromised the safety. I think whenever you ask a person to stand erect for 16 hours it has to have some impact on the quality of the work and safety. Working in the inspection office, there were very few hazards that would impact on that. If you had to work in and around machinery obviously the risk was greater. Because the Grain Commission really wasn't involved much of that type of work, I don't think it was much of an issue there.

NP: How did the samplers fit into this set up? They were hired by the Grain Commission and the weighman as well. How were people streamed into the different positions?

RB: The grain samplers worked an 8-hour day. At that time, when I first started there, I could see the military analogy taking place where the samplers were the enlisted men, and the inspectors were the officers, and they treated those samplers very much the same

way. They did not want them in the inspection office. They were told they had to stay in the lunchroom. They had responsibilities like carrying out the bags, sweeping the floor, and any of the physical work that had to take place, and the inspectors and the inspectors-in-charge saw them actually paraded around like they were generals and officers in the military. You could see that come through in the work they did and how they did the work. At that time, they began hiring inspectors with a Grade 12 education not having sampled before. That raised a few eyebrows among those who had to put their years in, I'll say, who spent time as grain samplers before given jobs as grain inspectors. They felt some resentment for those that skipped that introduction and went right from Grade 12 to a job as an assistant grain inspector. So, that whole thing eventually ended when automatic sampling replaced the samplers, and that transition eliminated the need for samplers. The only occupation was an assistant grain inspector that was the bottom level. That would have happened again during the late '70s. The Grain Commission transitioned out of that two-tier system.

NP: Who would be doing the sounding of the cars?

RB: That was the weighing branch that did the sounding of the cars.

NP: Were the weighing branch, were they divided into two, the guys up on the scales floor?

RB: Yes, there was. Yes, there was that same difference between the trackmen, guys that worked out on the tracks, as opposed to the weighman who were weighing grain. They had same analogy of the officer and enlisted man.

NP: Had the official category system exist in the government? A trackman would be PI--?

RB: Their classification was a Man 5. They had different classification than a weighman. They were considered MOC, a short name for Machine Operator Controller. That was their classification in the government. The inspectors were Man 5 out in the track shed when they sampled and the inspectors were in the PPI, primary products inspection group, a different branch of Agricultural Canada.

NP: Did people tend to move from one to the other?

RB: No, very little.

NP: Was there half that just stayed there and liked what they did, or they quit?

RB: Yes. For strange reasons there really wasn't harmony between the two branches. In fact, they were as different as night and day when it came to cooperation. They did their thing, and the inspection branch did their own. They were managed separately through two separate streams of management. Reporting directly to an executive director through their own management in Winnipeg.

There really was no cooperation between the two. They belonged to the same union. The unionized guys did. However, when it came to occupations and roles and responsibilities in the elevator, very little cooperation. They kept separate office and management was different. That carried on until the late '90s when they changed the whole organization into industry services and consolidated the unit.

NP: You would have the chief weighmaster and the chief inspector?

RB: Correct.

NP: Regionally and then up to--?

RB: Even through to Winnipeg. Into Winnipeg, you had the chief grain inspector who was the director of the grain inspection people, who reported to an executive director. The chief weighman as well that supervised all of the weighing activity again reporting to an executive director.

NP: The expertise was quite different?

RB: Absolutely, and that was part of it. There was really no advantage because the work was so very different. The fact that they both occurred in the grain elevator did not seem to be relevant.

NP: When you moved out into the elevators themselves, which elevator did you go to first?

RB: I remember going to Richardson Elevator with the protein testing equipment and spent a winter field testing the equipment and trying to replicate its use in a live setting, as to what it would look like doing the testing and submitting samples back and doing various experiments that Wally Zarowski would come up with to test out the system and how it would work.

NP: When you were working in the lab, did you pretty much just stay in the lab, or did it require you to go anywhere?

RB: Rare. In fact, only on a tour. I did not remember not going on the tour when others went because Wally wanted to show everyone, "Here is where your samples come from. For example, here is what you are actually testing on these things." So many people had never been in a grain elevator before but worked in the lab.

NP: I am going now to ask you just to talk about the various elevators because over time would you have gone to all of them do you think?

RB: Absolutely. I can honestly say that there are not many in Canada that I have not been at including primarily elevators. In my job as a training officer, and for a time I was also the deputy director standards and technology while Len Seguin was on French training I acted in his position for a year. Through all of that I did spend quite a bit of time travelling across the country to all of our locations where we had staff.

