

Narrator: Wilfred “Butch” Harder (WH)

Company Affiliations: Manitoba Pool Elevators (MPE), Canadian Wheat Board (CWB), National Farmers Union (NFU)

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Interviewer: Nancy Perozzo (NP)

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Summary: Former elected director of Manitoba Pool Elevators and the Canadian Wheat Board Wilfred Harder discusses his varied career in the Canadian grain industry. He begins by sharing memories of his parents farming during the Great Depression, his farm work and elevator visits as a young boy, and his father’s involvement in organizing the Manitoba Pool. He gives historical context for the organization of the Pools, and he describes his own active involvement in farmer-led groups, like the National Farmers Union, when he began farming on his own. He discusses becoming a delegate for Manitoba Pool, the occasional conflict of interest between his union and Pool positions, and the common issues of the time, like land leasing and plant breeders’ rights. Harder then describes becoming an elected director for the Pool, being on the other side of the table for policy debates, and joining the Canadian Wheat Board advisory committee. Throughout the interview, Harder shares his dislike of farmer-led organizations becoming too centralized, and he describes his attempts to maintain farmer input, communicate with all industry players, and visit main grain hubs like Thunder Bay and Vancouver. He also discusses the period of amalgamation among the Pools, starting with the creation of Agricore from Alberta and Manitoba Pool to the ultimate creation of Viterra. Other topics discussed include his dealings with the Farm Credit Corporation, issues with closing terminal elevators, issues with railway service, the deregulation of the Canadian Grain Commission, challenges and debates within the Wheat Board, and his vivid memories of board and farmer meetings.

Keywords: Manitoba Pool Elevators; Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); National Farmers Union (NFU); Grain farmers/producers; Agricultural policy; Farmer cooperatives; Prairie Provinces—History; Country grain elevators; Grain prices; Farmer delegates; Farmer meetings; Plant breeding; CWB advisory committee; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; Alberta Wheat Pool; United Grain Growers; Agricore; Viterra; Amalgamation; Privatization; Grain transportation—rail; Railcar allocation; Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Deregulation; Downsizing; Fusarium; Boards of directors

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NP: Nancy Perozzo conducting an interview on November 28th in Winnipeg. I will have our subject for this evening introduce himself and tell us his first introduction to the grain trade.

WH: My name is Wilfred Butch Harder, normally known to most people as Butch. I believe I'll be 71 December 9th. I grew up on a mixed farm, so when specifically I got introduced into the grain business, it was always there.

NP: Did your parents homestead then?

WH: No, they did not homestead. We were not--. They—as a lot of parents in those days when they got married, now I don't know, but in the '30s—they got married and lived in, I'm told, in an old granary for farm and they were extremely poor. My grandfather was a horse trader and made his living trading horses, and my dad was an only boy of eight sisters. Then he married my mother. Her maiden name was Klassen, so our background was Mennonite, although Mennonite is really, some say its a group of people—just read the religion because the Mennonites have developed into a culture with certain characteristics. But normally Mennonite is associated with someone who is very religious and all those things. We were that, but we were not what would you call, how would you say really--.

NP: Strict?

WH: Strict! That's right. My mother wore makeup in church, which was really frowned upon. And, as I said before, my dad was an activist in a cooperative movement and as a result had some conflict with the church. Why? I never know. Seems to me that belonging to the cooperative movement would be something that churches would condone, but not all church members did.

NP: It was your parents, then, that were married during the Depression and living in a granary.

WH: Yeah, that's what I'm told.

NP: How did they get into farming?

WH: I'm not really that sure. I guess in those days you would move from—my granddad had done the same thing—lot of people got a chance to lease land and the yards were there. Actually, our land, as long as I grew up—history is an interesting thing—a lot of the land in Southern Manitoba was owned by Americans who had thought they'd come up here and make a real windfall. The family my father rented from was Turblas. In fact, in my lifetime they still have relatives in Las Vegas. I think they own some of the oil rights on the land that we have. I don't know how that would ever go down.

So they leased land. I believe in the '50s my dad purchased the land, rented it first then purchased the land through what was then called the Canadian Farm Loans Board, or through private companies. So we grew up in a traditional Mennonite community, but my dad—and a lot of people in my community, it was traditional not just in the Mennonite community, other communities—you farmed, that's what you do. Then when your youngsters get married, you buy them a piece of land. That's how you get them started.

My parents grew up poor with a lot of these in the community. My dad had Grade 4. They actually had a goal. Not many people do to this day. They knew they wouldn't be able to give their children any farmland, so their goal was to give us all an education. We were six miles from school, and they sacrificed everything so that we had the opportunity to go to school. I was the youngest. Over time things got a little better and this is carrying on a little bit. In a Mennonite community, in fact many years in the Mennonite community, education was sort of frowned on. That was not in our family. My dad had Grade 4, but he was always willing to speak up in public.

Maybe this is not part of the story. He took me everywhere, and that's why I learned early about financing. I remember going to the Farm Agricultural Credit Corporation—no it was called Federal Farm Loans Board, now called Canadian Farm Credit Corporation. He took me there and they asked him—he was applying for a loan—and they asked him, "What education have you got?" He said, "Grade 8." I didn't say anything and so we left the place. I said, "Dad, that really wasn't quite right. You've always said you only had Grade 4." "Well, son," he said, "Look. First place, nobody would've believed me if I said that, and in the second place, it looks better this way." I have repeated that story so often. But anyways, go ahead.

NP: So when you were growing up, when did you first start working the farm?

WH: When I was 10 years old. That's when they started to modernize. We had a small Ford tractor with a three-point hitch. My parents got a letter from the Department of Education because I had been absent from school for two weeks and they wanted to know why, and they had to write back as a 10 year old, "He was hauling all the grain." I didn't have to shovel it, and of course I loved every minute of it. So that's what we did. We were a mixed farm, but we were no exception.

But my father always had also a--. Because there were distant relatives that were poor, they looked after, he was like my brother, he was Ed Braun. We always had a hired help as long as I grew up. See, in a Mennonite community, the children and the girls, they would have to stay home to do the work. My parents were more progressive that way. They had hired help. So that's how I grew up. We always had a hired person around. I would say a hired man, but nowadays you have to call it a hired person.

NP: Are there any female hired persons?

WH: Pardon me?

NP: Are there any female hired persons? Or are they mostly men?

WH: Well, they're mostly men, but it happens. We've come a long ways. In those days the women had to work on the farm, had to milk the cows. They did everything, milk the cows, do this, do the laundry, feed the children. I grew up thinking, "Boy, they sure got liberated once they didn't have to do all this stuff." Now we've done the full cycle. Now the young people want to go back and do that. Well, more power to you, go ahead. My parents, when I grew up, they tried to get out of those chores, but anyways that's okay. That's how that went.

NP: Did your parents expect you to take over the farm?

WH: No. I was not encouraged to go into the farm. That was the difference and--. No! No! There'd be no opportunity, no. They wanted us to have an education. Why would you live that life? No. Absolutely not! The goals were--. And actually, my oldest brother was good in school. He had university. My second brother was a bit of a joker, and he got married young. My sister is a retired teacher, now. I have a sister that's left. My other brother next to me, two years older than me, was a teacher. I'm the only one in the whole family that never taught school. Now having said that, one was a permanent teacher. One was a high school teacher. The others were permanent teachers. But I've been the only one and that's interesting. The first CIGI course I spoke at the university—Canadian Grains Institute—I'd never be teaching something because my role in school was not to be the nicest guy in school, that was having fun.

NP: Now, because we'll be spending time talking about your activities as director and a board member, I want to just touch on your father's political activism within the farm movement. When did you become aware of that? Can you describe what it was like?

WH: Always, we were always aware. It was a kitchen table topic. We grew up fortunate. Not just in the Mennonite community, other communities, children didn't talk back. We were taught freedom of speech. Now, on the other hand, if the freedom of speech didn't line up, it was a one-on-one—it was equal. We weren't taught to be rude and talk back, but we did talk to strangers, talk to us--. Once on a report card, it told my parents that they had very outspoken children. We said something and we were out of line, verbally. It was one-on-one. If we said the wrong thing, we could take the verbal abuse from that. It went both ways. We were allowed to talk back but only--. No, we sort of knew our boundaries, I think.

NP: Talk back politely but have an opinion.

WH: Yeah, strong opinions. And we would challenge each other. I questioned a lot of things my dad did. That's only normal. It was the game. But we always discussed stuff like that at the kitchen table.

NP: So what was your dad's involvement then in--?

WH: Well, he became one of the early board members of the Manitoba Pool Elevators. He was involved with Lowe Farm—it's still there, a town of 350 people—on the local co-op board. Then he had a store. Lowe Farm was a very cooperatively minded community. In fact, the Lowe Farm Credit Union, I believe, was still there. It's called something else. It's still a credit union, was one of the earliest English-speaking credit unions in the province, interestingly enough. And you have to understand at that time there wasn't that much communication. The Mennonites went to the French communities to learn about credit unions.

That's an interesting historical thing because in those days there was Catholic and Mennonite. Uh-huh. Nowadays that's totally changed. I say for the better. And he also became very well with Manitoba Farmers Union. I remember him having a membership one time. I don't know what it was, and I said, "\$7 for a membership?" Back then that was a lot of money and he said, "You don't believe in that?" But he educated me about that really quickly. He was always going to meetings and stuff. He was a public person, and believed, grew up, where the people should work together.

NP: Was he pretty much with the majority of thinking within that community?

WH: In that community, not in the immediate neighbourhood, but yeah, at that time, yeah. He was probably more left-wing than most people. I think he went to the grave knowing that he never voted Conservative. That was his background.

NP: Did you have opinions at an early age? Did you agree with your father? Disagree with your father? Not sure?

WH: Yes, I think we did. But on the other hand, I was already farming. I really believe in democracy and freedom of speech. I was at a Manitoba Farmers Union Meeting and eighth floor of the Marlborough Hotel. I probably was 22 years old. I had my first-year farming. That was another thing. I had a pretty good crop. I think I had a new car and felt pretty good about myself. The Farmers Union had a way of thinking a little bit ahead, and the subject of Medicare came up and Blue Cross. I said, "We don't need that kind of stuff." I said, "You know we can get Blue Cross and it can be so many dollars a week and really, that's not necessary to have public health care. Why should this organization even be talking about stuff like that?" An old man in the corner got up and said, "These young guys, if your wife is expecting a baby--." That old man was my dad. I lost the motion, by the way. His side

carried. And that's sort of the environment he got up. No, those young guys don't know what they're talking about. He was right. But that's freedom of speech.

