

**Narrator:** Gail Fikis (GF)

**Company Affiliations:** Canadian Grain Commission (CGC)

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**Interviewer:** Ernie Epp (EE)

**Recorder:** Owen Marks (OM)

**Transcriber:** Rebecca Kirkpatrick

**Summary:** Former grain inspector for the Canadian Grain Commission Gail Fikis discusses her short but groundbreaking career in Thunder Bay’s grain industry. She recounts joining the CGC as a grain sampler with a cohort of other women during the government’s initial push for women in non-traditional fields. She describes learning the visual distinction between grain varieties on the job, passing exams to become a PI 1 inspector, and working in a variety of elevators across the waterfront. Fikis discusses at length the difficulties she faced as a woman entering the male-dominated world of the elevators, like being excluded from on-the-job male social activities, facing workplace discrimination and harassment, and not yet having a system for dealing with grievances. She also describes her pride in working for the CGC and the community she found with her coworkers and other working women. She explains the processes of sampling grain on inward and outward railcars as well as out on ships, and she shares stories of memorable sampling activities. Other topics discussed include the cooperation with the elevator inspectors and CGC weigh staff, working outdoors in cold weather, the introduction of automation, training in the CGC’s downtown office, and the lack of health and safety equipment during her work.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative
EE: It is a pleasure to have you here, Gail, this afternoon for an interview about our Voices of the Grain Trade Project. Let’s start by you giving your name for the purposes of the recording.

GF: My name is Gail Fikis.

EE: Could you describe for us how you came to work in the grain industry?

GF: It was a wonderful opportunity at the end of completing my studies at Lakehead University, and of course, being a student with loans to pay, I applied for a job through the federal government to be a grain inspector or a grain sampler, which was the preliminary step. I was the lucky candidate at that time, which probably would have been the summer of 1978. I began my employment with the federal government and started at Pool 4 in Thunder Bay working as a grain sampler.

EE: Was this somewhat unusual? You were a woman entering a profession that had been largely male, I guess, until very close to that time?

GF: Yes, it was a new incentive for the government, I think, for employment equity in getting a balance for women in non-traditional fields, and there were a number of us hired over that summer and probably maybe, in my assumption, one or two years previous to it. They were coming up to par bringing women into that job position. We felt that we were young revolutionaries and were not quite suffragettes, but we felt there was a job to fulfil, and most of us were ready to tackle it and see what was going to happen. It was quite an experience for the next three years!

EE: Were they talking employment equity already in terms of the language at the time?

GF: Yes. When we had gone down to fill out the application forms with what would have been called Manpower at the time, which probably Canada Employment Services now, it was about equity and balancing the workforce then. We thought, "Wow, what an opportunity for women."

EE: There were task forces, et cetera, and judge Rosalie Abella did a study a few years later as I remember before the 1984 election when I was successful and seems to me that I thought that the language had been developed by her. For you to say that as much as half a dozen years earlier or more that the federal government was pursuing this, it does actually open an interesting window as to how that happened. There you were young revolutionaries. You had a degree. Did the others have degrees as well?

GF: I think some of the other girls did have degrees or in the process of degrees. My ambition was make some money pay off that loan and see where I go, knowing that in the federal government there are lateral movement and upward mobility, and certainly that was made apparent to us also. There was always information on other jobs within the Grain Commission or other

departments, so it was really something to see how the whole system works to work in that position in Agriculture and it was good. It was great!

EE: I am assuming also that university degrees were not general in the Commission, or were they? Were the men also university graduates?

GF: No, they really were not. When I came in there, it was still considered the following through from the '50s. A lot of the gentlemen had been WWII veterans and other positions. There were some people I remember who had come out of other fields of employment and decided to work for the Grain Commission for varying reasons. I know I worked with a number of people who had formerly been teachers and decided that teaching was not the vocation they had thought it was going to be, so they had switched careers at some point in their life and were now working as grain inspectors or grain samplers, and that was both on the weigh division and the inspection division. I worked for inspection.

EE: At 1978, 33 years since the war ended, so some of those vets would be getting close to their retirement age as well, so the Commission would be looking ahead.

GF: They were.

EE: Thinking of developing a work force. An inappropriate comparison I am sure, but I think of the RCMP which achieved its centenary in 1973, and the sense I have was that it was a paramilitary male force after that point and then when they passed that, it began to reconstruct the force with woman, aboriginal people, I think, in whatever number. That is somewhat impressionistic. The timing is close to suggesting that in the mid '70s the Government of Canada was moving towards what would be a formal and firm statement of employment equity on their own. Young revolutionaries, in you came.

GF: Yes, we did!

EE: Can you say something about the weigh division? This was the division in the Commission, and there were those who were involved with the weighing and inspectors at the outset already. Can you sketch that for us?

GF: Most of the inspectors our job was basically coming on as samplers because the process to inspect you had to come on and be trained in the office with somebody with experience and eventually write a set of examinations to be able to visually grade and assess grain qualities, varieties, and know your basic difference between what is wheat and what is barley and what is oats. There were specifications set out by the federal government as to what were acceptable limitations in grain samples. We started in the

sampling and then worked our way up to be inspectors. The weigh staffs were the people who came on and made sure that everything that was going out in cargo shipments, whether it was by water or rail, was going to the proper tonnage that was being decided or ordered and processed by whomever the orders were being filled to.

We worked simultaneously and sometimes we all met in the car sheds or sometimes we met on our way to a ship. If it was a saltie, an ocean-going vessel, then we just crossed our papers, and everybody had everything ready to go. If it was a laker, like the Paterson Steamship Lines at the time, then we also crossed paths, too, making sure everything was done. There was quite a representation of the government workers being inspectors and weigh staff and samplers. There were some of us that worked hands on, right with the workers in the elevators and working with the ships or the rail. Then there were the divisions of people who did a lot of paperwork and a lot of processing within the offices. Depending on your ranking where you went on both of those divisions, you may or may not have to cross paths every again and go into the trenches, as we called them. It was very interesting.

EE: Yes, it would be. What were the relationships between the weigh people and the inspection people? Was there a sense of rank differences here or anything of that sort?

GF: No, not from my experience.

EE: Different skills?

GF: Different skills required. They did their job. We did our job. It complemented each other and was all done under the Grain Commission title, and that is how we worked things out. I don't know if the weigh staff had any difficulties or encounters with anything to do with inspection or not. I certainly didn't have anything that would be considered conflict or anything like that. It was always our duties to do what we were supposed to do for the Grain Commission and arms-length from the staff complement that were employed by the elevators at the time. That was the one big thing. Of course, we worked with the local union of grain trimmers and that was a big part for both weigh staff and inspection staff. You had to be pretty comfortable with those people, too. I don't remember there were any women at the time in that job, which was very physically and heavily demanding to move and bounce about the spouts. When I was there, it was still a manual process, though while I was still there the process of the spouts coming down from the elevators and into the holds of the ships was being automated.

EE: As far as the work that was done and the rank that it's assumed, was the weigh division--. And was it called that? Were there promotion opportunities for the people there, or did they basically do the same thing for years and years? Again, the samplers could move up to inspector. You will describe that sort of thing, I am sure.

GF: I am not really sure how the weigh division worked. I can only assume they have the same process. For us in the inspection division, as I said, we started off as a sampler, and then you went up to what is known as a PI 1, 2, 3, 4. I think it went to a 5 rank. It was a series of examinations along in differentiating that. I actually did my PI 1 grade papers before I left in my three-year period before I moved onto another career.

EE: You were with the Commission until 1981, was it?

GF: Yes, 1981.

EE: A three-year period when durable inside into your life we are going to be exploring this afternoon. [Laughs] Learning to grade grain, had you ever had any former grading experience before you began this in 1978?

GF: Absolutely not. My family came from good farm stock out in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and came to Ontario.

EE: But were quite separate from the farm?

GF: Quite separate. I only knew of their history. I had an uncle out in Alberta growing grain, but I never had any experience with it other than the grain that came into the house at Christmastime to make the Ukrainian kutya that did come from the elevators, and that was about it. I knew what good grade Canada No. 1 Wheat looked like because it was certainly coveted or soft white for other purposes. But until I got there, I didn't realize all the little categories and technicalities and what you look for. It was very interesting and highly visual.

EE: How long does that take, learning wheat, barley, oats, flax, rapeseed or canola—whatever they called it at the time—and recognizing them? They look quite different simply as the generic or as a species?

GF: The term rapeseed had gone out at the time. I would say it would take you, if you had the opportunity to be in the office—and the opportunities were given to us to be there rather than just sampling out into the car sheds or on to the boats. Or depending on if it was a saltie, you were often up on another floor in the elevator sampling from the belts. You could not sample on a saltie. That did not happen.

EE: Really?

GF: Yes, you could not sample on the salties. It was too difficult.

EE: Because of the deck structure, et cetera.

GF: The size and the speed on the deck. Even the decks on the lakers were somewhat dangerous. There had been incidents and accidents recorded. You had to be really careful. Of course, as the year went out it got worse. It was easy to figure out what was wheat and what was barley. Sometimes barley and oats might be difficult. The seed wasn't too hard. You got to catch on. What was hard was figuring out the difference between the quality of the grain as you went down from durum semolina to winter white to oats to malt barley. That became a little more technical. You have to learn how to look for germ quality and colour and clarity. There were different things that were happening at that time to.

