**Narrator:** Ray Schmitt (RS)

**Company Affiliations:** Alberta Wheat Pool

**Interview Date:** 22 June 2013

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**Summary:** Former president of Alberta Wheat Pool Ray Schmitt discusses his ascent through the organization to the top position. He begins by discussing his family's over 100 years of farming history in Alberta, and his own work on the farm growing up. He discusses his election as a delegate for AWP at a time of hostility, and he lists the major issues of the day, like the Crow Rate, the Pool's too-rapid expansion, and high interest rates. He describes some of the groups he interacted with in the Pool, like politicians and other farmer organizations. Schmitt then describes his move up to director, second vice president, then president, and he explains his increasing responsibilities with each role, one of which was travelling with XCAN Grain and the International Federation of Agricultural Producers. He recalls the issues of these later years, like country elevator consolidation, inland terminal building, GATT negotiations, and government income stabilization programs, and he explains the impact of these issues on farmers and rural communities. He describes the relationship AWP had with other grain-related organizations, like the railways, the Canadian Grain Commission, the Canadian International Grains Institute, grain researchers, and the Canadian Wheat Board. Schmitt then looks beyond his career and discusses the main grain-related events and changes since his retirement as president, like the amalgamation and demise of the Pools, the demise of the CWB, the changing attitudes of modern farmers, the growth in farm sizes, and the division within agri-politics. Other topics discusses include AWP's terminal access through the east and west, changes to crops grown on the Prairies, his visit to AWP's BC terminal as a delegate, his trip across Canada visiting grain industry sites, and AWP's archives at Glenbow Museum.

**Keywords:** Alberta Wheat Pool; Farmer cooperatives; Farmer delegates; Grain farmers/producers; Agricultural policy; Crow's Nest Pass freight rate; Country grain elevators; Unifarm; XCAN Grain; Grain marketing; Grain export destinations; International Federal of Agricultural Producers; General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT); Government subsidies; Western Grain Stabilization Program; Consolidation; Inland grain terminals; Amalgamation; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Terminal grain elevators—British Columbia; United Grain Growers; Manitoba Pool Elevators; Agricore; Agricore United; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; Canadian Grain Commission; Canadian Wheat Board; Canadian International Grains Institute; Grain transportation—rail; Grain varieties

| Time, Speaker, Narrative |
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| NP: Nancy Perozzo, the western adventure continues. It's June 22nd and I am in Lethbridge, Alberta. I'll turn the microphone over to today's interview and have him introduce himself and his connection to the grain trade.<br><br>RS: Hello, my name is Ray Schmitt. I got involved in farm organizations at an early age, and in 1975 I became a delegate to Alberta Wheat Pool. In 1983, I became a director of Alberta Pool and became second vice president, first vice president, and spent the last four years as president of Alberta Pool when I retired in 1993.<br><br>NP: Great.<br><br>RS: I tapped. [Laughing]<br><br>NP: I know what I'm going to do. I wonder if that's good. That's a good introduction, and I'm going to go right back to the beginning. To be a farm delegate you had to be a farmer, so when did your family start farming?<br><br>RS: My grandfather came to Alberta in 1907, and so we're still on the original family homestead, and we celebrated 100 years on that same farm in 2007. Then my father has been the farmer, and I started farming with my brother and my father in 1951. We went through some pretty trying times with hailstorms and droughts, and it was a hard time putting shoes on the babies at times. Anyhow, we came along and got involved in farm organizations in Unifarm and locally, more or less. Then I ran for a delegate in 1975 for Alberta Wheat Pool. I won that. I was with Alberta Pool for 18 years when I retired as president in 1993.<br><br>NP: What can you tell me about how your grandfather ended up in Alberta? Do you know much about the history of your family?<br><br>RS: Yes. I have quite a bit of record that I put together in 2007 of our farm history, and I could maybe show you that after. He came from Germany as a young boy and they went to Minnesota, and he married in Minnesota, and he took a tree homestead there. Then he moved to Columbus, North Dakota and homesteaded there and they had a sod house in Columbus, North Dakota. In 1907 they packed up and moved to Southern Alberta and our farm is on the same land that he homesteaded in 1907.<br><br>NP: Did he say why he moved from the States to Canada?<br><br>RS: I really don't know. I guess those are questions you'd like to be able to ask now, but--. |

NP: I know, isn't it true.