NP: Let's just concentrate on the Thunder Bay elevators, but I would actually like to do this at some point for, let's say, the Vancouver elevators because we know so little about them. There we have our 20 some elevators and what are your general thoughts about the good ones, the bad ones as far as working in, efficiency and those types of things?

RB: It was a tradition that you were given an elevator to work at, and you stayed there for a period of time. If you were the inspector-in-charge for example, you stayed at one of the elevator for the entire year through good times and bad, busy and slack periods. And some of the elevators, places along the Kam River, really saw little work and there were long periods of time two or three weeks where they would not work at all, but they didn't move the staff out. They kept the majority of the staff. The inspector-in-charge would not leave and possibly the assistant or one of the inspectors. They would move the odd person here and there for brief periods of time. You may have to go to the elevator next door.

And other places like Pool 7, Pool 4, UGGA those elevators were always busy. They didn't see much of a break. There was quite a difference in the amount of work people were saddled with. Certain people would get a busy elevator one year and the supervisors who made out the assignments would try to give you a quiet elevator the second year and vice versa. That was something that they did every year. At this time of the year when navigation was just starting, there was always the excitement as to who was getting moved and where, and it was always like the rite of spring to find out what the moves are for this coming year.

I do remember one day Jack Robertson was responsible for assigning the elevators to the inspectors-in-charge, and he knew that the secrecy around that was also compromised one way or the other. Someone would always try to find a hidden list somewhere. He put together a list of fictitious moves, left it open on his desk, and quite a number of people would come by his desk for signatures or whatnot and he left it in a prominent location where anyone who came by his desk could see it, and within two days all the rumours all around the waterfront were flying around because he made some of the most ridiculous moves and put some of the most senior people at the busiest elevators and vice versa. It was the talk of the town around the Grain Commission for the first few days, until the real moves came out a week later. That is something that sticks in my mind. I remember that vividly. [Laughs]

NP: Obviously we are Friends of the Grain Elevators, and we are interested in the elevators. When you started, was the Electric still even standing? That was the one next to the Northwestern.

RB: No, I don't recall.

NP: Paterson's would have been?

RB: Absolutely Paterson's was.

NP: I am just going to ask you free thinking about each of the elevators and what you remember about them.

RB: I remember Paterson's being in kind of a residential setting, and it almost seemed unusual to have a grain elevator there. Being a nice place to work for that very reason that it was handy to restaurants and easy to get to and the amount of work that took place there was fairly slow. It was fairly easy to work. They didn't have a large volume of grain that they handled. It was always nice.

NP: What about the physical plant?

RB: The physical plant was always in great condition. Very clean and again the sampling system, the office that we had was all very good. It was a plum place to get an assignment. It was one of the better places to be sent to.

NP: Do you think there was ever any favoritism in who was sent where?

RB: Oh gosh, course, yes, there were all kinds of that. [Laughs]

NP: What would there be just friendships or any family?

RB: Yes, things like that, for example. If you had any physical limitations, they looked after you. They accommodated things that were not written that people had certain issues, physical and other and family issues. They looked after staff one way or the other without being told to do so. There was no legislated duty to accommodate people as there is today. Back then it was handled.

NP: Were grievances common in those days?

RB: If there were, they were not frivolous. They were issues, safety-related issues. I am thinking back to the '70s, I am not familiar with grievances or union issues. That was all new to me. There were some minor issues, but if there were grievances filed that they were genuine and there was no animosity between the supervisors and those filing the grievances. They were over classifications and rates of pay and generally amounts of overtime being worked and local systems the staff were trying to get corrected.

NP: We skipped over the Northwestern. Between the times you worked there to begin with and now that you are starting out as a grain inspector, was Northwestern gone by then?

RB: Yes.

NP: We can figure out that it went somewhere between 1971--?

RB: I think 1975 to 1978, somewhere around there would be my guess when it came down.

NP: We talked at the break so let's slot this in while we are talking about the Northwestern. We were talking about the safety protection when you were working that one summer at Northwestern. Would you just repeat that for us?

RB: What I mentioned was that I recall dust masks were a piece of tin and a piece of gauze, the tin intended to hold the gauze against your mouth and nose. Because of the amount of sweat and moisture, they are usually done in about one hour or less of working and plugged so solid with dust that you couldn't breathe. You would be given a second one in the afternoon for the afternoon work.