EE: It would be with wheat particular that these latter factors would kick in.

GF: That's right.

EE: How many different grades of wheat were there at the time?

GF: At the time I was there, there was Canada No. 1, [No.] 2, and [No.] 3 Red, Durum and Soft Winter White. Winter White may have gone to a [No.] 4, but that might be my memory not working so well. There was a lot going on.

EE: Canadian Western Spring wheat there was first, second and a third.

GF: When I came in, one of the most interesting things that was happening was into the elevators, they had brought into the inspection offices a nice little grinding machine that you had to put the grain through to determine the protein quality in the wheat, which depended a lot on how they were going to be bin and grade it also. There was a bit of a resistance from the "old timies" that they didn't want to have anything to do with this new-fangled stuff.

A lot of people like me who were just coming on at that time and it was an opportunity because we were not afraid of entering computer grades, which had to be set on and set up so that they knew how to bin. Some of the older people there were a little hesitant to embrace new technology at the time. So, we would get the protein count, and then we would have to enter it and that would see how it was going to be binned. They didn't want to be touching the keyboard and entering the stuff. We did to get to spend some office time which I think gave us more opportunities to become inspectors that may not have happened previously to that, rather than just being left onto the boats or the car sheds. It was quite easy for me to become a PI 1 within a year.

EE: This manner of grading is a very interesting thing. I grew up on a farm of course and belonged to a 4H Seed Club. We learned to identify weeds, I remember, more than I guess distinguish grades of grains, but I have this vague memory of a farmer taking a handful of wheat perhaps and rubbed it with his hands, or actually taking a kernel or two and chewing it.

GF: Chewing it was another way to see how gummy it would get. The old people there, the older guys knew how to do that, and they would pass you on some tricks of the trade in that. Chewing was still considered, before the protein grinder came in.  
[Laughing]

EE: You use what you have available, and your mouth is generally always there. So, you were a PI 1 within a year and then continued at that level?

GF: Yes, a PI 1 and continued at that level. It was very interesting. You learned more and more how to do things. As a sampler what you did—and it has probably been explained through other interviews—is you went out and there was this lovely archaic hockey stick with a little sheet metal scoop nailed on to it. The idea was that the spout streamed the wheat loading it into the ships holds. You would scoop off of both sides of the stream and mid-stream to get a good sample. You would have to figure out the tonnage coming down at a rate of whatever, so that you could get a quality sample for the bag which was usually a one-pound bag to bring in and you would take that to the inspectors inside. They would look through it visually and they would use a series of screens to screen out any extra materials, seeds, chaff, roughage that you didn't want, and depending on the percentile of the sample, that gave you the grade on the crop that was being taken out of the boxcar, loaded, and binned.

EE: What you are describing here is the initial arrival of the grain?

GF: Yes. Then the same thing on the export of it. There was the two-fold. The cars coming in, you were doing that, and the car going out. You were doing that onto the ship or whichever way. Sometimes we loaded tank cars, too, and you did the same thing.

EE: Winter shipment or whatever.

GF: Yes, tank cars were a little bit more difficult.

EE: Right. The elevator staff had done some things to the grain that came in, between the two, so that there should be a difference between the two. What about this first when you are unloading it, let's say, one of the hopper cars or boxcars?

GF: When we were unloading one of the hopper cars, it was a series where the car is pulled in on a set of cables, through the car shed. The CN Rail and the weigh people run the cars in, and they are set up. There are a lot of safety procedures for elevator staff and of course sampling staff. Generally, the door is pulled open and there is a person called the hooker who drags the cars in and there are a number of other little terms more elevator worker terms than inspector terms.

EE: I was thinking of the sampling in what you would find in looking over.

GF: You would find a lot of things sometimes. Sometimes you would find things that didn't belong in a car at all.

EE: Such as?

GF: Such as big pieces of wood or rocks, animals that shouldn't have crawled into the shipment. You would see them all getting dumped, but you do the sampling and generally supervise it.

EE: Little four legs coming in out of the grain or dumped in with the grain?

GF: Yes, there would be something that had crawled in that should not be there. When we were doing the loading on the tank cars, we would run the top of the tank cars. The elevator staff would bring it in, and the weigh staff would have the cars inspected. We would run down on top of the cars, which were highly discouraged, but time is of the essence. Often, we would not use the ladders to climb up the tank cars. We would just nimbly just jump from--.

EE: Up to the next. As you were checking each individually to be sure it was completely empty.

GF: That's right checking visually that they were empty, and then making sure that when they were hauled in that we were loading what we needed to load to ship it out.

EE: You had to be young and agile, I guess?

GF: You had to be young and agile. You had to be very aware. It wasn't the kind of job that--.

EE: Just a little bit [inaudible] care.



GF: It was quite interesting. There we were these new women with our little turquoise hats on and our green goggles and off we went to work. We were quite a novelty, I think.

EE: Did you have different uniforms from the rest?

GF: The weigh staff had a different helmet and I think they had a white helmet. I could be wrong on that, but we had blues ones and our standard green goggles. We were a little colorful out there.

EE: Green for any particular reason?

GF: I don't know but maybe that was what was just available at the time in safety standards. You really had to be careful that you didn't get anything flying in your eyes or anything as these were loading, so it was difficult. Of course, you always were well equipped with dust control and certainly masks, though mind you we all had dust rash like crazy. We all went home looking like Bozo every night, with big red marks where our masks were, especially if you were loading grain that was a bit more fibrous like barley or oats that has a large of chaff that really scratches. It was interesting, but we all did it and went to work and came and did our shift work and did our call across the port if there was a shortage on one elevator. You know, "PI 1 ordered out to Pool 7," away you went for the day.

EE: Hop in your car and go over.

GF: Hop in your car, go over, find a way to get over, get somebody to drive you over or whatever you needed to be done. There was a shortage for sickness or whatever or overtime was going to take place especially on the loading onto the vessels. If it wasn't completed by the time the shift ended, somebody had to stay and do the work, so away we went.

EE: And you would want to get it done if you possible could.

GF: Absolutely.

EE: You are describing this novelty hopping along the cars and whatnot. What kind of reactions did all of that produce?

GF: It was something that we learned to do, unofficially. It did make the work go quite smooth. There might have been some risk, but we took it.

EE: I wasn't thinking so much that you were doing that up there, more generally in terms of the interaction with other workers, when you have been added to the crew.

GF: I think they we were just added to the crew. That had been the practice, and we followed the practice people were willing to do it. That is what we did. It wasn't unusual. We just kept the work going the way it was. We tried to fit in, and I don't think there were too many people who were not willing to tackle what had been practised previously. The only differences started happening when there was really--. A protocol of personal behaviour had been set up in the offices, especially on the shift work. There would be that Friday night is Friday night even if you are at work. If you were on a 4:00 to 12:00 hour shift or a midnight shift, if you were the woman on staff that night, you may have been pushed out to be a sampler everyplace because everybody was personally doing what they had followed for years, which was a bit of a boy's club. "We are going to have some snacks, and we are going to have some drinks, and we are going to watch some movies."

EE: On the midnight shift particularly, I--?

GF: Yes, or the 4:00 to 12:00 at times and sometimes on a Friday. I don't think it was out of control. There was always somebody who was vigilant. But there certainly were things that were probably not by the book. [Laughs] It wasn't that we were going to be welcomed into it on any case. We were pretty much told to be looking the other way on it. As woman, that this was a man's world, and you can just look the other way.

EE: I can understand the alcohol, but what about the movies? How did they do that?

GF: I know a couple of the girls were highly offended.

EE: By what was being shown?

GF: By what was been shown, and we were not invited into see. But the fact that we knew it was going on made it somewhat difficult. I think some of the women I was working with at the time felt that they were at risk. There were a few women who were more, I think, feminist in viewpoint and did not see that it was appropriate at any place let alone at work. I may have been slightly different, maybe a little more liberal in my viewpoints coming through the university system. Not that I was approving of it, but I think at the time I wasn't as affected by it as some of the other women were.

EE: It becomes a matter for each person what battles she or he is going to fight or how much one is going to tolerate.

GF: Exactly, yes. But there were all different issues with that.

EE: Of viewing stag films or whatever?

GF: Yes.

EE: Did they have a little projector and screen?

GF: They did. A little projector and a little screen usually set up in a back office. At the time it was sort of offensive. It was basically you were excluded.

EE: [Inaudible] afterwards, but you are right it is, of course, in the best or worst traditions.

GF: Some elevators were different. It depended on the crew, and of course people moved from elevator to elevator. It wasn't a steady force at one, because inspectors are moved around just as readily as samplers were at all levels. They may be responsible at one elevator or another, and then we would all move out to different places. We worked with a lot of different people. There were a lot of us at that time—a lot of elevators workers, and a lot of Grain Commission workers.

EE: These backroom gatherings, maybe they would be the elevators workers and the grain inspectors would be happy to step in and enjoy the show, I suppose?

GF: It wasn't the elevator workers. It was the inspection workers.