RS: You never knew at the time.

NP: Things I wish I would've asked my grandmother.

RS: That's right.

NP: Wasn't smart enough at the time to know that I'd be interested in it.

RS: That's right.

NP: Was your grandfather alive for very long when you were growing up?

RS: Oh yes. They lived a mile and a half from us, and my parents' farm was just a mile and a half east of the homestead, and so we would see an awful lot of our grandparents. He loved to grow trees I guess coming from Southern Germany from all the trees and coming out to the bald prairie. He planted an awful lot of trees, and shelterbelts. My brother and I would help him cultivate the trees in the summertime, and we enjoyed always going to their place.

NP: Did he ever talk about the old days?

RS: Not really. I don't know. I never had that--. I don't really recall him talking about Germany very much on why he came from Germany. He was only 16, and then he came to the United States with an uncle and that's how he got here.

NP: The Alberta Wheat Pool would not have been around when he started. Was your family involved in the development of the Wheat Pool? Were they supporters or were they--?

RS: My dad was an original contract signer, but as far as being involved in the organization, I don't think they were. They were good community people and did an awful lot of work in the communities and in our home community and supported everything that went on there. But he never branched out any further than that.

NP: What interested you in running as a delegate?

RS: I got involved, I suppose, in some of the farm issues at the time, and at that particular time there was an anti-Wheat Pool kind of a feeling. People would run and not really be supportive of the Pool. So I decided that I would run, and I won the election, and I was there for that long a time.

NP: What caused you to be a supporter of the Pool? What was it about the Pool's philosophy that you liked?

RS: I guess my dad was the original cause of it, I guess, but I think we were always treated fairly, and the dividends were paid out became quite a nice little nest egg by the time we finished our farming days. They always treated everybody pretty fair, and that's one of the reasons that I think we joined the Pool.

NP: What do you think was the cause of the discontent of those who weren't that happy with the Pool?

RS: Well, if you remember back in the early '70s, a lot of people were thinking the Pools were getting too big in the whole context of the thing, and so they were a little bit anti in that respect and thought that we shouldn't really try to continue growing like we have. Anyhow, some of the issues I guess were political issues—method of payment kind of thing, Western Grain Transportation Act, and a lot of the cattle people were pretty anti-Pool in those days, the livestock people.

NP: Was your farm mostly a grain farm?

RS: Yes. Most of the time. We raised hogs for about ten years, and I think in 1965 I built a barn and we had about 1,500, which is about peanuts in today's hog industry. But anyhow it was a nice little cash flow all the time. When I became a delegate, I didn't have time to do that anymore, so we quit doing that, much to my wife's agreement.

NP: Livestock is really tough.

RS: Well, it's 24/7. There's always something going on. You always have something to do.

NP: When you became a delegate, that was, what did you tell me, in 1975? What were some of the issues that you were dealing with? Do you recall?

RS: They were starting to talk about the method of payment in the railroad. I think that was one of the big issues at the time. I could remember going to some meetings and at Unifarm we would have a delegation from the Pool and be there and the cattle people

would be there, and they were really up in arms with the method of payment and wanted it kind of scrapped. Eventually, it was resolved and maybe not to everyone's satisfaction but we're living with it today, the way they resolved it.

NP: Was that the Crow Rate?

RS: Yes, the Crow Rate.

NP: Did you--. Going into a delegate position where you were more in tune with the Pool, what surprised you about the Pool, or what did you learn about the Pool that--?

RS: Actually, in itself, it was quite an educational experience. I never had the opportunity to go to university or ag school. I just went to high school, and I think I learned an awful lot in the Pool with the people that were there and the knowledge base that most of those people had. They were really good at passing that on to us younger guys, at that point in time.

NP: When you said that some people thought that the Pool was getting a bit too big, was that more of a question that they were expanding into other areas?

RS: I think those days they were buying out smaller elevator companies and that kind of thing, and it ended up that we had a significant amount of elevators in the province. But there was still lots of competition. Grain Growers were still there, and Cargill came in and some of the smaller companies like Parrish & Heimbecker were there. But there were an awful lot of small companies that, I think, were having a tough time surviving at that time, and they were glad to sell to the Pool.

NP: It wasn't that they were predatory.

RS: No. That's right.

NP: So who were some of the people that you recall from your early time as a delegate who you admire or who you thought were real characters?

RS: I don't know where to start with, the Pool people or the politicians?