One another thing that is different today, back then the grain that arrived in Thunder Bay was very dirty. The amount of the impurities ranged anywhere from 3 to 10 percent. It was not uncommon to have grain that had 10 percent of material that had to be removed. It is rare to find that now. The harvesting techniques that they use in the Prairies are so good and some cleaning does take place in the Prairies, and you rarely see levels that get anywhere near 2 percent now. Back then the amount of dust generated by all of that in the port and not having the pollution abatement equipment that they have now, that really contributed to a significant amount of dust in the grain elevators.

I recall standing on the scale floor at Pool 15, and at 8:00 AM and seeing a nice clear blue sky and about 10 lakers waiting for grain, and within two hours a grey cloud that looked like smog and hung over all of the elevators in the Intercity area and all just generated from dust, and the car dealerships along Memorial Avenue like Gibson Motors and others that had to clean their used and new cars almost daily from the amount of dust that would blow in over the city when the wind was in the right direction. Huge amounts of dust that was generated by the amount of dirt in the grain. There is dust even today but not anywhere to the degree that there was back then and that is largely because of the pollution abatement equipment we have today, but because the grain is cleaner when it is shipped.

NP: You also mentioned that people would be working in these dusty conditions with the very flimsy masks and then they would take their breaks.

RB: Yes, they would take their breaks and go for a smoke. Just to add insult to injury basically. The ones that had a long service in the elevator didn't depend on those little flimsy gauze masks, they simply wore a handkerchief over the mouth and nose and pulled that up whenever the dust got bad and pulled it down when it wasn't. It just seemed easier to use.

NP: One of our people that we interviewed talked about going into the bar after work and you could always tell who worked at the elevators because they had a certain kind of cough that was recognizable. Do you recall that?

RB: No. I heard though those coughs, and I probably had them myself back then. I think that quite a few people had emphysema and other grain-related issues. I remember people filing compensation claims for dust-related lung issues later even after they retired.

NP: Because so many people at that time were smokers as well, wouldn't that be problematic in proving claims?

RB: I can't really comment. I don't know about the details. We know that some people are able to claim compensation as a result of working in a dusty grain elevator.

NP: Probably different kinds of affects on the body to be able to distinguish?

RB: Yes. There was a time where a researcher gave me a battery-operated device so they can measure the amount of exposure I had to dust in the areas that I was working in. It was a plexiglass tube with a hole in it and a filter paper in it and a little pump that drew air through. I wore that through the day and turned it in at the end of the day. That was all I think part of a research project to make improvements in dust collection.

NP: Do you have any idea who carried out that?

RB: No, the name escapes me.

NP: Would it have been through the CGC?

RB: No this could have been Health Canada or the Province of Ontario. I don't recall. It was a government researcher, I met the guy, who was conducting the work whom I met.

NP: When you left Paterson's, you were heading downstream, and you came to Western?

RB: Right.

NP: Now gone.

RB: Right.

NP: Any remembrances to that?

RB: No. I don't recall much of that. I do recall Pool 15 very well. I spent lots of time there.

NP: That is Searle?

RB: That is Searle at the Mission.

NP: Before you skip across, we will come to that. But then we were at Pool 10?

RB: Yes, and Pool 11. Those two I recall and remember the garden outside Pool 11. To illustrate how little work took place there, there was enough time and there were two gardens—one at Maurice's place as well and the other at Pool 11 where they grew everything from potatoes, onions, and carrots, and all of that. I remember staying for lunch and someone would make soup and harvest the vegetables. You didn't go home for lunch you stayed. People cooked in the inspection office.

NP: Speaking of the inspection offices, the inspection office at Pool 10 and 11 you said it was pretty nice at Paterson's.

RB: It was pretty spartan at these two. Pool 11 especially, a hot plate and that is pretty much the extent of it. But you made do with everything that was there.

NP: Pool 11 which was Consolidated and Fort William Elevator E was its name at one time at least that is on the front of it.

RB: Was it ever Superior Grain?

NP: Yes, at one point when Maurice Mailhot's dad owned it.

RB: Okay.

NP: That is a very unusual elevator because it has two parts. Any comments to make on the two parts?

RB: No. I only spent very short period of time there, and I don't recall.

NP: When it was Superior, it was probably dealing with speciality products. Would the Grain Commission spend much time with it?

RB: No, back then it was handling Board grains and handling everything like everyone else. Every little elevator from Pool 2 to you name it wanted a piece of the Board grains, wanted wheat and whatever was coming through. Because of this pooling of the grain, the railways didn't care. You got whatever was there and they would swap the paper later. You handled everybody's grain and that was the unique thing about the system back then. You handled whatever was in town, and the railways would try to spot cars to get them going and get them out of the way and you just swapped the paper later.