NP: And did you know he would be the one to stand up and take you to task?

WH: No! No idea. Absolutely not. I knew he spoke from the heart. I knew what he was talking about, I just hadn't picked it up. He did. He wouldn't let that go by.

NP: In the Lowe Farm area, that's a pretty prosperous part of the province, as far as good farming.

WH: Now it is.

NP: Yes. I mean as much as farming can be prosperous. That goes in cycles, too. What was competition like there? For the--.

WH: Well, that was why the co-ops got started. The competition was--. They were actually friends of the community. They were private merchants in the community. The Rosners are one of the Bronfman family. They were Rosners—Rose-Ners we called them. In fact most of the Mennonite communities had one. You would have a Jewish merchant and probably a Jewish farmer. When farming got to the point where they would usually have hired help. I would say business-wise they were quite a bit ahead of us. They were parts of the community. Then they had the merchants in town, and they were the only merchant. Somehow, they needed a little competition there, or something, and somehow the co-op movement evolved.

Every community sort of had a Jewish farmer or Jewish merchant, and the Jews and the Mennonites got along extremely as an historical record because in Russia the Jewish people were the businesspeople and the Jewish people were smarter than us. They broadened their horizons and became doctors, dentists, lawyers. I always said. My optometrist from Lowe Farm was a Rosner and he'd always talk to me in low-German. I say this very sincerely, the Jewish people, people are envious of them. But they're just simply jealous because the Jewish people, the first thing they do is learn the other person's language. It's good business. They know how to laugh at themselves. Yeah, the co-ops started because they felt there should be some--. And the credit unions especially. That was part of the cooperative movement.

If you go to the Bank of Montreal, you couldn't borrow any money if you're a poor person. That's why credit unions got started. That's what it was. It was interesting, if I look at the history, how the politics didn't seem to bother. A lot of the people that were strong movers and shakers of the cooperative movement in my community, you would hardly call left-wing, probably conservatives and liberals, whatever. It was just business. You work together. It's just what they did.

NP: They were private buyers or were they connected to other companies?

WH: The grain companies that were first there, the Ogilvies and others, and then the Pool elevators took over. I'm not that familiar with that history. The Pools were the forerunners of the Wheat Board, and then they went broke because the market turned down and people weren't loyal. Then somehow the Pools started to have a Wheat Board. The Pools actually weren't in trouble, but the Pools were farmer-owned, and they were little committees. When we had a reunion at Lowe Farm, I went into the archives in Brandon—if you ever want co-op archives—and I looked up a certain history of the Pool. The minutes—people think minutes are dull—I don't know whether it was in the '20s or the '30s, and my dad was at that meeting I think, the minutes show topics of conversation were very interesting. They were turning grain into alcohol. That hadn't changed in damn near 100 years, in 70 years. Those are the topics of conversation. I found it really interesting.

NP: Even the grain turned into alcohol? I think that would be quite profitable.

WH: We've obviously been joking in the Ukrainian community that they really did turn that grain into alcohol, and they drank it. [Laughs] I'm not so sure that didn't happen in our community either, but--.

NP: I don't think there are many communities where it didn't happen. [Laughing]

WH: The grain business, especially farmers, needed fair weights and measures. The cooperatives, they had, for many, many years, a very large percentage of the business because that's just what you did. They didn't always pay a dividend of course, but that was very much a part of the community. Every community had a co-op elevator and--.

NP: Was there another elevator?

WH: There was United Grain Growers elevator and I believe there was another one. Subsequently one burned down, and the United Grain Growers stayed there for some time. Manitoba Pool was an individual association and as things got bigger, they became--. Saskatchewan that already had that form up, then they were individual associations. They had a head office. They had their balance sheet. They did this. They did that. They were self-sustaining.

Then in my lifetime, probably in the early '60s, they decided to become what we call a line company, so all their earnings would go into one central office. Communities could vote on it. Some chose to stay out of it—Jordan, Manitoba, was one—decided to stay out of that cooperative, although they still had synergies with central agency.

That didn't do those individual companies that much good because when you had a larger conglomerate, managed more centrally, group buying all that is fine, but, having said that, it did take away from local control. That's always the dilemma. The local people didn't have a say. They felt alienated from the company. I don't know where democracy takes off and where it doesn't. But they start these things, and then they gradually become so big and then gradually the power becomes more centralized, for a lot of good reasons. That's how it went.

NP: I think I heard you say that you were delivering grain to the elevators.

WH: Yes.

NP: At age 10?

WH: Not to the elevators, that was a mistake, I was delivering from the field to the farm.

NP: I may have misinterpreted.

WH: That's okay. From the field to the farm. I never, until I was 16, I never did drive without a driver's license. Well, I guess we all did, to school, but that was different.

NP: [Laughs] Doing it for a good reason.

WH: Well, there were good reasons! But I'm very sure that it happened before you were 16, that you would drive.

NP: So what do you remember about the early elevators?

WH: Oh, early elevators, you know what? Elevators didn't change much in my lifespan. When I was a delegate to Manitoba Pool Elevators of early farming, I said, "When are we going to build concrete elevators?" What did I think of the early elevators? As a youngster, I remember I was always scared to walk over the grate because I thought I'd fall in. The early elevators didn't have--. You want history? They didn't have a washroom. I'll always remember in the corner there was a sign, "For you to pee." That was just in the corner where the door was. I remember that extremely vividly. That's how it was.

Some of the work in the early elevator, the pit, where the grain was dumped into, and that was not all that many years ago—well it is, but it isn't—cleaning out the pit was a bad job. The newcomer usually got that because that's where the rats were. I'm old enough to remember that they would have the not a steam power but an oil-burning engine that would run the whole elevator with the belt. I guess they'd call it—there's a name for it—they'd call it the workhouse. That's where the office was. The Pools, the elevator companies, became the distributors. We'd store the chemicals in the same office that the office was in.

Well, if those pails ever leaked—that would be a no-no nowadays, but that's how it went. It was always going up the manlift. I took the lift up one time. It was a rope affair. You go all the way up and then there's a certain place where you kind of feel squeezed in there and be a little careful there. I never understood the safety of it and a lot of times managers were there by themselves.

The other job that was there was coopering cars. That's not so long ago that that didn't happen. When the boxcars would come down, you'd have to put a siding door in them. The first thing, of course, we'd want to do when we went to Thunder Bay was to see how they were unloaded. They had a mechanism where they would just tip the car over and unload it. That stayed there for a long time until the hopper cars come in. It didn't modernize all that quickly.

NP: I imagine your father was delivering horse and cart?

WH: I think so, yes. But my early recollection is-- I was born in 1940--. [...*audio skips*] Model A tractor and the first load of grain going to town. We'd get to go along. We'd get an ice cream cone out of it. I also remember secretly when we were filling the grain bins that we would—when the bin was just starting and it was 500 bushel bin—we'd crawl on top and jump to the grain. That was a lot of fun. Whether the parents ever knew that happened, I'm not sure.

NP: [Laughs] Sometimes they'd be horrified if they did.

WH: I'd think so. And also, that was when I was already in Grade 8. My dad took a load of wheat to town. Then we'd pull it with a tractor. But he had me sitting—there's a four-tonne hitch—I was sitting with my feet dangling over the front of the truck, I'm not sure there was a safety pin in the hitch. That's just what we did.

NP: Things have changed.

WH: Didn't see the danger.

NP: How long did your father--? Did you farm together then?

WH: In 1961, my uncle passed away on my mother's side. He'd rented land all his life in the town of Lowe Farm. We lived six miles out of town. I got the opportunity to rent this land. It was twice the acreage that we had. We were a fairly large farm, the three-quarter section. We had an opportunity to rent a section of land, right in the town of Lowe Farm. I did that.

That got me started on farming, and I could rent on crop share. That was fairly hectic. We had to get machinery. I was one of the larger farmers at that time. It was quite a jump. Then, which my siblings didn't like it all that well, it was a very risky thing. I believe it was 1966, I mortgaged all of my dad's assets. He was just making the payments to buy a three-quarter section of land. I should've just kept that program up. Then in '67, '68, and '69, there were very low grain quotas, and I was three years behind in payments and could hardly make it. It was very stressful. And I'm not saying that derogatory. That's probably the reason things worked for me because I didn't have three children to worry about like a lot of people did. We got married young, traditionally. But anyway, how quickly I turned around. '70 all of a sudden, prices picked up.

Overnight, overnight literally—I didn't see it coming—prices picked up. One time Farm Credit Cooperation wanted to foreclose on me. I went in '71 or '72 and--. See in those days, credit corporations, loans, were for beginning farmers. That was the government's job. That was a very good philosophy. Anyway, I went into the office, and I don't know whether I wanted to borrow more money or not. I remember the guy behind the counter. He was bitter, and he said, "You know what? I've got a university education and you—" and I was a high school dropout, essentially— "And your net worth is way higher than mine." And I can't really make this up. I find it hard to believe because he didn't like the Farmer's Union. He made mention of the fact I belonged to the Farmers Union. I was an activist, and he didn't like that. And also, traditionally, people that belonged to the Farmers Union were considered derelict farmers and not progressive, et cetera, et cetera, which was not true. But anyway, that's how it went. So then in the '70s, things changed around, and it was just like that. And then slowly, I bought more land, and--.

You would talk about things that you shouldn't do. I was a party guy. I knew friends at university, I knew friends that were from Farm Credit Corporation. Yeah, that was the time I couldn't make my payments. Somebody gave me a second mortgage on my land and all this stuff, and I was so bitter about the government I said, "Well if I ever do go broke, the Farm Credit Corporation is the last ones that I'll be paying."

I blamed the government for everything. It wasn't a very bright thing to say because I was saying that to a fellow who worked for Farm Credit Corporation. I know his name. I don't think it serves any useful purpose to mention that here. I could. His name was Perry Pressman, actually. And later on, we became extremely good friends. But that was on a record, he told me, and then--. But it wasn't until 3 or 4 years later I went back to them, and I made my payments. One should be careful what one says at a party.

There's a saying that I saw on the Beausejour Beaver on the wall one time: "Good judgement comes from experience, but you can't get experience without bad judgement." That's how it is.