EE: Oh, it was the inspection crew?

GF: The elevators workers had their own foibles going on! [Laughs] If you were working down on the car shed on a Friday night, you could be expected there was some nonsense going on. We all looked the other way. We tried not to involve ourselves too much. Sometimes you were asked, "If you are not with us, you are against us." I am sure at times we crossed the boundaries but did what we needed to do to be accepted because you didn't want to look like you were so different or outstanding.

EE: None of this changed during the three years you were employed there? These patterns continued?

GF: No, it had not changed. We knew it was going to change. We knew that it was being flagged. We knew that disciplinary issues had been handed out to some people. The change was a-coming and whether or not it was seen that it was because of the infiltration of women. That could have caused some of the animosity that existed towards us at times, from some individuals. But times were changing!

EE: You did experience animosity from some?

GF: From some. Some of the men who were there just did not want women there. I think they felt, "I have to go home to my wife, and that is as much women I need in my life.

EE: That is as many women as I need in my life.

GF: "I don't want to be working with one." They had worked a long time without a female presence anywhere. It was a very, very big workforce of men on the inspection side, the weigh side, the elevator side, and that was just the way it was. We were breaking tradition. We were coming into labour, and I don't think they were quite prepared as to how to deal with us. And it caused a lot of confusion.

EE: Had there been a change in leadership in the Commission here in these years? What was the top man a commissioner is he?

GF: I don't know if there was. I am not aware of that. There probably were a lot of changes, but I wasn't aware of that. But they certainly knew they were going to make the changes, and the way they were happening was, "Here it is." And I don't think there was any kind of introduction as to what would be expected. People who were supervising us were equally as confused. Some of the people there took on the role of being a mentor, taking it quite seriously, and wanting us to be good inspectors and samplers. Others tried to make exceptions for us, and they operated in a very gentlemanly way of, "Oh, we will make this easy because she is just a girl." Others were like, "Well if you are a girl, and you want to do this job, this is the way it is going to be." and made it rougher on us. I imagine it is that way in a lot of things in the military, et cetera.

EE: These men came out of the military in 1940s, the mentality would be very unique. There were the nurses and the secretaries that had their place, but before that there would be the Army or Airforce.

GF: They did, and many of them did. There was a bit of proving oneself. It was different.

EE: Did the entire commission staff meet at all or once a year? Did the superintendent have you all in a room at any time and talk to you?

GF: No, it was never a large gathering. Never anything like that.

EE: So it was paper that flowed down?

GF: Paper that flowed down and flown up and you reported to your PI 4 or PI 5 or whoever was out in the elevators and that was it. We all got a stint at what would have been the Grain Commission office above the post office in the south ward at the time. We all went up there and met the higher up people in charge, the superintendent here in Thunder Bay for the district. We got more training up there and understanding of what they did with our samples and clarification of what they wanted to see coming from us from the elevator sites and what would be expected if we worked up in the Commission at that point. There was also a push at that time of people who were willing to go to Churchill to sample and inspect. I never did get that opportunity, but it certainly was there.

EE: Was it regarded as a bit of a plum for those who went or quite the contrary?

GF: I think it depended on the person. I think for some people it was a plum and a great adventure, and for some people it was like being sent to Siberia to the salt mines. [Laughs]

EE: And it would depend somewhat on personal situations family, et cetera.

GF: Yes, family and commitment.

EE: May I ask if you were single all through of this period, or perhaps I should not ask you?

GF: No, that is okay, and it is actually a funny question. I started single, but I was living with a person who was to become my husband. He became an elevator worker, and it was frowned upon and made note to us from the get-go that fraternizing with elevator staff was not something one should do when you were employed by the commission. Couldn't do much about it if you wanted to work and pay off your loans. There were few places you worked in Thunder Bay, so he did get a job with the Richardson Elevator, and of course, I would at times have to go over there and be a sampler for the Richardson Company also. He and I married during the time I was a grain inspector, but because of the situation, we married in secret and didn't tell anybody. I also didn't change my name at the time because of it and still haven't! [Laughs]

EE: You were not found out during this time?

GF: We were not ousted. Nobody ousted us for being married.

EE: What was the relationship between the Grain Commission staff at both division and the elevator staff? The grain elevator companies would have their own inspection staff?

GF: Yes, that's right. Elevators had their own trained inspectors, and we worked for the government making sure standards are being upheld and elevators are a business. The business of grain is the business of shipping, selling, and storing grain. As we talked a little bit earlier, I mentioned about using screens, weights, and roughage and tolerances that were allowed when you were going to, A, pay a farmer for his grain, and how you are paying to ship and how much dockage. When you are going to ship the grain out, of course, the elevator is getting money for it, and we are trying to uphold the government standards on that.

It is on the outward shipping that it gets important on the relationship of not being distracted or not doing your job in a timely manner. There was always suspicion that if you looked the wrong way, and the elevator staff sees you as an inspector or a sampler looking the other way, this is when they are going to add a little bit more of that canola or roughage, et cetera, into the shipment for the weight, and they are going to profit a little more. In Canada, the grain when it comes into an elevator is cleaned. At the time, that was the process. In the United States, it wasn't. As it was shipped in, it was shipped out. But we cleaned in the elevators here, and then we put back in the tolerances. If your No. 1 grain of wheat--.

EE: Let's just take this step by step. As far as the arrival of the load is concerned, the person who is concerned about the dockage is the farmer or the producer or the seller of it at that point because more of the dockage is pulled out generally being paid by the bushel or by the tonne. The fewer tonnes that come in, the less he is going to get. When the load is going out to the market, the concern about the quality is the buyer's, of course, wherever that buyer is, and the interest in the grain company now is to be moving as much as they can. Dockage is always generally the lighter stuff depending, of course, what it is. If it is stones it could be heavier per cubic centimeters.

GF: It is still a percentile of the whole shipment.

EE: Did I hear you say that there is going to be a little addition of stuff to acclaim grain as they were loading the ship?

GF: We were always told, though I never had any proof, that one must be careful because somebody might be told some place on the scale floor that now is the time to open that bin of the grain that was really hard to clean out because it had canola or something that couldn't be cleaned. It takes too much money to do it so we will just slip a little of that bin in now with that shipment.

EE: The bin down on the ship that will be just a small part of the total load. So those were the kinds of concerns that arose?

GF: That was one of our main concerns we were told as sampling of how we were doing and how we were watching.

EE: When you are cleaning the grain, it has to go somewhere. You were not at all involved with what happened to the various kinds of what we are calling generically dockage here other than the cleaning?

GF: No, with the screening trucks or anything that happened, no, I wasn't involved with any of that.

EE: Some of that stuff you just want to get rid of such as stones, et cetera.

GF: Yes. There were some pellets processing of screenings, but I don't know if that happened or what the process involved in that or who actually took the pellets and what they were used for. I knew that was part of the elevator process.

EE: Some producer, or conceivably a line elevator, got involved if there was a mixture of different kinds of grain that would be a real challenge. How do you get rid of it?

GF: Yes, how do you get rid of it?

EE: Slip it by.

GF: Sometimes it was simple mistakes when they were moving the grain in that a wrong bin was opened and, all of a sudden, they put No. 1 Canada Rapeseed on top of a shipment of wheat, which would really change the grade of what was binned and everything else. Just human error or clerical error would take place and that would be a problem.

EE: In many of these cases there can be a market for the result but is probably what I like to call No. 1 Northern [inaudible] days of yore which is going off to a flour mill to be ground into flour, and that grain wouldn't go to that. Suffer a price differential.

GF: At the time I did come in, I don't know when about the official name change had come in. But when I had arrived in 1978, they already had stopped using the term rapeseed, and I don't know if it was because they were bringing women in or whether that had come from something else, but the name was changing over to canola, though the old staff would always keep on referring to it. It was taking them some time to use the new term canola.

EE: I would suspect that the change would have been proposed, first of all, probably by the plant scientists, the breeders who were achieving things with this particular plant that produced a better oil seed, so that made sense to give it the distinct name canola at the very face of it for Canada. Here was something that Canada was offering, but for the male tongue the residence of the old name, I am sure was all too likely to be used. Often in a segue here to contender to trial coverage media, coverage of sexual assaults and Daisy, where that old language where I thought had been written out of the criminal code has in fact been used, so that would be one of the ways which the stuff for harassment could in fact occur. You were saying regulations about the behaviour pure and simple. They didn't talk about sexual harassment in those days, I guess, or was that terminology used?

GF: I know after I left, within a few years after I left, there were harassment and sexual harassment charges leveled from inspectors in the lower ranks to inspectors in higher ranks. It was evident. I don't think a lot of us knew how to deal with it. I think we had seen that this was an opportunity. I think a lot of us thought if we are going to break ground in a male world, then this is some of the stuff that we are probably going to have to put up with.

EE: Non-traditional occupation is one of the phrases of employment Canada.

GF: Yes. Non-traditional occupations. I know there had been difficulties for some of the women before I came on staff with the Grain Commission, and the usual way it would be handled at that time was that individual's partner got involved and usually ended up meeting somebody as they left work and having a discussion of fisticuffs with them is how it was dealt with. Because there wasn't a lot of processes at the time. But they became more and more apparent and visible.