NP: Both because you must have been much more in tune with the political side now too.

RS: I guess Wally McDill was chief executive officer at that time, and I always had a great deal of respect for him. And I learned to respect a lot of the people in the Pools later on when I became a director and came to join meetings with the other Pools. Some of the ones, Sask Pool's Ted Turner as president and Milt Fair was CEO of Sask Pool at that time, and he was really a good man to set an example. I had a good guy I worked with in Calgary when I was first Vice President named Doug Livingstone. I'm a lot older than him but he was able to teach me a lot. As far as some of the politicians, I can remember going to that first delegates' meeting and Pat Pan and some of them and Otto Lang. And he would show up and those other names I just can't recall right now. Otto Lang was a different kind of a guy. I can still remember him. He never had any expression on his face, and I see his daughter on TV now, on that Lang O'Leary thing, she's maybe a little bit like him, I think. I'm not sure.

NP: The politicians, and you don't need to necessarily attach names to issues but that's okay, too. What were your thoughts about Ottawa because you were talking mainly federal politicians? What were your thoughts once you got to hear these people and have a little bit closer connection with them?

RS: Until I became a director--. [Phone rings] Is that you?

**[Audio pauses]**

NP: I'll put you back on. Okay. So we were talking about how any changes perhaps in attitude once you got to work more closely or actually hear politicians answer questions. I think back then they were trying to answer them, were they?

RS: I remember going to Ottawa different times, and it was kind of interesting to visit our local MPs, and they were always willing to, just on a personal basis, give me time, and then we would always go to ag [inaudible] meetings, the group of us. Those were sometimes interesting things because during the, I don't know if you recall, during the '80s interest rates were so high and we were losing so many young farmers out of agriculture at that particular time. We did our best to try to get the government to help us out a little bit. One of the reasons for that was because the trade subsidies that the U.S. and Europe had at the time, it just pushed our price of grain into almost nothing. It was hard for people to survive, especially if they had got into buying land or buying machinery at 18 percent to 20 percent interest, which is hard to understand nowadays. Most of the banks will hardly give you a penny anymore. Those were interesting kind of times, and I remember going, Ralph Jesperson at that point in time was president of Unifarm and a group of us went to, I think maybe it was Ottawa or Winnipeg, and had a meeting with some of those people, and we came home with a nice little bundle of 1.6 billion. [Laughs]

NP: That's nice. Now what is Unifarm?

RS: It's a farm organization. It started out as Alberta Farmers Union and then it became Unifarm and then now it's called Wild Rose. But it's having its struggles. It just survives on direct membership, and we at Alberta Pool at one time always spent a certain amount of money giving it to Unifarm. But in the later years, it seems like there got to be a bit of a conflict, and so we discontinued that.

NP: Bit of a conflict in what way?

RS: In some of the policy issues it was more--. I guess I can't think of anything specific right now.

NP: So would Unifarm be a sub--. Would they fit into the National Farmers Union in some fashion?

RS: Well, they were part of the Canadian Confederation of Agriculture. They were a member of that, and so that was kind of their connection to the federal base. When it first started, they had a huge farm-based, direct membership, but it seemed like as time went on there became so many commodity groups in this province, and they always didn't see eye to eye with Unifarm. Unifarm was more or less down the middle of the road and tried to voice its concerns to ordinary farmers and not just to specific groups. And they were more concerned with the well-being of everybody.

NP: You mentioned Doug Livingstone and that he taught you a lot. What did you admire about the way he operated?

RS: I guess one of the things, he could always get up in front of a crowd of people and always have the right things to say, which I never quite had that same ability. It was a great thing to just kind of watch him do that. I always admire that about him because he always seemed to say the right thing. He never got people up in the air about it or whatever and whatever he said.

NP: Now some people do that by not really saying anything and some people do it by diplomatically presenting--.

RS: That's the way he was. He was more of a diplomat kind of a thing.

NP: But he spoke--.

RS: Yes.

NP: He mentioned something on his tape the other day that he said he learned early on, and I can't recall where he learned it from, he said where he would ask questions more so than--.

RS: Okay, yes.

NP: So he was saying he had an interesting statement about somebody who was saying that he had bought fertilizer in the States for less than he bought it, and instead of saying, "Well, blah blah blah." He said, "Well did you buy in Canadian dollars? Was it Canadian tonnes or American tonnes?" By the end of it, the guy said I guess he could've got it--.