When I started farming, I gradually started to expand my farmland. Then I went out and--. We had a local Farmers Union, and I went out—second year farming—I went out and went to pick a membership for the Farmers Union. People would look at me because I wasn't a mechanic, really, and I wasn't a big build, and they kind of looked at me as a city kid because of clean fingers and stuff. They didn't need a farmer's union. It's just guys like me that didn't know how to farm. Well, to make it long story short, you know how that went. I bought some of them out. I made up my mind at that point, and maybe I'm just justifying, that I would be involved in farm organization and do my thing. In the meantime, I would look after myself. So, I was a bit of a contradiction.

NP: I'm first of all interested in why you blamed the government.

WH: Well, you know what, I don't really know. Maybe, you know, I became a director of the Wheat Board later on. We couldn't move the grain. I don't know. That's a very good question. We all blamed the government and the railway for just about everything because times were tough, and we were not getting a good return for our stuff. You know what? I don't really know. I'm actually surprised I don't know. That's a good question. You got me stumped. But that's what you did!

NP: [Laughs] Who else could you blame?

WH: Well, that's right! Maybe I was angry at them for trying to collect from me because I couldn't make my payments. I mean I was doing my best, but it just wasn't there.

NP: Now, you became an activist in the Farmers Union?

WH: Yes.

NP: How did that come about?

WH: Well, because I was always in the meetings, and I would attend the local farmers' meetings. It was just something that was interesting, even when I went to high school. But my real involvement became, it was interesting, because I was so busy working. My dad didn't like field work. I was busy working when I had my farm and in the '70s when the Manitoba Pool changed to a new structure, which was a centralized structure. They were looking around for delegates and a neighbour came to me. He must've seen something in me that others maybe didn't see, and he wanted to know if I wanted to become a delegate to Manitoba Pool. But I

didn't have time to go to the meeting that evening. I was busy working. I didn't sit around. Then he came back and said, "You got elected." So I became a delegate. I shot off my mouth considerably and got involved. That was a 12-year stint. I enjoyed it.

NP: Now the Farmers Union and the Manitoba Pool--.

WH: I was involved concurrently with a Farmers Union as well, attending those meetings. I became a junior director and all those things and moved up the chain. When the National Farmers Union got started in 1969, I believe, I was a junior director. There was a Manitoba Farmers Union. Then there was the other farmers unions, and I sat with a board and—you might not be interested in these—but I sat on the board with Roy Atkinson, who should go down in history with some fame. Him and me, we didn't always agree. There were some very, very good people in the Farmers Union, although I was not as--. The Farmer's Union spent the most of its life bitching about how bad everything was. Well, I was a young, aggressive farmer, so I was moving ahead. To be fair, some of those people in the early Farmers Union movement, they actually sacrificed. There was no hope doing anything on your own. They were probably very socialistic minded and no opening anything on your own. You all got to work together. They weren't selfish. They wanted to work together. Some people could not have handled those meetings.

I remember one of my first workshops that I went to. Things were so bad. "Oh, farming is terrible." I got up—you have to sort of give your overview of the meeting—well, I said, "If I go to these meetings long enough, I won't be farming. It's far too negative." That's where I felt I was in a bit of a contradiction. I was preaching family farm, doing this, and doing that. In the meantime, I was buying land and mortgaging things, and moving forward. I didn't see it that bad. I was single and I only had to look after myself.

But I always had a winter job. I worked at the Hudson's Bay Company. I did other work. My farm income, to me, was a working holiday. In the winter, I would get a job doing anything. Hauled pulp in Kenora, worked on construction. That was my spending money, and I liked to live a good lifestyle. I didn't like wearing patched pants because I had to do that 1948 when we got [inaudible] didn't like it, never have.

NP: What was that?

WH: I don't like wearing batted clothing—patched pants—because we had to do it, because we had no--. There was nothing there and that's always been--. Kids today run around with these jeans that are torn. Try doing it when you really have to do it, and it's really not all that much fun. Don't tell me, "Well I understand how it feels to be poor." Stop there. I never liked that.

NP: So what was it like to be poor?

WH: Well, we ate well on a farm. My dad was always wanting to sell the land. It was very depressing for me. I think this is more so for the older children, I didn't like that. I didn't like it.

NP: Were other farmers doing any better?

WH: Yes. They were in our community because their fathers had a better start. They had things paid for. In 1951, we got hydro. Most of them had already bought the electrical appliances before the hydro came in and not up our way. We were a little different than the community. I didn't really like that. Worked for different goals. But we never--. I can't say that we ever suffered from my dad's loss was you killed the best beef not the worst. My mother was a good homemaker and cook. They said that's why I didn't get married for so many years because I was spoiled. And I was.

NP: The Farmers Union then, were they--. Was the Manitoba Pool and the Farmers Union working hand and glove or did they have--?

WH: At one time they were, yes. That's right. I remember in the Manitoba Pool, my local elevator would have a list of the Farmers Union people. They were working hand in hand. But as the Farmers Union got stronger and with the leadership of Roy Atkinson. The Pools--. The Farmers Union then almost became the nemesis of the Pools because the word agribusiness came into play.

I would say—of all the meetings I went to—I would say Roy Atkinson almost invented that word. Then, although we wished we all had the Pools back, and then the Pools got so large and successful that they became, in some people's views, just business orientated. You forget about your roots.

The Farmers Union came along and pointed these things out. Then for a while they were one in the same. I was one of those that stayed the same, probably in the Manitoba Pool convention. But the Farmer's Union—and I'll get back to it—thought they were thinking way ahead. Some were too left wing as far as I was concerned, but probably the policy Manitoba Pool for years. Although the Pool people there didn't like the Farmers Union, it was the Farmer's Union people, we knew exactly who we were all over that room of 80 delegates. There's probably 10 of us that made policy.

Plant breeders' rights, I looked that up and that came into being. We all know who we were. The Farmers Union people were the ones that—more advanced education—they looked into corporate takeover, corporation running things. That's all they talked about. Then the Farmers Union were labeled as people that were just poor, not progressive—certainly a lot of them were. But on the other hand, if you look back historically, the Farmer's Union people would actually expose themselves to both. Most left-wing people, so-

called left wing, a lot of them are better business people than the right-wing guys because the right-wing guys only go to one kind of meeting. I have to, by very nature, because the majority is that the other side go to everybody's meeting.

As a member of the Pools, when I went to a Manitoba Pool meeting, I was considered pretty much left wing, so to speak. But on the other hand, when I went to Farmers Union meeting, I was considered far too right wing. I remember being at a meeting in Regina, and I'm going to use that in a speech that I may make. The Farmer's Union was a little bit top heavy and so we had a conference with probably 100 people there. We do this visioning and getting everybody together and, "Do we all agree?" We're all one big happy family. And it was me, "Do you all agree?" Well, that's the old game and most of them got up but there were two people that didn't get up. Then the real test came, "Who does not agree?" and it was myself and John Rapstead from Swan River. We didn't agree.

NP: On which issue?

WH: I don't know, on some policy issue. It was going too far too fast. We knew that the average farmer in the country wouldn't go for that. I'll use an example where the Farmers Union was way ahead. I agreed with him, but I didn't agree that it should be a policy was government ownership of farmland. It was in the '70s. That came from the top down, and all of a sudden, governments should buy land, thought that was a good idea. I thought it was a good idea and the Schreyer Government in Manitoba implemented that policy, but that did not go well with the farmers.

NP: Was that in response to overproduction?

WH: No, that was a response to giving farmers an opportunity because they couldn't finance it. It was a land-lease program. I could not understand it, why the farmers didn't go for it. You'd only qualify if you were a low-threshold level. It was a way of transferring from one generation to the other. I, at that time, was already--. My equity was too high that I would not have qualified for that.

I have a person that worked for me, still does, and I said, "I have a quarter section of land I will sell it to the government. I could've. And you can rent it back. Get a lifetime lease." He'd only been there for a year, two years. I said, "You go have the meeting and you decide." He didn't do it. I asked him some years later--. [... *audio skips*] I had a brother-in-law who could've sold his land to—later became my brother-in-law—the government and rented it back, if he had pursued it. Well, no, he was a pretty strong Conservative, so he'd rather sell it to Europeans, and guess what? Two years later, he didn't have the land. That's the only time in history that you could start farming without having to put up equity. You could rent it back the rest of your life.

That was not really any different than the ranchers in Alberta with 90-year leases. But in Manitoba, it's communism. In Alberta, it was something else. It was free enterprise. They had a right to it. They even want [inaudible] our leases. That the government changed. But that was the deal. I actually went to a meeting in Morden, Manitoba, and the issue of land use came up. I made a presentation and said—and I gave some of the examples I just gave—and said, “Well, I can't use it. I think it is a very good program.” I said, “Simply, if I had the option of selling to the--.” [... *audio skips*]

The room was full, probably 300 people. People came up to me that I thought were my friends. They said, “You must've had--.” And it was the NDP in power at the time and Mr. Uskiw was the Minister of Agriculture. “Mr. Uskiw wrote that speech for you.” I developed some enemies, or people didn't like me, because it took many years for that to wear off. [Inaudible] couldn't believe it. Here I was this guy promoting the government buying some land. How could you be so stupid? In that presentation I said the preference is I prefer to own land. Given they don't have that option, they could consider this other one. I was vindicated many, many years later. I didn't speak about that topic anymore. On the other hand, I had lost the directorship in the Farmers Union because they didn't support a land-lease program. I didn't think the organization should because it was political dynamite, and it was.

Many years later, the Royal Bank, I believe—I think it was the Royal Bank—came out, said in the '80s, “Why is it important to own land? Why don't you just lease it?” Then I got to the mic and my fellow Pool director [inaudible] and I said, “You know what? That's right.” Then I told him the story I just told you. “Well,” they said, “you know what Mr. Harder?” They said, “Unfortunately, that idea was many years ahead of its time.” So that's a long story, but anyway.

NP: Just a question about the government buying the land and leasing it, did they have restrictions on who could, other than being beginning farmers? Would they lease it to--.

WH: Family members. But that became the nemesis of the program. That happened in Saskatchewan too. There were so many people waiting to lease the land, that who got the land. I think family members were the first, and then I'm not sure.

NP: Did you have to be Canadian to rent?

WH: Oh yes, I'm sure you did, or had to be living here. In fact, there's still some—I'm on the directorship of the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation—there's still a few of those leases left. The interesting thing was, that in my community, the people that took advantage of it—you guessed—but there were a couple, but they did it.