EE: A colleague of the person who had suffered had it out with the person who was perpetrating the action?

GF: Right.

EE: It has great dangers when this happens!

GF: Great dangers. Great dangers.



EE: Criminal offences perpetrated a second time round, if you will, when that happens. But if an organization has not come up with, first of all, a recognition that this may happen and then with the response. I think the whole terminology of sexual harassment--. And did it take into the '90s or was it already in the '80s? I think it was already into the '90s before society began to recognize. It was in the mid '70s when Margaret Mitchell mentioned domestic violence in the House of Commons and Members of Parliament laughed. That is one of the most shameful moments, and I think that happened sometime in the '70s. It was really from the time that the Members of Parliament whether they laughed out of embarrassment or worse to the '90s when conceptualization had developed. I guess as a Member of Parliament in 1984 to 1988, I remember almost saying to someone once that one of the interesting things about this is the kind of behaviour that I was taught and almost religious context as a boy growing up—appropriate behaviour and inappropriate behaviour, if you will—but emphasizes on how one should behave was now in quite a secular context being focused and language was being developed, et cetera. My good colleague Owen was waiting, and I had for a moment, and he was with Employment Canada for years, so he had further insights on this from the government's perspective.

OM: I think from our department's perspective those changes started occurring in the '70s, and I know staff were reprimanded in the early '80s for actions more spoken than actual activities that created the issues. There was a change in the culture proceeded with non-traditional work. It was coming through the late '70s and early '80s as women were moving into the non-traditional areas. One woman went out to, I think, it was grain camp or bush workers that were one of the first instances where it really was somebody was a pioneer in that particular area. Because we dealt so much with individuals on a daily basis trying to find employment, it became quite sensitive to the idea that it was your ability to do the job and nothing else really was a consideration at that point.

EE: You would have to tough it out.

OM: No, basically, we referred and up until that time and well in the '70s there were places in town that you went to if you were Finnish or Italian or Scottish or English or a man or a female, and it was very structured, departmentalized in that way, especially with some of the major occupations with the more conventional occupations here in Thunder Bay. That was coming from Toronto and Ottawa. It certainly wasn't something that had its genesis in Thunder Bay. This was a top-down sensitization.

EE: You are describing a situation where this city has quite a segmented employment picture in which various kinds of distinctions would apply to various workplaces and the non-traditional.

OM: It still holds true for some occupations.

EE: I dare say.

OM: There are no female firepersons, so to speak.

EE: Yes, and that has been a battle in various communities where a determined, physically strong woman has decided to take on the system and tried to become a fireperson, if you will, but a tough one. The police, of course, have crossed that particular divide.

OM: But you would have been going in at that time--.

EE: Part of a social change.

GF: It was a frontier and a social change all around it. It wasn't a fault of the Grain Commission. It was just that times are a-changing, and it was very fast for many people who had already been entrenched in the workforce for the last 20 or 30 years. They didn't know where to move forward, and we didn't know how to move with them either. The system had not caught up with where we were all at.

EE: During the three years were with the Commission do you think that it did catch up or was it beginning to catch up in the kind of institutional way?

GF: It was beginning in an institutional way. I think by the time I left I was about done with the personal battles I had. I know that my union was very supportive at the time. I think my representative at the time was a man named of Bud Warner. I think Bud Warner was his name. He encouraged me to stay open, and that my position would remain open for a year. They contacted me and asked me if I wanted to come back, and I had said no. I was done with the strange behaviour, and some unfair practices, and what we were subjected to. I mean, if you had a different mindset for it--. But I was ready that I didn't think I wanted to do this anymore. Between the shift work and the unpredictability, I didn't want to fight the good fight. I wanted to move onto something else and certainly did. I worked with some very, very fine people, but there were some unfortunate incidents that I just left behind me and said well done with this.

EE: Do you want to say anything about some of those? You have used at least four or five, two or three terms now that tempt one to ask, but it is your right to decide what you want to say.

GF: Just the silliness of dealing with situations where people would definitely know they were going to be assigned something because it was an informal punishment. You had annoyed somebody, or it had been a transgression, in some way they felt

slighted, and you would do silly things. One of the worst things I ended up doing was sampling belts off the grain in one of the bottom levels of the elevator. They sent me down to do it, but nobody had informed me that I was sampling mercury-contaminated grain. I had no extra protection. I just had my standard mask and gloves. We weren't really concerned. I mean if you could work without your mask you did because we certainly, in these situations, we sweat a lot, and we would get as I said the dust rash. It would be very uncomfortable.

EE: That is occupational health and safety. Your health was being imperiled.

GF: Yes, that was the one of the last straws for me.

EE: Do you think someone did that deliberately?

GF: Yes, somebody did that deliberately, and I was very dismayed.

EE: When did you discover or did someone tell you what you were actually had been handling?

GF: Yes, somebody told me.

EE: A friend or not?

GF: A friend. About two weeks after.

EE: About two weeks later?

GF: Yes, and I was quite distraught because at the time I was pregnant.

EE: The person who sent you down knowing you were pregnant?

GF: I don't think they did, no.

EE: No. It mitigates it a teensy little bit, but not much.

GF: Yes, it does but it was very difficult. So I thought, “I think I am done here.” There were other circumstances. Some of the inspectors who just couldn’t conduct themselves properly in the workplace. The women were such a novelty, and we were kind of preyed upon to be something that was nice to have in the office to look at. We had one individual who was particularly notorious. At the time, when I was his interest—sort of like a fresh horse I guess—he would move me all around the waterfront to make sure I was in his employment in his office. It made it very difficult for me. He was just a gentleman who couldn’t keep his comments or his inability to keep hands off. There always had to be some kind of contact. It was unnerving, really, and it was hard to get your job done. The other people you were working with, they knew it, but they were just as uncomfortable too, but the solution was to look the other way. And it would be unfair to have put your co-workers in trying and do something for you. My feeling at the time was that I had to stand up for myself to do this. And I found that I was becoming more and more unsuccessful at standing up for myself and keeping out of this individual’s way. But ironically after I left one of the other girls, several years later, brought charges against him. I felt, well, I wasn’t unfounded in concerns and everything, and maybe if I could have toughed it out. But it didn’t seem worth the experience. It really didn’t.

It was a rough go, but I think when anybody is breaking into different fields, and you see that things had happened--. We just weren’t aware if there was a means to address these. We were not aware of it, or certainly I wasn’t if other people were. If there was a way to deal with improper advances or unfair treatment, we didn’t know who to go to. We knew we were unionized, but we really didn’t know how you brought this about.

EE: The union hadn’t developed an institutional recognition of this, which is what it requires. For so long this sort of thing would have been interpersonal behaviour, and as you say people look the other way and it continued.

GF: I imagine before the women came on that there were probably adverse behaviours that were just a put-up-and-shut-up situation from a male-to-male perspective of being manly or being one of the boys. We are just not all the same person, and depending on who was the dominant one then I think it was expected that you went with the flavor of the day. If it was called for that you were going to have a drink on work or you were going to watch movies at work, you wanted to be one of the boys. And I think a lot of the guys—I’ve gotten the feelings from several of them—they were not exactly happy with some of the ongoings, but they didn’t want to look different.

EE: The change in attitude and all the rest of it, if we date this particular interview on the tape the 22nd of October, 2010, I may then observe that Mrs. Thomas’s email to Anita Hill, this [inaudible] didn’t happen this week but it broke the media this week relating to Ms. Hill’s charges against Clarence Thomas, candidate for the Supreme Court of the United States of America, were surely of that nature. That his behaviour [inaudible] and that happened in Canadian judges’ chambers as well. We know from cases in the past years that have broken. Patterns of behaviour that have persisted into the ‘70s had to be stopped. The relationship

between a union and an organization is all—Commission, corporation, or whatever it happens to be—is, of course, always an interesting one. In this case, what was the union like? Were you active in it?

GF: I wasn't active in the union. I think, because it was my first real job experience, I did not understand what my union could do for me. I certainly was an employee. It was made clear to me that my union was for me, and I knew that they were more than willing to do things for me. I just didn't know what it was I, myself, wanted done. I was a little too young. It was a little too new. We were bombarded with so much.

It is a little different to put together what's happening to you when you are constantly moved around. That was part of the issue. I could even start off one morning at UGG A doing one job, and by the afternoon, I would be down at Canada Malting trying to sample malt barley. So you are working with a whole different inspector that day and being answerable to them. So, when you have things going sort of wrong, you considered it more like, "Well, that was a bad day."

EP: You hoped that this won't happen again.

GF: Yes, this is not going to happen again, or I need to understand that person, or maybe they need to get to know me, or I need to fit in with this crew now. You were travelling so much across the whole waterfront from the Current River down to Chippewa that it was really hard to figure out if you had a problem with the work situation or if it was the individual work site. By the time I had ended in three years, I knew that there were problems with the integration of women into the job and that a lot more work was going to have to be done.