NP: The Ports Clearance Association would have been busily coordinating all that?

RB: Absolutely. When it came to handling all the paperwork and everything. The Grain Commission had one of the first mainframe computers that ran punch cards. It was a unique thing. If we needed information, for example, you just simply punched in the car number and after hearing a bunch of crunching and about 20 seconds later you got a print out of all the information about that car: the shipper, the station, commodity and other things that you needed. They ran that computer for about two to three years. The guy who ran it was Keith Shurget. Keith went on to work at Confederation College after he left the Grain Commission. That mainframe computer was replaced after three years with something considerably more modern and smaller. The thing had occupied a fairly large office room in the Grain Commission building.

NP: Take me into the Grain Commission building now. I am familiar with it. Where would it have been located?

RB: It was in the weighing office where Garnett Watkins office was just adjacent there is a supervisor's office and would have just been in there.

NP: Garnett was the first person I met other than my dad from the Grain Commission. And how do you spell Shurget?

RB: S-H-U-R-G-E-T.

NP: Is he still around?

RB: Yes.

NP: Then there is Westland D, which is also gone before I came back to Thunder Bay. Tell me what you can remember about it?

RB: The legend of Westland D that no one wanted to work there. I never was assigned there. It had a reputation of being one of the dirtiest and most difficult places to work and no one liked going there. That is what I remember about it.

NP: Why do you think that is? Just because it was dirty?

RB: Not sure. I think they did a lot of work and I think they were very busy. It's possible that the combinations, the office and the environment weren't as good as others were. It was considerably older than everyone else.

NP: Then we moved down to Ogilvie, Pool 8. What about it?

RB: Pool 8 was again the same thing as Paterson. They parked cars at the A&P and any time you needed groceries, you had a grocery store there. It was very handy. It was very old and a lot of old equipment. I remember a jack ladder that went from the basement all the way to the top floor. A jack ladder is a long conveyor that you stood on a platform held on to it and there was a bar that you held onto, and it would lift you to the top. Anyone with any fear of heights would never get on one of those things. Never. It had unique features like that. It had a little inspection office. Again, limited amount of work. It would only do 20 to 30 cars a day, which was very few and maybe not even that much. Maybe even less than 20 cars a day. The work was steady but very slow. Two people could do the work there. I spent a couple of years there with Henry Caruso. He was the inspector-in-charge and was the inspector or the assistant inspector back then. Probably one of the best elevators to work at.

NP: Why?

RB: For that reason that the work was very slow. If they were loading a boat they couldn't unload cars, because they could only do one thing or the other. They didn't have enough crew. When we loaded a boat, we always got extra help, as well. This made it one of the more preferred places to work at for that reason. P&H would have been somewhere where they have an either-or capacity. Canada Malting similar places like that. Pool 9 all had this either-or capacity. They didn't have the number of legs or the number of staff necessary to do both functions at the same time. So when a boat was being loaded, the cars were not.

NP: We hop across the river, and we came to what would have been called at that time, currently Cargill, the former Grand Trunk. What would it have been called then?

RB: Back then the National. Next to it was Searle and very soon became Co-op 15 and then Pool 15. National was known for shovelling grain. They didn't have a dumper, so the boxcars had to be shovelled into a big elevator and handled a fair number of cars every day and very busy. What I remember about that place was seeing friends of mine that were teachers that would work in the summer as a summer job shovelling grain. Back then one or two that I recall. I don't think the teachers made the kind of money that they make today. [Laughs]

NP: Probably also interested in fitness?

RB: To a certain degree that was the benefit of that kind of work, and it paid fairly well. Nothing special about the National that comes to mind. Until it became Cargill when they did some major renovations to it and improved the loading system, a new gallery, state-of-the-art control system. It was really moving into the jet age. No one had the control room like they did. It was ultra modern.

NP: The gallery you were talking about, is that some of the structure that goes out along the slip?

RB: The external loading, that is right.

NP: Was that largely to handle the bigger boats?

RB: Yes, that is right. To a certain degree you could handle a larger volume of grain and to move it they could load it either at the front of the boat or the back of the boat without having to move much equipment. They could just redirect it from the control room and that control room allowed them so many options. They did have a real different approach to modernizing the plant, where they could move grain anywhere in the system through cleaners and scales with very little manual labour.

NP: The next one is the Searle, Pool 15.