NP: Saw the advantage of it.

WH: Well of course, it was business, It was good business.

NP: Now the Manitoba Pool, at the time, who headed that up? And what was your thoughts moving in as a young farmer into the--?

WH: Oh well, I had been involved with the Farmers Union, and they were strongly affiliated with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and Bob Douglas, who passed away, was a grain commissioner. I remember going to the first meeting—lucky thing he didn't remember it. We became very good friends later on. But I was so hard on the poor guy because they were involved with some red meats council, and I had been on the Farmers Union. I just tore a strip off him. Their president was Bill Parker, and he was a very--. And that's what I actually liked about the Pools, the directors. Mr. Bill Parker, who didn't probably like my Farmers Union associations and that. Actually, the Pools gave to the farmers unions. All the directors did as well. They were very well-run meetings. It was a week in the city. My first impression was good. We would have resolutions, we'd have speakers in, and then we'd have someone from co-op implements and co-op fertilizer. We'd have that come in. It was a good mix.

NP: And you were how long as a--.

WH: I was 12 years as a delegate, and I liked it. Then Ray Siemens, who was my director, his father was founder of Co-op Vegetable Oils. A.G.G. Siemens, I believe, is manager of the Agricultural Hall of Fame. He was my director, and then one day he came up—we went out for dinner—he said, “Would you like to become--?” For some reason he wanted to retire. He was 55, and I never thought he'd pick me because I wasn't as polished as he was. And, “You should be director.” I said, “Oh really? I like the job I got. I don't want to be a director.” I did it because I knew then I'd have to start answering questions. Up on the platform, you know there always somebody smarter down there than you are. I didn't underestimate the power of the crowd because I was the crowd. I was always scared of the crowd—not scared, but maybe you call it respect. And there were some interesting situations, now that I was on the other side of it, overnight.

NP: So what were some that stick in your mind as being on the other side?

WH: I can't come to mind--. I was at a different presentation. I can't really think of one.

NP: Can you think of a time that somebody from the floor put you on the spot?

WH: Yes. This is interesting. It was a time I was a Wheat Board director. The thing was [inaudible] person. I was farming with my brother. I was farming with my hired man and there was myself. So we had three permit books, which gave you—it was a

legitimate thing—which gave you more delivering opportunities. That’s not that long ago that that didn’t happen. I was at a meeting in Selkirk, Manitoba, and my brother was already farming with me at the time. Somebody got up and said, “Oh these damn guys shouldn’t be allowed more than one permit book.” [Inaudible] trip, working for the Wheat Board, knew what my personal situation was, and I said in a very serious face, “You know that’s something we’re really going to have to look into.” My brother was in the crowd and I still see the smile in his face, the body language, and he knew I was a bit of a BS-er but sometimes you got to. That was it.

NP: Did the fellow who took the multiple permit books to task, did he have a point as far as you thought?

WH: Yes, he did to some extent. Wasn’t maybe quite fair but there are bigger problems to worry about than that. That’s just how it is.

NP: What were the issues with the Pool at the time that you were--?

WH: Plant breeders’ rights was one.

NP: Say a bit about that because--.

WH: Plant breeder’s rights gave--. We have a system in Canada of public plant breeding, and you didn’t have--. If you produce something, nobody owned the copyright to it, so to speak. At that time, I was quite well versed on it, so they were going to issue that if you developed a variety of wheat, it became your own variety. Until then, they were always public varieties. In fact, canola would’ve never been invented by the private sector because when it was invented—Baldur Steffanson was one of the people who was involved with it in Manitoba—it was the money-making crop, so the people who developed new crops, and it’s even that way today, wants something that makes money. So plant breeders’ rights gave the plant breeders very strong control. It’s no different than Monsanto owns control over the chemicals and gives them many-year patents, and it gives them the right to do this—how to be in plant breeding.

We carried it by a very narrow margin that we did not support plant breeders’ rights. I worked my butt off on that one. Then the interesting thing is, I got on the Manitoba Pool Board and the Federal Labour Council. Some labour union had a conference on plant breeding! Remember, I know what our policy position was, not by large majority, but I knew what our policy position was because I was now a director. I had helped develop the policy position. I asked the president at that time—maybe we should just leave it at that—I said, “Maybe you should go to that. Not maybe, we are invited to go.” “What can I learn from a labour union?”

That's where the political side took over. I felt quite comfortable going to the right-wing point of view, but some of these guys--.
 [...*audio skips*]

He had never been a delegate. When you come to this grass-rootsy stuff, a street fighter, oh no, they didn't want to do that. They didn't want to expose—I don't mean that in a sexist way—they didn't want to expose themselves. In fact, a lot of people in politics in this stuff, if you shoot off your mouth, you're going to get into trouble, but they didn't want to reveal their ignorance. People are like that. Then it was a strange company. "What do you want with those people?" It was association and there were also labour issues, which—again, from the Farmers Union—I learned that the unions have a point, and the Pools were the other side of it.

I haven't said that the Farmers Union—that was the National Farmers Union—they were everything a union did was right. Well that really wasn't quite so. Now, I could see this because I was in management on a board that unions aren't always doing the right thing. I read both sides. We would send lawyers. We as directors, as Pools, we're not really informed what the issues were. And then I'd go to the Farmers Union. I'd know what the issues were. So it was always lawyers talking to lawyers and that was the problem.

And there, Roy Atkinson on the Farmers Union was right. It should be farmers talking to farmers. In fact, if I have any, if [inaudible] while at the Wheat Board I was chairman of the advisory committee, the farmers would tell the company, "Oh, we should go out there and load those boats ourselves."

NP: We should go out there--.

WH: Load the boats yourselves, run the union! And the Farmers Union had very good--. I'm digressing a bit but with Henry Kanks, he was with the Thunder Bay Lake. He wasn't always in Vancouver. But then they had a very good relationship with Henry Kanks. He was from the Longshoremen's, I believe. And, his name will come to me, in Thunder Bay, they had developed these relationships. But when I was chair of the Wheat Board's advisory committee, we actually organized, under my direction, that we would meet with all the parties—stevedores, ship owners, the terminal operators—and I was ultimately--. And you got to remember the same time I was currently involved with the Pools. So we, under my signature, we wrote letters inviting everybody to participate in meeting with us—we, the Wheat Board advisors. We were only the advisory committee. What really bothered me was everybody responded except the Pools that I was the director of. They wouldn't come.

Pat Keena, who was then the corporate secretary to us at the Wheat Board—she's retired now—she could write the way--. I can't spell very well, and she'd write the information, then she said, "Butch, you'll really like this one." After the thing was over, she wrote a letter saying that we had such a wonderful meeting into the Pool. "Unfortunately, you couldn't be there." She did it in a

sarcastic way that I would've done. She says, "You'll really--." It was always the key. The key is that if you get a speech writer that could write--. I didn't like having stuff written for me. I'm digressing. But if they can write the way you think--. And the one I did was great, "Sorry you guys couldn't be there."

But we met with them, met with the union. I don't know what the long-term effect was, but we actually have got a lot of press. I was interviewed on—I was just a farm boy—but I was interviewed on Vancouver radio! We went there to talk to them. I think I just threw some of the business cards away not too long ago. I thought that kind of dialogue should exist. Subsequently later on, when we had trouble with the Grain Commission, I was already with the Wheat Board director. They had trouble in Thunder Bay. So why don't we send a delegation down there? Not that I just wanted to travel—and we did—it was my idea but they determined at that time that I shouldn't be chairing that. It was a little--.

NP: A little too close to--.

WH: A loose cannon. They really didn't know what else to do. [Laughs]

NP: So what was the issue?

WH: I'm not sure what the issue was—service, boats were waiting in the harbour. The Grain Commission was--. Everybody was always wanting to downsize the Grain Commission.

NP: But not necessarily now. We sort of left the general stream, talking about moving from being a delegate to a director, and having to listen to people like you, from the delegates challenge you about direction that the Pool is taking. You also started to say that you thought it was important for the farmers to know what was going on in the other elements. So I can remember—just a lead into this—I can remember John Mallon, the father of Billy and Brian Mallon who managed the Pools, he told a story on his tape about coming up to the annual Manitoba Pool meeting. We're just interested in your take on bringing the elevator managers in and what kinds of things that the directors--.

WH: I forgot about that, that was very good. That was the nice part. They could get in. They could come and listen to the farmers. I don't know if they could get to the mic. They could hear the farmers' point of view. "Why are we getting different grades in Thunder Bay? Why aren't they taking the grain? This looks like a No. 2 wheat here, but we noticed the terminal looks a little different," and those kinds of things. In fact, we at Manitoba Pool one year organized a farm tour across the province with the Mallons, I believe, with the terminal operators, so they could see the farm. It was a good thing. I forgot about that.

NP: Why would they do that just once?

WH: I don't know. I never thought of it before.

NP: Did they do it again?

WH: Don't think it happened--.

NP: Or it was the same for--.

WH: It was a bus tour, and they got to see the country. We did a province-wide tour for two days. It was good.

NP: You, in turn, the directors went down to--.

WH: We always did, once a year. It was a public-relations exercise, but they would—I probably mentioned while we were having lunch before—we met with city council one time because the taxes were too high. They'd take us there and we had to explain the importance of Prairie farming to them. They didn't always pick that up. That was the thing.

NP: Was it an issue with Thunder Bay or were taxes and terminal elevators, regardless of where they were, always an issue?

WH: In what way?

NP: Was Vancouver--? Did you--?

WH: If you talked to someone in Alberta, you'd get a different answer, but our main source, unless the Wheat Board--. Our terminals were in Thunder Bay. We did ship through Churchill, but that wasn't a terminal thing. Our terminal was Thunder Bay, and we had terminals there, and we had staff there, and that's where it was.

NP: Could you remember your first visit to a terminal elevator and what you thought about it?

WH: It was probably when it was that delegate. Well, it was these massive belts that would carry the grain, and the ships. The massive belts that would carry the grain. And someone else that had toured this, I didn't pick that up, but rural people would take

tours too, these belts that move the grain they go at a big speed and there's a sign that says, "Please don't stand on the belt." Well, who the hell would? We thought it was funny. The elevators I guess it was a great big, massive structure. What can I say?

NP: They actually did stand on the belts.

WH: They did?