I left early. I guess I didn't have the stamina to stay. But I know a lot of the women that stayed and fought the good fight, and they are still there. They are women in their fifties, and they are going to be retiring now. They did a fabulous job of upholding what they needed to do in the workplace and doing what needed to be done to make sure that women were integrated into these jobs. And certainly, I don't think they had it any easier or better. There were no different opportunities for them, but they did. They saw the opportunities and made the opportunities. They advanced through the systems. They reported duly as they should be. Some of them got involved in the union. Some of them didn't. I think it probably made for a better workforce, and we have that, and we will work through those issues.

EE: A better Commission at the end of it all.

GF: Absolutely!

EE: Did you feel that you had more freedom of choice than others did in terms of continuing the employment or giving it up?

GF: I think I had freedom of choice and certainly, as I said, I was very surprised when my union kept in contact with me after the day I said “I quit” that they would keep my job open for me for a year and say, “You can come back. Your job is open. You can come back.” They had known some of my personal decisions on leaving, that I had had it. I didn’t think I was ever going to work in that environment comfortably. It wasn’t—not to misconstrue that it was a brutal situation and man versus woman—it was shiftwork, and environment, and certainly it was very dusty, and, as I mentioned, mercury contaminated grain and that kind of thing. It was awfully cold in the winters.

Maybe this is the oldie in me going, “Back in those days, it was really cold,” [laughter] but the salties would come in, and the slips were filling with ice and we would have to put up 25 foot ladders to crawl on board with our papers, and the ships couldn’t properly dock because they couldn’t get in close enough. We would be out over open water and it would be a bit bouncy. I would be thinking as I am going up these rounded rungs of the ladder with my work boots on slipping and sliding with pails and sampling bags and tickets and thinking, “What am I doing in my snow suit?” I thought, “Could I really do this and carry on, have a family? There has to be something more than this.”?

EE: But you had only admiration for the ones that toughed it out.

GF: I certainly do. They toughed it out and many of them continued in their roles as workers and women, wives, and mothers and still stayed. I just really admired that they were able to do that. Good for them! There were so many of us, and I think it was a real challenge and some rose to the occasion, and I am really proud of them for doing that. It was a big difference at that time.

EE: These comments, of course, related primarily to work within the Commission, but you have mentioned, of course, working in various elevators. I have wondered about the ambiance of various elevators and the nature of the company, relationship amongst the workers etc. Did you as an inspector develop any sense of more fun to be in this elevator than in that one? If fun is the right word?

GF: Oh, absolutely. Some just because of the physical layout of the elevator was just more comfortable to be able to sample from or work with the workers.

EE: Which ones you rate high on that basis?

GF: Pool 7 was always a great elevator. It was huge. It was big. It had a huge car shed and big office, and it was very busy, and you were well looked after. Pool 6, that was torn down, that was just physically a beautiful site to be on. To be right out on the waterfront. The way they pulled the cars into the car shed, it was very nice to be there. They had rebuilt the inspection office while I was still there, which was a bit of a fiasco because even though the office was newly designed to take in automatic sampling, which meant no more sampling in the car shed with the cars. It came down through chutes in the office and you just got the bags out and sampled at that time. That happened during my time there. But the office was built a little inadequate. We always loved to grade by northern light because the northern exposure light gives you the best visibility, neutral. But they had unfortunately built six-inch wide and high ledge under the window to the counter which cast huge shadow across our grading area.

EE: Where is a sledgehammer when I need one?

GF: Yes. The men who had been there and had been well experienced were always very frustrated with that situation. It made it very hard to really determine a good grade. We were always trying to hold it up to the light or do something different. The automatic shoots they had installed in the office for the sampling to come down were set up a little too high, especially for some of us who were a little shorter in stature as myself, being 5'3". We had stools set up all over so that we could stand up and get the sample down because we couldn't reach them to properly release the latches. [Laughs]

EE: For crying out loud! Speak of failures in designing the place! [Laughing]

GF: I think maybe they got confused that there should have been a ledge under the sampling shoot and not under the counter. I don't know what happened. It was quite funny. We all laughed about it when it happened. But we were seeing automation coming in quite readily at that time. The job was a-changing.

EE: Did the Commission carry out inspection of the chutes? Because when you went to separate it from the arrival of the grain the possibility that some--.

GF: That I don't know. Everything must have been properly checked out.

EE: Just to be sure that you got what you were supposedly getting.

GF: But then in doing that, they did the removal of the inspection staff from the elevator staff, and that was funny because it was a good relationship. If you could get to know the elevator workers, it really assisted in your job with knowing what was going on,

and what was coming in, what to expect. It was good. They would often be very helpful to you, too. There were not a lot of people that I encountered who were actual elevator workers who tried to impede your job in any way. It was good. It was good.

EE: Sask Pool had a couple of good ones. Were there ones that you would want to describe as more difficult elevators?

GF: It was always difficult when you went to Canada Malting because they had to be so careful in the variety of barley that was coming in, and oats. One of the jobs that you had to do, and it was such a dirty job, was we had this six-foot telescoping pole that was made out of brass, and it had another tube inside it that you twisted open to open the slots. What you did was, you would take this pole, rather like a javelin, and you would have to jump in the boxcar, and you would have to ram this pole down that was six feet long, and you would have to twist it to open it and capture a sample at different levels in the car. They didn't want to dump it because you couldn't separate the variety of barley out if it was the wrong variety. The feeling that perhaps there might be more in there than they wanted, they didn't want to ruin the quality of malt barley they were bringing in. You would have to go and do that.

EE: You as the Grain Commission inspector were the one vouching--?

GF: Yes, we would be sent out with this six-foot brass poles. It would sometimes be a struggle as the weather got colder the grain got harder to do it. It was quite a physical effort, and I remember sweating bullets trying to get this pole down into the depth of the car.

EE: Did they not have an inspection staff of their own?

GF: They did have an inspection staff of their own, but this was done for grading the grain and also for paying the farmer.

EE: Which I guess is the Grain Commission function?

GF: Yes. It was a two-way street. Then we would have to bring this pole in and then lay out this lovely white cloth, in a communal fashion, and then we would take the pole and carefully unscrew it again so that we could lay out the sample, and they could see what depth it was.

EE: From top to bottom, the strata.

GF: That was a tough one. The nature of barley and oats, it's a scratchy grain to work with.



EE: Yes, barley bins are on a short list of the reasons I am a professor and not a farmer! [Laughing] Oh yes, a hot summer day and the barley arriving, and you have to spread it out in the bin to make sure you have as much grain in that bin as you can get into. Sweaty legs and all the rest. Oh, yes, a couple of items—at least one other item—but that is very high on the list.

GF: Yes, it really sticks to you too in the warm weather.

EE: Prickly stuff.

GF: Yes, you would go home, and you feel like you were just being rubbed with sandpaper until you could get into a shower.

EE: The skin, after you showered, the skin accepts the fact that it is gone?

GF: Pretty much—a little harder with dust rash and a few things.

EE: Yes, I can imagine. You end up like Bozo the Clown. You could wash it away?

GF: Oh, no, it would stay. If you were somebody who was sensitive—and I think most of us women, not having big, scratchy beards that we could build anything up—we were pretty sensitive and raw from the experience. It was good, and we enjoyed what we were doing. We certainly enjoyed what we were doing.

EE: The lesser problems, I suppose?

GF: Yes, and they were wonderful perks, too. In the wintertime as it got colder—and boy it would get cold—they would stop for coffee breaks on the ships, and the captains and the cooks would always make you more than welcome into the galleys of the ships. There were some fine foods that they made. Of course, you have to make everybody happy on a ship. We were indulged also. We'd be working shifts and go in and there would be steaks and pies and veggies, and it was help yourself. It was great. There were perks on the job, certainly.

EE: It certainly helps in the wintertime for sure and other seasons as well.

GF: Right. The elevator staff the people were generally--. It was a cooperative venture between the Commission and the elevators, and they knew we were there to do a service, and we went hand-in-hand, and everybody just had their own inspection division.

Certainly, if you were at one elevator for a long time and often you were presented with a turkey or a Christmas present or something. You were rewarded, and there were perks!

EE: This was acceptable to the Commission as well that you would get gifts at Christmastime?

GF: Yes, and it wasn't bribery. It was just, "Good job."

EE: I nearly near moved onto some of these various generic questions we have, but Owen did you want to ask anything about the process? You grew up a little closer to it than I did for sure. Is there any other aspect to it because our interviewee is doing a splendid job of explaining things? Okay, well there is no such thing as a typical day, that is very clear, or typical place. What would you like people to know about the work that you did or the places that you worked at on this tape, which will last forever?

GF: Well, it certainly was a job that required physical and mental skill. You needed both those skills, and you needed to be alert and ready to go because the job was ever changing. There really wasn't a typical day. You really didn't know what you may be asked to do, whether you would have a day of inspection or a day of sampling, whether it would be inbound by car or outbound by ship. It was always a different process whether it was a laker or a saltie. You might start off one morning thinking, "I can hardly wait till the end of the day," only to be called out that you had to work overtime because somebody failed to come into a ship. Pack up your gear and down you go, down to the harbour to yet another elevator to work another seven hours.