RS: [Laughs]

NP: So that was, you're just reinforcing what he hoped he was doing.

RS: He seemed to have that ability, and he could always think of the questions to ask. I guess that was [inaudible].

NP: Remain calm enough to think, "Now there's a way of doing this."

RS: Yes, that's right.

NP: [Laughs] Think I'm in your camp [inaudible].

RS: [Laughs]

NP: So calm. Now you mention a fellow that you travelled with that was with Unifarm, and I just wanted the spelling of his name because when we transcribe these--.

RS: Excuse me. That was Ralph Jesperson. I think that--. He was president of Unifarm that term. We were part of a delegation that went--.

NP: And do you know how to spell Jesperson?

RS: J-E-S-P-E-R-S-O-N

NP: Person, just as it's said. Okay.

RS: Yes.

NP: Okay, good. Now Wally Madill was there as the CEO?

RS: They didn't call him CEO when I first came. They called him general manager of the Wheat Pool. Then, as time went on, it became chief executive officer was what everybody got. [Laughs] Before that point in time in our history, most people in companies at that point, were general managers. Wally came from Southern Alberta also, and he I think started with the Wheat Pool and worked his way up to general manager.

NP: The years that you were a delegate, '75 to '83, when you became a director, the LIFT program would've been in there?

RS: Yes. I can remember that, yes. That would've been on about that time. I'm trying to think.

NP: Or would that have been a little later?

RS: I'm not sure just exactly when that was.

NP: Again, that's certainly something we can find in the records. You must have liked being a delegate because then you became a director.

RS: What I liked about it was the opportunity to share with other farmers at these annual meetings, not just about farm politics, but about agriculture in general. There was a lot of good friends that we made over the years by being involved in Alberta Pool, and we got to know, later on, a lot of the people in Manitoba and Saskatchewan that were involved in the Pools also—some really great people really.

NP: You mentioned Milt Fair. You know everybody mentions Milt Fair. Why is that, do you think?

RS: I guess maybe he stood out from everybody else. I think he was always calm, and he did a great job for Sask Pool as their CEO, and he had a good way about him that people just took to him, I think.

NP: A good leader?

RS: He was a good leader, a very good leader. He had a pretty good board at that point in time when he was there too. Ted Turner was president at that point in time and then Garf Stevenson followed him in, and both of those people really looked up to Milt Fair too. You'll probably find that out when you interview them.

NP: Yes, I'm sorry Mr. Fair isn't around because everyone speaks very highly of him.

RS: He passed away, oh, must be eight or ten years ago now, but he was not that old when he passed away, really.

NP: It probably all bleeds together, so rather than talking about years, you moved into second vice president, and what was the responsibilities of the second vice president versus the first vice president?

RS: They weren't near as much as the first vice president, and I didn't have to move off the farm to become second vice president. I was part of the executive committee, and so I was more involved in some of the organizations that the Pools had and on the board are some of those at that point in time.

NP: Which would be some of the--.

RS: Some of the boards that we had were Western Corp Fertilizers. The Co-operators was another one that I sat on for a while. I just can't recall some of the others.

NP: Was there any involvement of the board with XCAN, the XCAN Grain?

RS: Yes. I came on the board with XCAN. Actually, when I was second vice president, I was on that XCAN board. That was a real good part of the Pools in their export agency that they had, and actually I got a fair amount of travel around the world with XCAN because we would go and meet our customers in Europe or Japan and different tours like that. So that was kind of an interesting thing. Then another one that I got involved in was IFAP, which is the International Federation of Agriculture Producers. They would meet once every two years in a different part of the world, so that was maybe--. I guess sometimes I think I took more from the Pool than I was able to get back.

NP: So that was the International Federation--.

RS: Of Agriculture Producers.

NP: Okay. A few questions come out of what you talked about and that's the XCAN operation. What did being involved with them--. What did you learn about Canada's grain export trade?

RS: I think it was through them that they had representatives in Europe and in Japan and Korea and those kinds of countries, and we had an office in Japan, as well as one in London, that looked after the trade going to Europe. It was one of the biggest exporters out of Canada for grains and oil seeds at that time. A lot of canola seed and canola oil was exported through them also to these foreign countries.

NP: Were you amazed by the far-reaching nature of Canada's grain trade?