NP: [Laughs] Why do you think the sign was there?

WH: [Laughs] Yes, I guess so. But it was interesting how that works. You know the capacity of the whole thing and it--. [Laughs] It was a pretty fast-moving outfit.

NP: I'm always interested in a little friendly rivalry. What—from the board perspective of Manitoba Pool Elevators—what were the working relationships or friendly rivalries with the other farmer-owned operations and with private grain companies?

WH: You should ask at the Wheat Board as well.

NP: I'll ask about the Wheat Board separately, and the Grain Commission.

WH: The rivalry was, the Sask Wheat Pool, there was this rough numbers. Sask Wheat Pool was the big brother. Alberta Wheat Pool handled about half as much, and if my memory serves me right, we handled about half as much as Alberta Pool.

NP: Not half as much as Alberta Pool?

WH: Well, we were smaller than Alberta Pool.

NP: Oh, were you?

WH: Yes.

NP: I didn't realize that.

WH: Alberta Pool, actually, being the province that it is, they actually had the highest percentage of handle in the province for a long, long time. More than Manitoba. My first question at a board meeting was, “What’s the percentage of handle?” Question, always, I’d ask. “54 percent.” “Why would it go down to 53?” One of the managers got so fed up with me asking that question every time and said, “How come?” I wanted to know. That was a director’s job—and I’ll get back to the rivalry thing—that was the director’s job. And I remember the one answer, I said, “How come our share is now”—I’m fabricating the number but it’s probably in that area—“How come our share is now 53 percent, last month it was 56?” And he said, “Because the other guys handled more.” [Laughs] You know what? I liked it. I didn’t even pick it up right away.

Anyway, Well Sask Wheat Pool became fairly arrogant, and the thing was the three Pools should’ve merged, but that’s a whole other story. They had a convention that was two weeks long. Their directors were better paid. Their delegates were well paid, and it was a good thing. They became part-time jobs for farmers in winter. We would get together as Prairie Pools in my time. Before I got there, it never happened. It was ridiculous that the Prairie Pools wouldn’t get together. We did. Those were good meetings. Then we would develop policy all together and that was a bit strenuous for Alberta Pool. They were more right-wing, although they were always at logger heads with their, I believe at that time, conservative or social-credit government. I don’t even know.

NP: What about UGG?

WH: UGG was another, a horse of [inaudible]. They thought they were a co-op, but they weren’t. They had started off as a co-op but, no. Look, UGG could have an annual meeting in two days. They’d always change their delegates, which some might be say good. They wine them and dine them—I’m pretty biased on this—they wine them and dine them. How the hell can you pass 30 resolutions in 2 days? Impossible! It was always--. They never had the end-up discussions that the pools--. Sask Wheat probably was the best one for giving real cooperative education and stuff and discussing of resolutions.

But United Grain Growers was already a shareholder company of some kind but hardly paid any dividends. I mean I got dividends that sometimes amounted to \$10 an acre. The pool—and Sask Wheat Pool is very good, too—we had quite an equity system built up. United Grain Growers, they really thought they were a co-op, but they weren’t. I mean they were, but they wine and dined them, took them to meetings, and they had a good time and come home. Oh, we know all about it. Our members were much more involved. We had to report back to the districts. We had a lot of education going on.

NP: Besides the dividend pay-out differences, was there much difference in the policies?

WH: Yes. United Grain Growers was probably the first one to not be supportive of the Wheat Board. They wanted to change the Crow Rate. They were more, in their minds, progressive. Their policies were—I don't know that they ever came out with—they were more towards the system that they have now. That's how it was.

NP: Just to keep it straight in my mind, what years were you active on the board of Man Pool?

WH: I recently wrote that, probably '86. The last year was probably '86, so 12 years before that. For 12 years I was there. I started in the '70s.

NP: And your work with the Wheat Board, which we haven't discussed yet--.

WH: 1986 to--. I was there for 12 years as an advisory co-member. Got to add that up. I'm not very good at that.

NP: '96, '98?

WH: Then I was for six years a director on the elected--. When it came over to elected directors' system, I was there for six years.

NP: So until 2004, possibly, about right?

WH: That makes sense, yes.

NP: Just gives me a bit of an idea.

WH: No, you should have that. I have it written down at home, but I have to think back.

NP: You left the Manitoba Pool directorship, why?

WH: Man Pool for a while became Agricore United, we merged--.

NP: Oh, so you were with them when that happened?

WH: You see, the Prairie Pools were going to merge. Probably the saddest meeting that I went to, you look historically, is we were going to have a strategy meeting in Winnipeg in the Delta Hotel. Then what we were going to do with the three Pools—and we

hadn't really done anything—and then that was the day that Sask Wheat Pool announced that they were going to build a string of elevators all over Alberta. That's when the Pools went downhill because you don't compete with the other co-op. They became too large. We couldn't even focus. When that didn't happen, then we merged with Alberta Pool. And had we done that--. I should've followed one of my directors' advice who later on didn't agree. One piece of advice was we should have just merged certain parts of it and not all together. Then we lost control.

We had a manager with the name of Gordon Cummings, who I don't mind putting on tape, who—the deal was when Alberta and Man Pool merged—the deal was that the CEO of this new company would be either our CEO, which was Greg Arason, or the other one, which would be Gordon Cummings who was a real smooth talker. In the end, it was Gordon Cummings that won. Subsequently Greg Arason, not long after, became chief commissioner of the Canadian Wheat Board. That worked out for him. That worked okay, but Alberta Pool had an entirely different philosophy. They were not used to having so many country meetings as we did. We were much closer connected to the grass roots. They had their elevators. No, the elevator system wasn't in as good a shape as ours was. They already at that time on their board, one of them was an ex-Western Wheat Board director.

They had already had more non-Wheat Board-kind of tendencies and yet—I've always said in Alberta, even to this day—they had some really good supporters. If you're a Wheat Board supporter in Alberta, I said, "How come some of these guys in Alberta are so good?" Even today. Well, I said, "To be a Wheat Board supporter in Alberta, or a co-ops one, you got to be good or you wouldn't be that." They had some very, very, good leaders. They had an academy at the stampede grounds. That's probably gone now. One of the old directors, when they went to the academy on how the Alberta Pool got started, he had tears in his eyes. But anyways, then I became director at Agricore United. That's when the Wheat Board changed structure and then I had to make a choice. I couldn't be on both boards. So I chose the Wheat Board.

NP: Now who were some of the people that you remember from Alberta Pool that you--? We're just looking for contacts looking further west.

WH: How do you mean?

NP: To interview.

WH: Oh. Now?

NP: Within the year.

WH: I can--. You caught me off--.

NP: You can provide me with those--.

WH: We'll talk about that. Ask me about that.

NP: So the move to combine the Pools, Alberta and--.

WH: Manitoba.

NP: Manitoba into Agricore.

WH: Then what happened was that--.

NP: Right. So did that go, aside what you were saying about some of the philosophical differences and that--. What's the word I'm looking for? The participants.

WH: That didn't work out too badly, but they had a manager, his name was Gordon Cummings. He was very egotistical and the first thing he did when they merged--. Oh! Locating where the head office was an issue. That's always the issue.

NP: Because, if I'm correct, Alberta Pool was the bigger--.

WH: Yes, they were the bigger one. But they did some studies and it showed Manitoba had the grain trade here though, and that's why it went here. Actually, the Manitoba people kind of wanted, wouldn't have minded it in Calgary, because then we could take the trips to Calgary to have the meeting. But it came here. That didn't matter too much really. That all worked out. But they--.

NP: What was Mr. Cummings background?

WH: He had been with the cooperatives with Ontario and ran them into the ground, sort of. But he was a very good talker. The Alberta Pool guys warned us and--. I don't know. I don't know where he is today.

NP: How did he get--? What was the actual process for eventually choosing one or the other?

WH: Well eventually who decided who the CEO--. I know who I voted for, and I didn't vote for him. I voted for Greg Arason. That's a matter of record. The reason that Mr. Cummings won, he was extremely aggressive. I may not have liked him, but he was a very hard worker. He would not--. If there was a big issue coming up, he'd say, "I can't take my holidays." This is on tape, but the other CEO Mr. Arason wasn't quite--. He was very well organized, and he didn't appear as aggressive and Mr. Cummings.

NP: And he had another life.

WH: Pardon me?

NP: And he had another life.

WH: He had another life, exactly! That's fair. So that's what happened. But then Mr. Cummings became quite aggressive. We were going to buy all the shares of Sask Wheat Pool. We were going to do this. We were going to that, and he was a really--. He was not lazy! The truth of the matter is, we would've been better off with a less aggressive, and they wouldn't have gotten into trouble. Then I think they sold a bill of goods when they finally sold out that they--. That's another story.

NP: Were you finished there then before the next move? Which would've been--.

WH: Yes, I was already then with the--. In fact it was--.

NP: But at the same time, it sounds to me that you would've kept your ear to the ground as to what was happening. So what happened there, from your perspective?

WH: They got--.

NP: Who's the "they"?

WH: The directors. Good, let's not be so ambiguous. That puts me on the spot.

NP: Well, I just don't know if you're talking about UGG or--.

WH: The directors of the Pools got hoodwinked, whatever, by the management, that we were not having a good year. We better sell out. We had this offer from—what'd they become—United--. See we tried to merge with United. No, when I was with Alberta/

Manitoba Pool, we were going to do a poison pill. We were going to buy out United Grain Growers. It almost worked. That I was really excited about. An exciting time. But it was this poison pill that the competition bureau wouldn't allow it. We didn't do it right, and we should have, and that didn't work. Subsequently I think then they merged, I believe, with United Grain Growers.

Well that democratic process there--. When they merged the United Grain Growers, you had the real anti-Board people with the other ones, although the other ones had the majority and that was a real dog fight. That was really quite something. I used to remember when the United Grain Growers directors got up to speak and you--. But I did, in my capacity as a Wheat Board director, attend the United Grain Growers directors meetings, and I always said cynically, to be a director—and I still know those people—of the United Grain Growers there's one or two things: You had to be a seed farmer, you had to be appointed by the government to some commission, and always compliment management.

NP: [Laughs] Why would you say, first of all, that they had to be a seed grower?