RB: I remember it well having spent almost a year there working in the plant. You got to know it intricately, from backwards and forwards. It was built in 1929, and I recall the first day working there being trained by a guy that was there the year they built it, in 1929 and still working there. He retired with 47 or 48 years of service.

NP: Who was that do you remember?

RB: His name was Tom Burnside. Others who had long service there on the scales were Bill Fisher, and he is another that had a huge numbers of years working in the plant. That plant prided itself on volume, on trying to maximize the throughput, through the plant. They had an automated dumper called the Seabar, and it was one of the first automated dumpers ever anywhere. It could unload a boxcar faster than any of the other mechanical dumpers that were out there and do it better. That allowed them to handle more grain than others of that same size. It wasn't really a big elevator, but it did push through quite a bit of grain.

NP: Where was your office or where were the inspection offices?

RB: The inspection office was a separate building above the millwright shop. I believe that was an addition that was added to the millwright shop in the '50s or '60s. I think '60s probably. It was relatively new and had a lot of space.

NP: In your experience of all our history, were any of the wartime storage units still up or had they all being demolished by then?

RB: No, I don't recall.

NP: Probably all gone otherwise I think you would have noticed them.

RB: Yes. Are you talking about the flat storage?

NP: Yes.

RB: There was at National a piece of flat storage that when Cargill took it over built a roof over it and used it for flat storage, and they would keep things like sunflower seeds and commodities that were not moving in and out very quickly. They moved the product around with front-end loaders.

NP: I would like to identify where they all were. I think almost every elevator probably had that additional wartime storage. Some of which I have seen, and we have pictures of Paterson's building theirs.

RB: Some became parking lots in some elevators. I believe Richardson's used part of that as the parking lot.

NP: Before we leave the Kam River area, any personalities, the managers of the operations? You did mention Mr. Burnside and Mr. Fisher. Any in your experience—and this is not just in the initial days—but as you worked there were they good people to work with?

RB: Yes. Doug Asquith. Doug was the superintendent at Pool 15 formerly Federal Grain and he worked for Federal Grain. A good person to work for and I had a conversation with him when I left to work for The Grain Commission and told him that I have this job opportunity and I wanted his opinion, and I did not want to leave him high and dry, but he encouraged me to do so. He said, "If you ever want to come back let us know." I thought that was very nice of him. He was a good person to work for.

NP: As a grain inspector and later when you moved into the management end of it where you might be put in positions where you had to deal with elevator managers on a more regular basis, what would be the characteristics of elevator managers that you admired and which kind of elevator manager behaviour would create difficulties?

RB: It is no secret that the Grain Commission, to a certain degree, was a thorn on the side of elevator managers. They saw us as the policemen and interfered with their production to a certain degree. There is some that would be less than cooperative and difficult to deal with and others more reasonable and business like. I think that early on there were more of the difficult nature and unprofessional nature than as years went on. As years went on it improved to a certain degree better training on their part, too, promoted better cooperation and a better understanding of what we were all doing in the industry.

To a certain degree a lot didn't know what our role was did not know what we were trying to do and the limitations that we had. It was something that, as I say early on, you found it difficult dealing with. Many of them if not most or all came up through the ranks as well. Some got their positions just because of their knowledge, their skill, and their ability to deal with people and dealing with managing their own people and how they managed other programs. The length of service was part of for some, but not for all. There were some really good people to work with.

NP: Some names that come to mind besides Mr. Asquith?

RB: Later on, Jerry Franklin, and again Jerry came out of the Grain Commission, and he had very good understanding of both our roles and responsibilities. Other people that I recall such as Bill Green for example, people are still working today that I ended up working with like Gerry Heinrichs and Brian Mallon. Those are people who I have a tremendous respect for. They understood the business aspect of the work but treated you with respect. I could say not everyone did that. I think our own staff lacked an understanding of that as well. We were not the good guys either. We had people who should not have had supervisory positions either. They had really very little skills when it came to managing people or managing programs.

NP: What would be issues that would arise that would put an elevator manager in conflict?

RB: We have to enforce the rules when it came to grain inspection, for example. They all knew what the limits were, the grade limits of all the different things we were measuring, and when they exceeded them and how we handled that and gave them their options as to what to do and what not to do, those were certain things, the cleanliness of the elevator. It is generally the shipping and not meeting specifications that seemed to be the greatest conflict.

NP: Blending? And it comes up everywhere in interviews with elevator managers and talking about the science and maybe even art of blending so that you keep it within the tolerances. Allowable under the Act?

RB: Not meeting the specifications, that was the number one area of conflict that still exist today.