There were often long days and hard days, sometimes 14 hours. Yes, we were rewarded with shift differential and the pay was extraordinarily good at the time as far as things went. The federal government was wonderful paying us, and we had opportunities. But I think, importantly, it was knowing that it was such a national feeling when you get to work for the Grain Commission because the whole Canada as the farming and grain tradition that brought immigrant families like my grandparents to come and settle in Canada. I was quite proud, quite proud to be a part of the Grain Commission even though it was only for three years because it just was wonderful!

EE: I am going to flip a question up here. Do you think that the work you did contributed to Canada's success as an international grain trader, and in what ways? It seems to follow on quite nicely to what you just said.

GF: I think so because we were very proud that we were upholding standards. As I had been told, and I don't think I was misinformed, that Canada, we had a certain standard of product we were going to take in, and that the elevators were going to bin, and that we were going to ship out. We were not going to allow a farmer to be paid any less or any more than his crop was deserving. We were not going to give anybody any less than what they had ordered up on an export order, and that was the way it

was going to be. We had pride about that, that we were a little bit different from the American system of just shipping out the grain, uncleaned or as is. It seemed to me that it was the luck of the draw with what you were getting out of United States elevator as opposed to what the Canadian government was upholding. Quality, quality assurance, though it may not have been addressed at that time or called that, but I think that it certainly was practiced there. We were quite proud to be a part of it. We really were. We felt we were real federal government employees!

EE: You were sworn to do that at the outset, were you, I suppose, to serve the Queen?

GF: Pretty much, yes. When you become a PI 1, it is quite an interesting process.

EE: Summer of 1968, I worked for D & D in Winnipeg [inaudible] surveyor's helper first, and I do remember that there was an oath of allegiance. Did the Commission have something similar then?

GF: I think we did. That is a little hard for me to remember, but I think we did. I know I took the job very seriously.

EE: You were doing a national service.

GF: When I felt that I was not taking the job seriously or I was too distracted because of other issues, I knew it was time for me to leave. Sometimes I have to say, in hindsight, I wish I had stayed longer and done a bit more. I think that is why I do have so much pride for the women who did stay on because it was an opportunity, and it certainly was, and it did change things. I think it did probably add to our representation internationally with what we did.

EE: The question here offers you a choice interest or surprise. What might interest or surprise people most about the work that you did as you think about it? I am not sure why the questionnaire has been formulated with such a choice. Surprises or would it be interest do you think?

GF: I think interest more because we were doing--. We did and we all felt we were revolutionaries. We were quite proud of ourselves.

EE: You called yourselves that?

GF: We did. There were a number of us, and we just thought, "Look at us. We are women, and we are doing something different, and the opportunity is here. We are coming on, and we are going to do it." We didn't see ourselves as an experiment, though we

knew it was pretty experimental at the time, that so many of us were being brought in en masse. There were already some women there when I came in. There were at least three other women that I was aware of working on inspection staff. And I think two of them had already risen to the level of PI 2 before I started. But that particular time of 1977 to 1978, the push was on to do this better and bigger. I think there were probably, from my experience knowing where I worked, there were at least 10 of us that were brought on that summer.

EE: Did you socialize together to some extent?

GF: Absolutely, absolutely we socialized.

EE: What did that involve?

GF: Usually, it involved getting together for a drink after work. We followed the traditional pattern.

EE: Any particular place?

GF: At the time, there was that conglomeration of elevators up in Current River. There was UGG A, and Richardson, and the Manitoba Pool, I think. UGG A was the big one, and then there was the McCabe's UGG M, but we all would get together and most often it would be Bunny's Place. We would be there with elevator workers and grain trimmers. After work, it was open. It wasn't segregated. We went, and we'd have a drink. Some people played pool, and of course there was female entertainment for the men. That was still quite traditional. We used to just sit and look the other way, whatever.

EE: It was a strip joint, to some extent?

GF: It was a strip joint. It was in fact a strip joint. Probably at that time, too, that I think we were probably a bit revolutionary socially—that so many of us were just going down with the guys and being a part of it, just saying, “Well this is the world, and this is what we do.” [Laughs]

EE: So the young revolutionaries could be in there making the revolution.

GF: I think so, yes, and just being very open-minded to different ways of seeing life and experiencing life because it was very different. There were not a lot of women in true labour jobs. It was truly a labour job. Yet, you did have to have some sense and

sensibility about you, to conduct yourself and to want to achieve things is to be able to pass the grading tests and become an inspector and have those opportunities. To move up in the Grain Commission, you had to study and know and remember.

EE: In the best frontline worker sense, a PI 1 or 2 might end up a sampler, as required rather. You didn't move up to grain inspection. You did in a sense.

GF: You moved up, but it wasn't a straight line. At any point in time, as needed be, you were sent back out in the trenches to be a sampler. Or you could work the same day being a sampler and an inspector. You could go sample your bag, bring it in, and then inspect your own grain, depending on if there was a staff shortage or what was demanded, there was overtime coming up, or if there was a particular backlog of things to be doing. There was not a typical day. It was never quite the same. You might be able to expect to follow some of the same procedures, but anything goes!

EE: What are you most proud of looking back to those three years?

GF: That I made the attempt that I did. That I did it.

EE: But you did it for more than three years, which is more than an attempt.

GF: That I did it for three years. It was something that was a big challenge. It took a lot of energy.

EE: Was your family surprised?

GF: I don't know if my family was surprised. I think they were a bit disappointed that I was working so hard and that, as a woman, I was working so hard physically. They saw that as being unfair, but I enjoyed it. I really did.

EE: Work often does work very hard.

GF: Yes, and I had already done non-traditional work. I had worked for the Conservation Authority as a labourer during my high school days. So I was experienced in unloading trucks, and laying sod, and running a chain saw, and wearing a helmet back in those days and work boots. I had thought of myself back then even as sort of looking towards as being non-traditional. Here I am being an administrative assistant. [Laughs]

EE: I was thinking back to 1968. I was expected to be married at the end of the summer, so it was about time to earn some money. I went down to Canada Manpower and into the labour pool. It seemed the place to go. As soon as someone there recognized the fact that I had a degree and was in fact a graduate student at Hopkins, back for the summer, I was up on the second floor, and someone sitting at someone's desk, and he was going through the card file and pulls out one, landscaping. And I said, "That is terrific work, outdoors in the sunny weather." He says, "That is tough work. Let me look a little further. Surveyors helper at DND, the very thing." I could savour your physical prowess already in having worked for the Conservation Authority and taking those skills into the--

GF: I didn't mind doing the non-traditional. I really didn't mind doing the physical, but I think my family just did question why would you have gone to university and done this? "This is what you are doing. You didn't need a degree to do this. And it is so hard, and it is shift, and there are difficulties. Why are you sticking this out?" At the time, I didn't see it as sticking it out, but near the end I felt I was. So, I knew the glow was off and the revolutionary had lost her edge.

EE: I wonder about your partner-husband and his reaction. Do you meet him in the elevators?

GF: No, we had met in university completing our English degrees. He became an elevator worker, and at that time, it was what we were seeking because of course we owed a lot of money to the government for student loans. We had both paid for our own education. When the loans come up, they are big and looming, and we just saw this as a real great opportunity. Unfortunately for most students today, those opportunities are few and far between to go into labour positions. Of course, with closure of the primary-product industry like elevators and papermills, we are not seeing what we once saw. But it was wonderful. We were able to pay off our loans. We were able to save some money. We were able to invest in programs at the time that existed with the federal government like home ownership saving plan, which ended in and basically became RESPs and RHSPs. So, we worked and had lots of overtime and opportunities. So, within a short few years, we pretty much were debt free to the federal government and were only going to be in debt to the mortgage.

EFF: Yes, of course, we own homes, and we don't actually for quite a period of time.

GF: We don't. We are just shifting money every Friday.

EFF: What major changes did you see in your job in the trade through the three years?

GF: The biggest major change was in the technology that had come up. All of a sudden, we were seeing automation coming in fast and furious. Starting as a sampler and then training in passing my papers to be a PI 1, we were wondering would there ever any

need for samplers again because these automatic systems were going on. We were not going to be out in the car sheds anymore, and we were not going to be asked on the deck of a ship anymore. Certainly, that was great for us because I am sure half of us felt like if you are a right-handed person your arm was now six inches longer from scooping in the grain coming down the chutes onto the ships because the force of the tonnage of grain coming down a chute and loading into a boat was something else. Sometime your arm nearly spun around in a complete circle trying to get these samples of tonnage mid-stream and side-stream.

EE: You would pull a little bit on one side and then on another and then in the middle.

GF: Yes, and then you would bag, and then wait and ticketed your required number of time with the flow to figure out which were getting an equal sample across the--. It was quite the experience.

EE: The more equipment the better, in a sense.

GF: Yes, you would be bagging which hold it was going into. Writing your tickets out and what was coming. And sometimes, you were running across the deck of a ship to different holds because one hold was being loaded with barley and one was being loaded with wheat simultaneously, and you needed to get the samples running between spouts. On a good day, the spout bouncers were helping you out. It was quite the experience.

EE: This is where the trimmers might come in? Was a trimmer allowed to help you with the sampling?

GF: They were not allowed to help with the sampling. You had to do it yourself.

EE: Could they hold the load back a bit?