WH: Well, because these guys would get up. They were all professionals. They didn't want to identify as being a farmer. They wore nice suits, and I like wearing nice suits, but that was the big deal. It was all hobnobbing and rubbing shoulders with one another. They thought they were just—this was just seventh heaven here. They were extremely professional in how they presented, and they all wore the nice suits, and nobody said they were on this committee, that committee and they were--. And that's what I thought was the irony. They were very free enterprise—but come to government appointments, they were the first ones there. For years the Alberta government, I mean that's another story, they would influence farm policies. The government, they were donating money to the Wheat Growers and to these people and there were alliances.

NP: Who was donating money to the Wheat Growers?

WH: The federal government. The Alberta government gave money to the Western Canadian Wheat Growers who then, in turn, could fight the Wheat Board and *blah, blah, blah*. But the difference was it was pretty much of a show. The directors, in my opinion, at United Grain Growers seldom questioned their management. We, in the end, lost out to management as well—we the Pools. But I think you were just there. Management made the decisions and that was not the case with the Pools. The farmers were--.

[Audio pauses]

NP: We're moving along, and we've got Manitoba Pool merging with Alberta Pool and then the joining friendly otherwise of that entity with United Grain Growers pretty quickly. That happened not all--. There wasn't a decade in between. So things sort of

started snowballing in a direction. From what you said, the Manitoba Pool/Alberta Pool combo, little bit at loggerheads with the UGG philosophy, and then what happened?

WH: Somehow Viterra or Sask Wheat Pool came into the picture.

NP: Yes, Sask Wheat Pool--.

WH: Yes, you tell me. This I should know.

NP: Sask Wheat Pool bought out both of them. Took over--. [...*audio skips*] There were two competing bids because I think Richardsons also got its--.

WH: That's possible.

NP: Got involved there somehow. Then, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool came in and sort of gobbled up everybody, in short order, because this is when I started to become interested in the grain industry.

WH: Then they still had the elected directors.

NP: Right.

WH: Then I was already on the Board. I remember getting a fax almost every week for a while, and then they expanded. Oh! Okay! Elders Grain came into the picture that was [inaudible] and they were starting to compete with the Pools here. That didn't last too long. Then Sask Wheat Pool was on a real--. They were buying like drunken sailors. They were buying everything. That had happened, and they were poorly leveraged or whatever.

I think it was like Rome. They were just getting too big. [inaudible] For many years, with some frequency, I would be getting messages about how Sask Wheat Pool was divesting itself of its--. The new Sask Wheat Pool was divesting itself of interests here, or there, and there, and there. Then I believe they hired, I don't know what order that came in. Yes, then they finally hired Mayo Schmidt from the States, and they couldn't make it. Then they also had a delegate vote and that narrowly carried that they become a private shareholder company, something like that. Then it wasn't long after when the investors started to go over—they had farmers on the board. We used to meet with them as the Wheat Board. They were farmers on the board, but they wore extremely professional business suits, and they were coached by management. They were sent to directors' school, and they lost their--.

NP: Were they appointed by management or were they still elected?

WH: I think they were still elected, but then that became a more, not so much reporting to the country I mean. Farmers that said their truck had never been to any other elevator but a Pool elevator. That was the thing. That got lost.

NP: Did the farmers—this is sort of a loaded question and—did the farmers let down their guard?

WH: Yes.

NP: Or were they ready for a--.

WH: No, they let down their guard. The loyal supporters let down their guard. Didn't think it would be--. When you got rid of the--. When you voted--. I mean, I know some people that delegates could vote and they could vote against—you know, it was a delegate vote in the end. They were convinced, I think, to be fair to the boards of directors that went to this new structure, management had them convinced that if they did not support this new share structure, or whatever it was, they could be liable because if the company went broke because they exhibited poor management. [inaudible] Management can really scare you, that if you don't do this, you can be liable for this. They got scared. And on the other side of it probably—and I never really could prove it though—one level, I don't know which level, I think they were working out of Grain Growers, and they had preferred shares, and if they sold out, the directors got fairly good--. But I'm not--. Historically, I'm not quite sure of that but I've heard that.

NP: So that's the rumour.

WH: I know when Manitoba Pool sold out, or merged, I was one of those to get my shares out. I was one of the larger farmers, larger equity holders in the Manitoba Pool, and I got \$80,000 in cash. Pretty tempting. A lot of money. So we had a lot of equity built up. Anyway, that's another story, but. I'm getting lost here.

NP: And then the Pool was gone.

WH: It was gone, and we'll never get it back. I just heard Stewart Wells the other day and he was the director—former president of the National Farmers Union—heard him last week and he had been a delegate and we got on structure, and he said at that time, we should've let the grassroots vote on the merger. He just--. I could quote him last week. His family had a long-term connection with

the Pools. And he said it was something he thought about everyday. I think he phrased it like that was that we should've let the membership decide that one. And the delegates got swayed! They got swayed, convinced us the way to go.

I don't know that we, and even myself, that we really understood the implications that this would have. Now we have no education. The farmers now, what meetings we attend now, is meetings put on by chemical companies. They wine and they dine us. Now we have farmers who don't really know anything about a co-op structure and are all for themselves. They think they're--. You'll never be bigger than a big grain company, and they think they can go alone! And some grain farmers have done exceptionally well.

NP: Going back to your time with Man Pool, because you were there when there was a little bit of the merger of this project, I'm interested in what happened with the terminals and the kinds of discussions that were made because, I think, over that time that you were on the board, there were hard decisions made about--.

WH: Some terminals were closed down and I never--. In the end, I probably wasn't very progressive. I didn't like closing terminals down, but one was Mission Terminal. I don't know if that was a Man Pool or Sask Wheat terminal. It was bought by someone else.

NP: I think it might have been Manitoba.

WH: Adrian Measner who was former CEO of the Wheat Board when the Harper Government fired him, and I'll say that with a loud voice--. Then he went on to other things and came to manage that. It's still in existence. In a way, I thought it was kind of unfair play because Mission Terminals was probably bought for a dollar by someone because the idea of Manitoba Pools or whatever it was. I guess they thought we had too much capacity. We don't need them all. We're going to tear them down. I don't know that the agreement was such that they had to tear it down. So these people essentially bought something that was a very low price and then they can be very competitive. [...*audio skips*]

NP: Normally, there's the iron-clad agreement that if it's bought, it cannot be used for a competing purpose. There was some sharp lawyer that discovered that this--. It was sort of flipped twice. So the first guy that bought it sold it, tried to make a go of it for something else, and then--.

WH: That's possible and they probably made some money at it too.

NP: Not that this is my interview, [laughs] but something that comes to my mind about the closing down of terminals and the preventing of competition in raising them up from the dead is poor public policy of a Thunder Bay perspective.

WH: Of course it is. But I would say in defense, and you've had--. You're from Thunder Bay and I'm from here. When the things in the terminal side didn't go well, we wanted tax concessions, and I was there—and now I'm putting my business side on—and trying to negotiate with city council. That was almost non-existent. What used to bother me though, if we talked about Manitoba Pool—and all the Pools did this—we'd have departments. The seed department, the farm supply department, the terminals—which made money, and which didn't—and the grain handling department. We had formulas, which was terminal profit, and which wasn't. Maybe I'm speaking too loud here, but when the terminals lost money then we had to do something. We had to raise tariffs. Do other--. Maybe I shouldn't say it for the record, but tariffs were usually between all the companies and even all the players there. This is an aside. Generally, someone will wait for the other one to make the tariff and the others would [inaudible]. You would kind of follow suit. It was a--.

NP: It was a price fixing but it--.

WH: No it was a very practical business relationship. But anyway, [laughs] pragmatic. The balance sheet showed the terminals lost money. Okay. But our country operation saved money. I don't have an accounting degree, but I thought, "What really is the difference?" The earnings were all shared by the farmers. I mean, what difference does it make? If we have a good year over here--. But maybe it's a way to keep management on its toes. But I have a little problem with that.

So then we didn't pay separate dividends in terminal earnings when it was a handle and how much we go back. But that was always the deal. Terminals lost, they made, we did this, did that. But at Manitoba Pool, we'd all throw it into a pot. We had some loss leaders, like fertilizers. Farmer supplies often didn't make money, later on it did, but anyways that was the thing, the terminal operation--.

NP: Who was the manager of terminal operations while you were there?

WH: I know, but I don't know.

NP: Okay. [Laughs] You see his face.

WH: Oh, my goodness.

NP: All very interesting, but I'm going to move along just because I'd like you to get home tonight.

WH: Oh, don't worry about that.

NP: I want to talk about a couple of other things. We ask—and I will come to the Wheat Board—but right now I want to talk about your interaction with a couple of other big players in the grain industry, railways.

WH: Railways. My interaction? My company's interaction?

NP: Yes, just--.

WH: Well, that's where the Pools weren't very smart. That's where they--. And this has to lead into the Wheat Board.

NP: Okay.

WH: It doesn't have to lead into it but that's where they weren't--. The Pools actually--. Manitoba Pool—I can't speak for the others—on some occasions there became an acrimony between the Wheat Board and the Pools. If there was a certain Wheat Board policy that didn't make much money for us, then there was very tough people that were very quick to bitch about the Wheat Board.

NP: Can you give an example?

WH: Well, it had to do with freight rates.

NP: Ah, okay.

WH: No! I'll give you an example. I was a director of Manitoba Pool, and I was a director through that at Western Crop Fertilizer, and for some reason or another the Wheat Board was under some attack because they were a monopoly.

NP: Of the Pool--.

WH: And under someone's canon, I approved it. Now, I was chair of the Wheat Board Advisory Committee, but I was also a director of the Pool. Yes! So we put out a press release under my signature. It said, "If you don't--." And we were owners of Western Crop Fertilizer, and I was a director of it. I said, "If you don't think monopolies work, have you looked at your fertilizer bill lately?" I was not reappointed to be director of Western Crop Fertilizers. That's one of those times you shoot off your mouth, and you should not do it. And the friend that wrote that, which is Bob Roehle, and he's a very good friend of mine. We still tease about that. Bob, you did good! But I approved it, I said, "Yeah! That sounds good to me!" If I was supposed to be a true director,

they could not really understand that I had a--. When I'm in that role, I'm that role. When I'm in this role, I'm in that role. In my mind, I could separate the two. That's what I had to say over there.

But where the Pools were stupid was we were suing the railways. Wheat Board was taking the railways to court for [inaudible] CN and CP, and if you really want to research--. I don't know when that was but it was in my short lifetime.

NP: For non performance?