NP: When you don't meet specifications, what were their choices?

RB: Their choices were to either take certification at a lower grade, which could cost them some money, or remove grain and replace it. And again, that is going to cost them even more. We would try to work with them through all of that. We would try to find the owners of the grain, and if it was their own grain or Wheat Board grain and work with the Wheat Board to try to be the liaison now between the company and the Wheat Board to say that if we blend something of higher quality into that and you

offload at a certain elevator in the St. Lawrence, you have got some stuff that is okay for that particular tolerances or characteristic, and that will offset anything that you have done there.

No one is going to be out anything other than the inconvenience or the hassle of doing all of this work. That was something that we used to do a lot. I used to do being the middleman trying to help them out. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. It is rare that they had to offload any grain in Thunder Bay, rare. It didn't happen very often if ever.

NP: They wouldn't move the ship somewhere else and take some out and put in a higher grain so that when it finally came out in the wash it all came to that?

RB: Absolutely. That is the thing we would ask them to do. The protein didn't make it, or the moisture was too high, or something to that affect. We would ask them to cooperate to move it to an elevator where we thought that particular characteristic was not there. The problems though when grain originated from the same place in the Prairies and had spread all over the city and is all of the same marginal quality, trying to meet grade specifications, and it is all marginal to begin with. Now you have got issues when they see that limit. That took the owner of the grain, or if it is the Board, to contact the buyers and say, "Here is what we have and here is what is happening." Then some negotiations on their part as to what they are going to pay for the grain. Some of the companies were flourmills in the east in Southern Ontario that would hold these elevators for ransom. If they knew there was a problem on a particular ship that was marginal for quality, they would say they will take it but for 50 cents a tonne off of the original price, something to that affect. Everyone is out looking after themselves.

NP: Being able to look back because your career took you from that inspection office up to the regional boss here, how often would that kind of thing happen in an average shipping year?

RB: At least a dozen. Some years some even more than that. I was on the phone when cell phones finally came, oh my god, that thing would not stop, and it would happen all hours. I got calls at midnight and at 1:00 in the morning. "My ship is over limit. Your inspector tells me that it is over the limit. What are you going to do?" "Nothing I can do. I am going to sleep right now, and we can talk about it in the morning. I am just reporting the news, I didn't create the news." That is something I would always tell them "I didn't put this grain on."

NP: Could you almost predict who was going to do it?

RB: Some places were worse than others.

NP: Yes.

RB: Some places pushed the limit. You almost knew and expected what was going to happen.

NP: Almost like the brinkmanship and the tourist ships?

RB: They tried to get as much through as they could. You would go back and look at their stocks and look at what they were taking in. None of the elevators binned the grain on the basis of what we graded on the way in. Our grades never matched up with those. They had their own system of binning grain and that was something through experience they learned how to maximize volume of higher grades they could get out of a plant. That was again something that occasionally they got caught at.

NP: I would assume that they really liked it when they had a guy who was very proficient at this and could get the maximum

RB: Absolutely. For example, in 20 cars that came into an elevator, and we graded 10 of them No. 1, they might have put 14 in a bin of No. 1's and the other 6 as 2's. If you were to ask them, they would probably say just the opposite. There was always that issue. However, we always knew because we audited the terminals at the end of the year their receipts and shipments, we showed them to be in a surplus position. When they are in a surplus position, they would go back to the Wheat Board and have their hand out and ask for a cheque.

We knew this was the game and this were all part of the game. That is all part of what went on. In handling grain and measuring grain and all of it, I always said that it wasn't as much of a science. There was always some flexibility that you had to have when you were doing your job. Because the sampling had an inherent bias, and it wasn't perfect. Nor was the testing that we did. It wasn't perfect either. It wasn't a precise science. There were always these things that were built into the system that should have allowed you a little bit of flexibility. Because you didn't have perfect confidence that you knew exactly that you were measuring perfectly to begin with. While your sample and tests showed that you were marginally over the allowable limit, maybe it was and maybe it wasn't. If you were to test it again, sample it again would you get that same result again? I contended you know you never were.

The same thing with insects. We would find an insect in a sample. I could sample that thing 10 more times, and I will never find another insect. But we would confirm that entire whole four thousand tons of grain was infested, and they would have to fumigate. That was on the basis of that one insect that we found. As I said, the whole system operated as good as it could given the nature of it and the fact that you are sampling grain and the measuring techniques that we had, were precise as it could be.

NP: We are coming to a point where I think we should call it quits because I know we will have another interview.

End of interview.