GF: They would sometimes help assist and really hold back on the pipe and things for you to make sure you didn't really get hurt. I only had one circumstance where a poor sailor on leave came back from a day on the town while I was sampling. I guess he thought I must have been irresistible, and he actually ran to give me a big hug and embrace and bowled me over into the hold of the ship, which was filling with grain. Luckily, we were near the top and neither one of us were injured. The trimmers managed to get the spout differed, so we weren't covered in a stream of grain at the time. There was some silliness, yes.

EE: That is quite a moment right there!

GF: Yes, that was my last moment, and I thought, "Oh dear, what am I doing with my life?" [Laughs]

EE: A hold would be perhaps weighing how many tonnes?

GF: I can't remember.

EE: How long would it take to fill a hold?

GF: It would depend on how fast it was coming from the bins, how fast the belts were running, and how many belts were running, and how many bins were being pulled at the same time. But loading a ship depending on how much was taken, and it depended, you see--. You have to remember that a ship would leave one slip in an elevator and go to another elevator to get another type of tonnage because they were signed up to get several different things. They might be loading wheat from one and then pull back out into the harbour and off they go down to the next elevator and pull into their slip.

EE: I was wondering how many times would you have to sample the filling of one hold and how much grain would that actually produce?

GF: That would depend on how much they were taking and how much the elevator had to offer. I mean some elevators well this is all the tonnage we have of that grade. You are going to have to go to-- We would stop. So, if it was a short shipment, you had to sample more randomly and faster to get enough poundage to be inspected.

EE: How many pounds did you need from a hold? Was there a rule?

GF: It depended on the size of the shipment. You had to at least get a one-pound sample.

EE: A one-pound sample from a hold?

GF: Yes, but you might have to get several from the hold. Depending on if it was empty, if they were filling it to the top, and it was taking all afternoon, you might get five or six samples and be bagging all day long. And if there was just like, well, we are doing a short load of barley, here you might get one bag. And sometimes if it was fast, and you didn't know it was coming, you barely got half a bag, it made it very difficult for the inspector inside. Often, we wouldn't be able to leave the deck of the ship, and the grain inspector would come out and say, "Throw it." and you footballed down a sample. The good news was as the ship filled up, we got lower in the bottom, so it wasn't as much of a toss.



EE: How big were the bags?

GF: In terms of size enough to hold a pound, so probably about six or seven inches wide and maybe 12 inches, enough so that you could tie it up. You had to tie it off with string and double knot and put a tag on it.

EE: Bigger than a rugby football?

GF: Yes, and a little heavier depending on what it was, too.

EE: That is only one pound of grain?

GF: Yes. They were cotton bags, and they were distributed.

EE: A bushel of wheat is 60 pounds.

GF: You have to make sure that all your bags, before you got on the boat, that they were turned inside out and shaken out and that you were not contaminating the sampling etc. and that nothing is left in them. That was a big part of your maintenance too and the integrity of inspecting. All the little nuisances are coming back.

EE: Those are the changes that automation added to your job in the industry. What other challenges did you face? And in fact, you have told us about some of them. Do you have anything to add, or do you want to underscore what you have said about the challenges already mentioned?

GF: No, I think I pretty much throughout the interview I highlighted many of them. It would not be too much of a point to do a synopsis of them. It was just good to do something that I think, despite the Grains Commission and the federal government and what we were doing as a job, just from a perspective of a woman just doing something non-traditional and being able to do something non-traditional, and being paid well for the job, it was quite something and just that opportunity.

EE: Could I ask where you went to after you quit the Grain Commission?

GF: When I left, I thought I was going to be a stay-at-home mom, which didn't quite work out. My plans didn't quite work out. So, I found myself re-routing myself back to school again. It was quite different, so I had come back to university and did a Library Information Studies diploma to look at something different. Immediately after that, I went into culture, and it was quite an

experience. In fact, I took a cut from unemployment insurance to take the job so I could work for a not-for-profit. But it took me years to catch up in salary. Probably by the time I left the Canadian Grain Commission, with overtime and payment, and it was good. Shift differential was good, and the grain trade was booming. You have to remember back in the end of the '70s, it was still very high. So there was lots of work for everybody, and I remember gentlemen giving away their overtime all the time. If you were too tired and didn't want to work, there was always somebody who was hungry for overtime, they would say. I think I left and my wage probably at the time was probably about \$28,000 a year, which was high. It took me years to catch up with that type of earning.

EE: With the assistance of inflation.

GF: Yes. When I came out of my departure from the Grain Commission and re-routed to school and re-routed to not-for-profit, my first job after leaving the federal government was a job that started at \$10,000 a year. So that was a big change.

EE: Quite a come down in some ways? There were other rewards, I suppose?

GF: Yes, big change in lifestyle. There were other rewards. I was looking for other things at the time. As we always say money isn't everything, but, boy, it is nice. [Laughs]

EE: What are your most vivid memories of your job, or have we already had those?

GF: One of my most vivid memories is probably one of the most embarrassing ones that I ever had. As I said, being out on the boats it was hard work, and it was cold, and we were equipped with our helmets and gloves. We often were in a ski-doo suit. You were out there for hours, and you would get really tired.

I actually sent away for this lovely pair of boots, which I thought was going to do the job. They were these boots from England. They were flat heeled and had a great zipper and sheepskin-lined, but they came over my knees. I thought they were the warmest things, and I was so happy with them. The first day that I wore them on the job—I was at Pool 4, I think—and the grading office was right out on the slip at ground level, and I was above the ship, and at some point in the shipping, my inspector waved me and said I had to get off the ship, and I thought I wonder what was wrong. I came into his office, and he took me into the backroom and said, "You have to get those boots off. Nobody can get any work done." I thought at the time I had no idea what he was talking about. But I guess the boots looked very colourful and a little bit more like a costume than work fare, having these over-the-knee boots on. It was a vivid memory as these poor gentlemen had to tell me that I was wearing inappropriate clothing, which I thought was so appropriate for the job. I was warm. I was cozy. I was great.

EE: And he was blushing a little bit?

GF: He was blushing, embarrassed to tell me. I was embarrassed to have to take them off and put on my steel-toed boots and go out there and be very cold.

EE: The steel toes would be another factor. The boots didn't have steel toes?

GF: No, my boots did not have steel toes. On one hand it was health and safety, and on another hand, I was a big distraction! That was the naivety on my part of being a woman in the workforce—not even thinking that this would be an issue.

EE: “Keep your minds on your job, guys!”

GF: It was quite vivid, because I can remember this poor gentlemen, he was so embarrassed trying to tell me, and I actually felt quite sorry for him, that I presented an issue for him. I can only laugh about it now, because it was certainly my naivety at the time. I had no idea.

EE: Was this quite early in your--?

GF: Quite early. I was still a sampler. [Laughs] Oh well, never make that mistake again.

EE: That is pretty vivid alright. What were the most important events that happened in the workplace during your career? Do you have anything to add to what you have actually said very nicely?

GF: It was really a wonderful experience when you did get called down to head office to go work at the Grain Commission above the post office and see how it really works and how all these samples were coming together from all the elevators, and how they were being archived and what it meant—you know, that all your little tickets with the information that you filled out on your grading—how that meant the farmer would be paid, and how the number on it and your initials on it, if there were any questions from the farmers point of view, that they would call up your ticket and take your sample, and they would take a look at it, and they might have to re-grade it.

EE: This was all explained to you early on? One on one or in a group?

GF: It was all explained. It was in a group. A number of us would get called down at a time to work above the post office and see what was happening. You really got a feel of what you were doing out on site and how that was all being brought together and divvied out. That was really, really nice and exciting, and it gave us lots of lofty aspirations that we would maybe one day just be downtown. Downtown is how we called it.

EE: I actually slipped by an earlier question because I thought you had actually answered it, but you are now expanding on that. Describe any connections you see between your work and the work of farmers growing the grain handled in the grain trade? You just said that though.

GF: Yes, really. Once we had understood that whole process, you really practiced due diligence on your sampling because we certainly didn't want the farmer to be cheated. It was his livelihood. [Laughs] You were there with a big in front of you and that meant what would be paid to him. It was his livelihood. We certainly didn't want any mistakes to be made.

EE: You all felt that. In your case, you had family connections?

GF: Yes, I did, and I am sure we all did. I think there was an overall feeling of the intent of our job, and the integrity of our job, and what we were to do. It was a great experience.

EE: Do you think it is important to do this, to capture and preserve and share the history of the grain trade?

GF: Absolutely. It is a big part of what our country was doing, and what our workforce was doing, and certainly connects us to the land. A big part of our Canadian sensibility, I think.

EE: Do you have any thoughts about the aspects of the history that we should be preserving?

GF: No, just as long as we know that we are getting the whole picture, I guess, which is nice from the inspection side, that I have been able to offer some of my insights. Even though it was a very short career, it certainly was enjoyable. Hopefully you will be able to record more histories either from inspection staff or weigh staff, the elevator perspective or those that worked downtown in the big office, and maybe some of the experiences of those ones who went up to Churchill and certainly had the experience up there—how that all fit in. It was very, very big for us, at the time.