WH: Yes. Oh yes. And there was one disclosed settlement in the end with CP and one that never became public and one was. One was I think \$30 million rings a bell with me. I don't know which one it was. Finally, the Pools, ah, they caved in and wanted the Wheat Board to lay off. But the Pools were crazy. The elevator companies were crazy. Here they had the Wheat Board getting the bad name, which was to the advantage of the grain companies. That was craziness.

Let the Wheat Board do the dirty work. That's fine. See, with the grain companies I can understand why we didn't want to get too vociferous because we have a day-to-day relationship with the railways. We've got to move--. We got car allocations, car spots, all that stuff. So it didn't serve any useful purpose for us to do the fight with the--.

The Board was the big--. It didn't matter what company, and we were rarely stupid. In fact, our board wrote a letter, and I had that [inaudible] from me, and I don't know that I could dig it up now. I don't know if it's there. But we wrote a letter to the Wheat Board, I believe Manitoba Pool did, saying they wanted them to lay off this acrimonious thing with the railways. I remember that I voted against it. Someone—I think it was probably confidential or some damn thing—but I voted against it. They were stupid. We could do the dirty work for them. It wasn't very smart. Anyway, I'm digressing. But you were--.

NP: I was asking a question about your--.

WH: The relationship with the railways?

NP: Any comments about the relationship with the railways.

WH: Well, the railways, we were always fighting with the railway's car allocation spots. I mean, getting spots. It was a big deal. I do remember two locations that Whalen--. Who got the car allocation? No, this was the Wheat Board. It was always a fight. Will the smaller elevators get the car allocation? Will the bigger ones? And the first thing that we as directors would get together, well that spot got. My spot, my district got this and got that. Yes. Those were issues.

What we had at Man Pool and all the Pools was—which we didn't really appreciate at the time—my previous director Ray Semens was still alive told me that we would get minutes from all the little elevators, all the little communities. We actually knew what went on in any little community. Now minutes are dull to read, but they aren't 20 years later. We knew that at Swan River, Manitoba, those guys weren't getting cars. The local community issue was that maybe there was a foul supper, and the Pool wasn't well represented. We knew all that, and we paid staff that would actually compress all those things and give us a board report. And you know what? It was a board report that was only an inch thick. We could cover the whole province. I don't know how we did it.

In the end there would always be a section, apart from the operational stuff—made money, lost money, blah, blah, blah—in the end it would always say what's happening in that district. What's happening in that district that was---. And yet when you had those local meetings, they didn't seem like much, but we had all the connections. We knew what was going on in the grass roots and some of those things may have been written by---. Like in my own local, we had someone, I won't mention names, he had a university education. We thought we'd make him the secretary. That was no good at all. And then we had someone who had probably Grade 8 education. He did a great job. He didn't have a television, so he would actually read the material and write the minutes. But we had an extremely good network from the country through a chain, and we spent a lot of money at that. They thought that later on it was too expensive, but it really wasn't. That's what kept the pulse up. That was the deal. Keep the---. And then of course we had the delegate structure and that was---. Yes. But the biggest mistake, the Pools, after a while, would get into arguments with the Wheat Board, and that really was not very smart.

NP: Before we move onto the Wheat Board, I'd like to just ask you about your own personal experience as a farmer, and your experience with the other groups that you worked with, with the Canadian Grain Commission.

WH: My experience with the Canadian Grain Commission?

NP: Yes.

WH: I was never on the---. Sometimes you have representatives on the Grain Commission. I was never involved with that. But we had always been fighting, even when the Liberals were in, for financing from the government. They always wanted to downsize. I didn't go to some meetings that I spoke up quite vociferously. The Grain Commission—although the Harper Government is really doing a number on it right now—but it was always under threat from the Liberals as well. In fact, we just discussed this, the Grain Commission, today we had Terry Boehm from the National Farmers Union speak to our canola growers, which was a first for me to get somebody to speak to such an organization. But it was always a struggle of the federal government, in my time, wanting to

downsize the Commission and get rid of it. Then the political appointments were sometimes just political. The bonding issue is very important.

They want to do away with all that stuff now. You have to put the grain companies in charge. We have a tremendous reputation in Canada for quality system, and the Grain Commission actually worked a lot in hand together with the Canadian Wheat Board. But then through this privatization to the structure of the Grain Commission, then even the Wheat Board itself didn't always use Grain Commission inspectors because it was cheaper to get other ones. The Grain Commission sort of slowly deteriorated. But there was not a will to keep it going. I think the companies started to have too much influence. This big production is happening now to get rid of the Grain Commission. Well, are the companies going to police themselves! Yeah, well great.

NP: From the farmer's perspective, was the farmer even aware that the Grain Commission had any role? Do you recall?

WH: They were aware, but no, really. That's the sad thing today, is that probably in this country—in Manitoba, Saskatchewan—how many farmers are really involved in farm policy here? Hundred farmers. Farmers are just farming on a farm and don't really know all these intricacies. Trade deals we're going into now, CIDA—not CIDA—but the trades deals we're making now with Europe and the Trans-Pacific Partnership—terrible! We're giving away all our rights. That's another story. But farmers don't know. They don't speak up at meetings. They just aren't there.

NP: So the farmer now, also because of the size of farms, being so much bigger, the farmers are small businesspeople and sometimes large businesspeople.

WH: Extremely large businesspeople, but they always were. That was always the thing. The Farmers Union, we call it a way of life. I firmly believe it still is, but I was still a businessperson.

NP: What I'm thinking is a lot of businesspeople have organizations, business organizations. So will the farmers form a business organization?

WH: Well, they have organizations now, but these farm organizations are—and I'm a director of the Canola Growers—the national organizations. We have the grain company there, the chemical companies there, and we were really forgetting about the farmers. The farmers get out of it. They go to these meetings. That's where, because of my experience, when I go to these meetings I know what's going on. We have nice cocktail parties. We have nice dinners, and we bring our spouses. And the spouses now, who haven't been to farm meetings, think it's just great belonging to one of these organizations. And grain farmers, some of us have become fairly well-off. I personally was criticized last year for a meeting in Washington because we had a thing on plant research and stuff.

I was too hard on those people because it wasn't the venue because I asked them about seed prices—something to do with we hadn't gotten a hell of a lot more efficient than they were and why they didn't have synergies, start using their words—and some people from Alberta took a extreme offence to that because “These are our friends,” and almost like “We like high seed prices.” I mean how stupid can you get? Like we can't say too much. It wasn't the venue.

NP: And what would be the venue?

WH: Well lower--. Not when we have those high-priced people there like David Frum speaking and stuff like that. So that's not the place for that. Be nice guys. You just don't--. It's not what you do.

NP: We have about 20 minutes left so the Wheat Board, you were--.

WH: What do you want to know about the Wheat Board?

NP: You were director for quite some time. What were the issues when you were there?

WH: The issues were transportation, car allocation—who would get the railcars—and in my mind, government always trying to scuttle what we were doing. Initial price announcements, purposely holding them back. At issue was how far should we--. How many options you get towards the open market or market information. Farmers wanted more issue public relations. [...*audio skips*]

But my wife wants that, when we go to the Pool meetings that we should have some cooperative education maybe at these meetings. Oh really? A lot of people that worked for the Pools didn't know why they were working for the Pools. That was not the case for the Wheat Board. People that worked for the Wheat Board—yes, it was a job—but people that worked for the Wheat Board knew that they were working for farmers far more than any other organization. It breaks my heart. They did. Yes, maybe we had a hundred too many employees, I don't know. And the biggest mistake we made, and I was part of it, when we lost the loyalty was there was a move to downsize. We cut 20 percent of our staff. I only remember, for the record, the only director that really objected to that was Bill Nickleson from Shoal Lake, Manitoba. Still alive. His dad was a strong co-op supporter, and he was right, and I was--. I didn't pay enough attention to it. We didn't allow for even just orderly retirement. We just slashed and burned. But that was the mistake.

NP: Why did, Mr. Nickleson, was it--?

WH: He was a director as well as I was, but he raised some concerns about it.

NP: And what was--.

WH: Well, he just didn't think it was the right thing to do. That we have--. Staff has been here forever. Not forever, but they can contribute. There's other people you can talk to, but that's where we lost it. Some of the people that had been there for a long time, they were loyal employees. We could've done that by attrition. That was a mistake. That was some of the--. And the other issue of the Board, should we allow exports to the United States without permits and stuff, and sometimes—I've said this before—maybe we should open that border up.

The Wheat Board, in an orderly fashion, exported high-quality wheat into United States mills, durum especially, at a level that would not upset the Americans. Their industry wanted the high-quality wheat, but if you do too much—you know Americans—they're not going to like that. I think what we should've done is use our high-quality wheat to export into their markets. Let's say we had too much free movement into the United States over high-quality wheat. We're only doing it to the mills, to the best to my understanding.

We didn't want our Canadian wheat finding itself to the U.S. export position. I am almost convinced that had we opened up the border, just like that, the Yankees would've shut it down. They don't like that. That's probably what we should've done. I don't know that for sure, but in my weaker moments, we maybe should've done that because even today I'm not one—even when we are going into this new environment—I'm not one who would really want to sit in an American lineup with my truck, if I was the only one with a Manitoba license plate because—Americans are nice people—but we knew what happened to the flood water two years ago went to the United States. A Canadian at Wal-Mart said, “No, you're from Canada. You're sending our water down here.” They didn't want to do business at their shopping centre.

The railway, and the railways was an issue. It was car allocation, and how you do that. How you do it fairly. For years the Wheat Board allocated--. Like allocation means we only have so many rail cars and you allocate so many cars to--. For many years the Wheat Board even allocated how much the private grain trade would get. Canola, and that. And it actually worked quite well and having been there, the Wheat Board was always fair about, probably made sure—there's a word for overcompensated—make sure they didn't give too little because they knew they'd be under criticism. What was their fair share of the cars? Then the system had it decided. It was kind of a complex system on how they got the cars, or no they didn't. They developed various formulas for that.

The other issue that lead to the downfall of the Wheat Board, and there I was quite involved, they didn't react when fusarium wheat came in. That was a big issue. You ask me these things later on and--.

NP: Fusarium is sick wheat?

WH: A disease in wheat, yes. That was a big deal. It was in my district. The Wheat Board did not react quickly enough to that.

NP: Meaning?

WH: That they didn't-- Well, all of a sudden, our wheat became worthless, and farmers broke the border, went over the border. You had more money from the American's.

NP: With diseased wheat?

WH: Yes, because they were used to handling it, and they were used to a lower-quality product. We had a system in place. It's too complicated that you could make-- See you were always free to export wheat to the States. Let's say the Wheat Board deeming that the farmer would get \$7 a bushel that year. Well, if the farmer gets \$7.50 he could, but there was a buy-back clause that a private seller could not undercut the Wheat Board. That was always there. But this fusarium thing, well, this disease came in and the Wheat Board was kind of caught. It didn't know how to do that properly. But, for the record—and that's a letter I wish I would have kept—Adrian Measner, who is now at the Mission Terminals and later on became CEO, I think this is important for the record to have a CEO of the Wheat Board, he was, I believe probably in charge of sales, but he was very high up in the sales department, maybe the chief--

NP: Marketing--

WH: Marketing, I'm sorry.

NP: Head of marketing.

WH: Thank you. He showed me a letter from Charlie Mayer—that's the letter I wished I had kept—that warned the Wheat Board that they should—we didn't know what this fusarium stuff was—that we should not put Canada's reputation at risk by exporting this low quality wheat. That's the letter I wished I had kept because the Wheat Board was very, very cautious.

There was a big meeting in Morris about fusarium. What do we do with this? One of the commissioners, Richard Klassen, made the mistake of saying-- And you know, to be fair to him at that time we didn't know what to do with this wheat. The farmers were

there, and there were two kinds of farmers in that room, those that had crop insurance, and those that didn't. He said, "If it was my wheat, I would burn it on the field."

NP: By accident.

WH: No. Burn it. Just light it. He said it. And he shouldn't have said it. I know for sure that his intention was not malicious. What the hell were you going to do? Some of them did burn their wheat!

NP: Well, yes, because of the cost of harvesting is--.

WH: Yes, but the guys at crop insurance thought that was--. We wanted actually crop insurance to tell us to burn it because we didn't want to harvest the damn stuff. No overhead but the others were--. That got the wrong publicity. That was a very serious issue, and all the Board did not deal quickly enough.

Finally, I got, myself, I think I got farmers like Bill Toews and some other farmers from the pro-Board side—about ten of us—to meet with the commissioners at the Wheat Board. I couldn't get—and there's others [inaudible]—I couldn't get the attention of the commissioners on this damn thing. It had to do with this buy-back provision, selling it into the States. How we could make it a little bit easier. It was complex. I met with these farmers. We could meet with the--. This [inaudible] had the biggest company in Canada. They met with them and then the Wheat Board started to listen, and they changed those provisions.

Ironically enough, two months later, a farmer phoned me, and at that time they made it attractive. They made it easier. The farmer said, "So what are you going to do about this?" Well, I said, "Didn't you sell your wheat after?" "No, I was waiting for a better price." Then I thought, "Why do you work for farmers sometimes?" But that was actually what led to the downfall. That really hurt the Wheat Board. And they did a lot of things right, but the publicity around that really, in my time, that was huge, that was just bad. That's all it was. We even had people within the Board later on moving ahead that kind of thought we should have this dual market. People who have worked there for years thought somehow that this would be the thing—not in really senior management, but getting in there. I couldn't believe it.

NP: People with farming backgrounds or people like--.

WH: No. But they somehow thought that would be okay. That wasn't the big issue in there, but anyway.

NP: I want to be sure to ask you a question, but I'd like to come back to your futuristic thinking because you're still a farmer. What are you most proud of? When you think back on your career to date, and that includes farming as well as your positions with the various organizations. What brings you the most pride?

WH: That hits very close to home. On the farm, that I had done reasonably well, not having a good education. I had to do 12 twice. I joke about it. And ran a good operation. I know the world is changing. We have sales of \$1.5 to 2 million. I don't use a computer, that's through a bad attitude. I complain that my eyes get tired, but I balance my books within \$5 every year. I was not good at mathematics in school. Nothing came easy to me, except this yakking. I didn't mean that in a derogatory way. I learned to use an adding machine. To me, when I started, I'd do income tax and people would be, "How do you do income tax?" I said, "I learned how to use an adding machine." To me using an adding machine is like what today is the power that you get with a computer. I can run an adding machine. I don't have to look at the numbers. I know pretty well. And to get my books to balance, I balance every month. I know what my net worth increase is every year. A lot of modern farmers today don't know that, but I do know that.

Achievements was getting elected to the Wheat Board advisory and to the Pools in the same year. That was a heady wine, so to speak. It was a bit like Rene Leveque saying--. You know, he was not predicted to win the election. He was out there smoking. "What are you going to do now?" "Well, I did not know I would get elected. But what the hell, here I am." When they interviewed me on this, I said, "Up to this point, I was mainly concerned about getting elected." What a really intelligent speech! But that's what it was. First things first. That was my answer. Some of the things, [inaudible] the Wheat Board would not have lasted long, if I hadn't pushed that issue. The other was meeting with all the various grain players at the West Coast. That I felt very good about that. You asked me about the Wheat Board or the Pool?

NP: Both.

WH: We had some programs that offered farmers a good deal on grain bins, through our group buying and stuff. That's a small thing. I'll probably think more on the way home. Yes. I don't know. I just--. Yes. I was chair of that Wheat Board for some years, of the advisory committee and that, again, was something that I really didn't like all that well, but it was there. I don't know that I had some good sound bites, in terms of interviews. I was able to do a sound bite quite well and it got publicity. There was a certain issue--. What really happens with these damn things, you don't get information assembled anymore. They give you just a whole bunch of information and you don't have a one pager anymore. There was something that came up with the Board, I don't know what the issue was, and I said to the other director beside me, I said, "This is our policy." "No," he said, "It's not our policy. Where do you have that?" I happened to draw out a folder and had the information before me.

The other things that happened, and my wife doesn't let me talk about it, but I had been known to doze off at meetings. What really always bothered them was when I would sort of wake up, or not doze off, I was the one that had the questions. And I remember, oh, we had this presentation on pension funds at the Wheat Board and blah, blah, blah, I didn't really want to do that. He was so good at where they could invest their money and this and I tuned them out after awhile. I wasn't terribly interested. Then asked them when he got finished, "So what now?" So I said, "You just do it for us." And someone said, "Well, I guess he wasn't really sleeping. I had that happen not so long ago again.

NP: [Laughs]

WH: You know, really, catch them at your own game. Nothing to do with the Wheat Board [inaudible]. The lady from the labour union or some labour group, she was head of employees' union and didn't like marketing boards and didn't like this and didn't like that. I knew her message. It was right after lunch. I put my head on the table, and she was intimidated. It is intimidating. It would really tick me off if somebody did that to me. "Do you have any questions? And what about that sleepy fella over there?" I had three. And it was beautiful! She melted! Vicious. Sometimes the funny things, to me were--.

NP: Are the memorable ones?

WH: Yes. A memorable one was going to--. I was just new as a director. We had a Federation of Agriculture meeting, and the topic was we were discussing the Wheat Board. I was both discussing the Wheat Board and how good a job the Wheat Board was doing marketing wheat. They did a really, really good job. Then the topic came up, "Well, maybe we should just even have a vote on if they should market canola." Oh, then the knives came out. I can say at that time for me the cocktail hour hadn't really passed that day. We had gone out for supper and then these guys kept nattering on and on, and I said, "What you're really telling me is that if you have a John Deere tractor, and it really does a good job for you, for that reason you would never buy a John Deere combine?" I think Ted Turner was there from Sask Wheat Pool. When you get a good one--.

NP: There's your sound bite. [Laughs]

WH: [Laughs] Yes, that was a good bite. And really it was a fun game. I don't know what other achievements there are. I was really proud to be a Pool director when we were thinking of merging the three Pools, and we were going to buy United Grain Growers. That really--. I remember going to church and I thought I felt so good about it. I knew it was a secret, but we were going to do it. We really were going to do it. And what I can never understand about the Pools, they were always afraid of owning too much. We were buying up little fertilizer plants, and I thought that was just great. I would never close an elevator down. I would always be buying more and that was the capitalist side of me. Here I'm the socialist, so to speak, but then we used to worry, "Well, maybe

we'll own too many fertilizer plants." Bullshit! I'd like to own them all! Why are we afraid of ourselves? Oh, then we can't be too strong, we won't be--. I was a big co-op guy, but I was running an efficient organization, making money.

NP: I'm going to stop you there and that's because we have three minutes left and the three minutes that we have left, I wanted to ask, if we ever get our little centre celebrating Canada flowing grain to the world through Thunder Bay, we wanted to have—I mentioned it when we talked earlier—about salvaging a grain elevator and having an interpretive centre of national significance because we feel that the whole grain story of Canada becoming an international marketer, was central to actually the success of Canada as a country. If we do that—and you have two minutes to answer—what about Manitoba Pool, the Farmers Union, what kind of things do you think that we should--? Stories that we should make sure to tell Canadians?

WH: I guess we should tell them how important agriculture is to the economy, is how many one dollars out of so many, all the multiplier effect, it is—and I'm biased—it is the most important industry in the world. Like I said to my son Dean when he interviewed me, Donald Trump has to eat. What else can I say? Mining is important, sure. It's all important but it's not just grain farming. It's agri-farming. I don't like to use the world agriculture because that's the companies and everything It's the farmer, and it's such a shame that that's the one at the bottom end of the totem pole. But that's the most important industry we have in the world.

NP: And probably always has been.

WH: Well yeah. You got to eat!

NP: Then, you've got one minute left, will farmers with all these changes that have taken place, will farmers survive and prosper?

WH: Yes, but the small family farm will not. Farmers will prosper due to the appreciation of land, which I think is a fair amount of land, but it's a bad thing because eventually the big corporations that are taking this over and owning the land will want a return on their investment and the consumer will suffer. That's very distressing for me. The question was, "Will they survive?" Yes, farmers will survive. We will always have farmers, but in terms of most farmers where it's going now, they'll be working for someone else. Some big farm. I hire retired farmers to work on my farm. They'll all be working for somebody else. That's the sad--. They came here for freedom but these guys who want freedom ain't going to get freedom. They're selling out to big operators. You'll be running a big \$50,000 land management company.

NP: We have ten seconds left in which I will thank you very much for a very wonderful interview. I know we could have gone on longer, but, unfortunately, I just put a two-hour tape in, so thanks very much.

End of interview.