EE: Do you remember anyone in particular who went to Churchill, who would be around?

GF: I don't know if they would be around. My connections--.

EE: I will ask you too after the interview for that matter.

GF: My connections are few and far between some of the people that stayed. But I guess someone would know if people are still around. I do know a few people who are still there. They probably could tell you, provide that information, if you haven't already interviewed them. I can let you know that.

EE: I hadn't really thought about as we are involved so much in the collection and have the pleasure of interviewing you and other people in this process. One of the ways we could disseminate the work would be in fact to pull any good extracts together and get the various phases and aspects of the grain trade into a little book that people could read to appreciate what various people did.

GF: We can only go from our own experience. Sometimes no matter how broad we think our experience is, it is pretty unique, and you haven't seen the flipside. I hazard to guess it was such a big process that there is a lot of the flipside I didn't see to the full process of inspecting and rank.

EE: We have interviewed a lot of people now, and we are going to be talking to others.

GF: Great. Well, most enjoyable. It has been great!

EE: I turn back to my chief engineer to ask whether he would have any questions.

OM: My father was a grain inspector-in-charge and worked at 7, liked 7. He liked Searle, too. But he would work year-round. Did you work year-round as an inspector?

GF: When I was a sampler, I was laid off. As an inspector, I was year-round.

OM: How did you wile away the hours from December to March? What responsibilities did they have for you at that point?

GF: Well, for me I would probably end up down at the car shed because I was only a PI 1. So I would be back down, and we would be doing things.

EE: Involved with the winter movement of grain?

GF: With the winter movement of grain, yes.

EE: That was going on through those years?

GF: Then we would be brought up, of course, to downtown for training. They would take us at that time and train us, show us what they were doing with the samples. It was during time that we would also be sent out to work with entomology to see how entomology--. And I don't know if you have interviewed the bug guys. We used to call them the bug guys.

EE: We haven't interviewed a bug guy, have we?

OM: No.

EE: No. We will have to find some bug guys to talk to.

OM: Just one other question, and maybe Ernie and you already talked about this, but when did health and safety really become an issue? Was this past your time?

GF: I think it was past my time, or if it wasn't, I wasn't aware or I didn't get myself informed. So, I don't know. It was quite a long time ago. I knew there were the issues about our standard boots, our masks, our goggles, our helmets. But as far as what we did about certain things and circumstances I was in, there wasn't much.

EE: The WHMIS, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System, I think is what that--. Seems to be a mid '80s I think it was happening while I was MP, and when I came back, not that it really touched my life. I wasn't a chemist. I guess if I had been in the Department of Chemistry, it would have arisen immediately. But I discovered that something had happened during those years and there was concern now about what kind of hazardous materials were being used and people had to learn it. It is an interesting question and there must be some writing on occupational health and safety and workplace hazards of various sorts.

GF: Yes, there must have had to be some standard set up because, of course, it would not just be for Grain Commission, it would be for the larger part of people in general in the elevators. Of course, there were all kinds of safety measures put in place about certain things in binning and that because of the issues involved with grain dust and combustibles.

EE: Yes.

OM: It was an amazing time because you were coming in at a point where things had been going the way they had been going for 60-70 years. Individuals had been working in those elevators gravitated towards that for a number of reasons including personality. Then the major changes started to occur just as you start, so it would be quite a transition, I would think.

GF: It was a big transition, and I think it had to happen. It is just the way time is. But for me as I said I looked it as an opportunity because it was non-traditional for a woman. But I think the opportunity was there for people who had been working there and had been the don't-rock-the-boat employee or follow the good old boys' school. It allowed them to have a voice, to be the person they also wanted to be, at that time. I knew there were individuals who had been there for a long time who didn't like it, but they didn't want to be the guy who spoke out. They didn't want to be seen as different or problematic. Yes, it was really coming to be, and certainly the people who were being put in place downtown and that were being moved in for their expertise and handling things, not just the business end, but management and problems. It was really a changing, changing way of the work world for us in that time in that job.

EE: Are there anything other questions you think we should have asked? You are answering one of them you maybe suggesting is in what way the order of things change in the Grain Commission and others? How was society changing? But I am suggesting a question. You may have one of your own.

GF: No, I don't know how to really pose that one. We were in changing times. The workforce was changing rapidly. You were playing catchup and fall behind all at once, trying to broaden the workforce and knowing that we didn't have that faction that existed. As I said, many of the people who were there were people who had come out of the WWII experience. Some of those people came straight in from that situation. Others were educated and still came straight in, and it was because of blue-collar work and being able to be paid and knowing that living in a city like Thunder Bay, it was a heavy blue-collar community for many, many years. Of course, we are now transitioned here, but overall in the field, the changing face of the worker and just social tolerance and that brushes on many, many issues of people in the workplace—male and female, lifestyle and sensibilities. There wasn't the opportunity or the--. I don't know how to phrase it. I'm looking for the word—to be different or to be viewed as different. It wasn't happening at that time yet. I think we were just there. We had maybe come through the '60s where the envelope was being pushed on tolerances and intolerances for people's differences, and it was everywhere. I think when you get into a very traditional job that had been male dominant, and a certain type of male, I think, it was different. It was very different.

EE: One of the interesting aspects of that and one could probably pin it down in the literature of social sciences, was the recognition that—well to be fairly explicit about it, shall we say—that sexual harassment was in fact an impediment to efficiency on the job. But one could generalize that first phenomenon as the way people had behaved in times past for a long, long time, in

fact made it more difficult for people—women in particular—to be efficient, to be affective employees. So, when you suddenly discover behaviour-- This is part of what I was alluding to earlier, when you have behavior that I would have been raised to think of probably as immoral behaviour, certainly bad form would be another way of describing it, but that is suddenly seen in quite secular terms as an impediment to effectiveness and efficiency in the office, there has been a watershed change in workplace norms. That is a very, very interesting change to observe.

GF: It was an interesting change, yes.

EE: It seems to me that was happening through the '80s that I sensed as MP that was happening. Maybe it was under way through the first half of the '80s, and you could see in pretty clearly by '85 or '86 would be one way I would be tempted to date it myself. Of course, it became much clearer and stronger as the years past.

GF: It is funny because in today's climate with President Obama in the United States and the US military and this "Don't ask, don't tell" concerning homosexuality, it was almost like that as a woman in the '70s. It was like "Don't ask, don't tell." You are not supposed to acknowledge that this type of unwanted advances or language is around you. But you are just supposed almost to pretend it is not happening, and you are not supposed to really talk about it or ruin everything. This is the way it is, and if you want to be here-- It was basically put up and shut up.

EE: One can think of the transition in other ways and some of it in the US and certainly involves partisan dimensions as well. But certainly, between what was given to us in a documentary the other day about President Kennedy's mistresses and all the rest of it, to 35 years later when the Republicans went at Bill Clinton as they did, there is certainly an incredible contrast between those two situations. Of course, the media played their part to it now. What is winked at if you will or ignored or what isn't now, and one could think of the US and Gary Hart as one of the poster boys for the [inaudible] find me out if you will, which was a stupid thing for any politician to say. And the media found him out, of course, if he is going to challenge them to do it.

OM: I like the fact those points that you made about allowing people who had been in that system to free up a bit and to speak their minds more openly. I think that is an appropriate statement to make. It wasn't one monolithic workforce, but there certainly was a culture there that one had to observe, if you wanted to be a part of that.

GF: Exactly. It was a culture if you wanted to be a part of it, and if you didn't want to have difficulties at work, you are with us or against us, right? I think a lot of the people that I worked with-- And certainly I did have a lot of respect for many people who were there, people who really helped and mentored me, and a lot of people who just didn't know how to deal with what was going



on. They really couldn't help, but they didn't agree with what was going on, and they themselves had difficulties. But there wasn't a way of doing it.

You have to understand that when something happens, in the case of a harassment charges, it's not just the one-on-one. It's everybody is a part of it. Everybody is a victim, everybody who has to stand by in silence and witness and feel that their hands were tied, or it wasn't their issue, or they didn't want to be involved. It is still underneath, and it is there with you every day. I could see when I was there the embarrassment in some of my coworkers' eyes that somebody was acting inappropriately, either verbally or physically, and it wasn't their role to do anything for me.

EE: They didn't have a means of challenging it.

GF: They didn't have a means of challenging it or reporting it. It was my job to take care of it for myself. But there really wasn't a way of doing it because there wasn't a way of stopping the behaviour because the channels were not in place until much later.

EE: I am repeating what others have said in this context in saying that masculinism is one of the ways or categorizing or pulling it all together under one label that masculinism has male victims as well as female, in the physiological sense.

GF: It takes its toll.

EE: And to break this kind of masculinism is liberating for men, for some of the men, maybe all of them, even the perpetrators are liberated in some ways. But certainly, for the women, the ones who are the first victims of it, there is no question about it. It is becoming a bit heavy here—the way of social science, isn't it. [Laughing]

GF: Thank you very kindly. It is very nice to have the opportunity.

EE: I guess we can conclude. Thanks very much Gail. This has been a very interesting interview. I am so glad you agreed to do it. Thanks again.

GF: Thanks to you for having me be a part of the history.

**End of interview.**