RS: I guess I was because it wasn't--. When you're sitting on the farm you don't realize how far the tentacles go out, and they do go out a long ways.

NP: Any special experiences that you can recall from your travels?

RS: I'm trying to think about that. I think we always--. Usually when we'd go to the [inaudible] meetings Jean would come along also, and we would--. Like going to Norway we'd take a week's holiday and that kind of thing after the meeting. And the one time we looked up some of her relatives, just in Norway. Another time we went to Australia, quite a group of us went over there, and I guess what I found out that everybody has this—in agriculture—have the same goals in mind. Most of them are--. Taking care of the land is probably number one and helping to feed the world.

NP: With this IFAP, how did you feel Canada measured up as a producer compared with other regions of the world?

RS: I guess one of the things is that they would try to talk about farm policy and how it--. GATT was one of the big issues at that time, General Agreement of Trade and Tariff, and so I think Canada has always held its own with most of those countries. I can't remember how many countries were involved in that but some countries I hadn't even heard of before.

NP: So you learned a lot?

RS: I think so. I've forgotten a lot too.

NP: [Laughs] Isn't that the way it goes. I think we're okay as long as we remember more than we've forgotten. Even if the balance shifts a bit. You mentioned GATT.

RS: Yes.

NP: So this was all the free trade negotiations and so on?

RS: Yes. General Agreement on Trades and Tariff.

NP: Do you have a personal philosophy on international trade agreements and--.

RS: It would be nice if the free trade agreement was really a free trade agreement, but during the time in '91 we were really getting hammered by the Europeans and the Americans because of their high subsidies that they were paying their farmers. I guess to be idealistic, it would be nice if every one of them would say, "Let's just have free trade, and we won't have any more tariffs." But that isn't going to happen. Then you have to be realistic about that. It seems like there's always somebody wanting the upper hand in those kinds of things, and I don't know how they'll ever come to some sort of an agreement that will satisfy everybody.

NP: Do you ever think they're a waste of time to even try because--.

RS: I think you have to keep [inaudible] often, otherwise--. But I can understand in Europe they had, during the war, they had a lot of starvation, and so they said they'd never be hungry again. So their main goal was to just make sure they had enough food in the European countries. I can understand that, but I think we're a long ways past that point in time, and hopefully it will never happen again. I really, other than that--. And the US are always very supportive of the farmers, but I think I saw in the paper not that long ago that they're going to cut back on some of that subsidy stuff to the grain farmers.

NP: Finding it increasingly difficult to pay.

RS: They can't pay for it, and I think that's maybe the key to what will happen is most of these countries' currency is in pretty bad shape right now, and so you may see us scaling back on a lot of that stuff.

NP: Alberta Wheat Pool would have been involved in position papers related to income stabilization programs. What do you remember about discussions related to that?

RS: I don't really recall the specifics of that right now.

NP: Think it's a good idea?

RS: Oh, I think we did. Some of those programs were pretty good. I can remember the one, we would [inaudible] a certain amount from our wheat every time we took a load to the elevator and after a period in time that became a--. I don't know if it was called GRIP or one of those programs, and it turned out to be a pretty good program actually. When they paid it out. [Laughs]

NP: Well, I was going to say, was there ever a situation where they paid it out?

RS: They paid it out. I think it disappeared. I'm not sure if it was GRIP or Western Grain Stabilization Program. That's the one I was thinking about. That was a pretty good program. I think it was better than the GRIP program. You put away a percentage of your income and it sat there in a bank account and later on--. You know when things like that get building up a little bit of money, some of the farmers get kind of antsy. They think they should be paid out, [laughs] and really it was their money in the first place. And they eventually did pay that out to everybody.

NP: The intention was that it would be paid out.

RS: In tough times.

NP: In tough times. And if there was never tough times, you never got it? It was like insurance?

RS: I think that's what these people were always thinking about. We never will need it, but that doesn't happen. Usually, there's a point in agriculture where you need a little bit of help.

NP: It just may be a little long in coming.

RS: Yes. That's right.

NP: And the year after you take it out, it hits.

RS: [Laughs] Yes.

NP: Right. [Laughs] Tell me about your years as president. So that was '89 to '93. Did you like being president?

RS: Yes. After a while. [Laughing]

NP: Well what--.

RS: I guess I wasn't planning on becoming president when I moved into Calgary, but then Doug moved back to the farm, and so I took that over. I really enjoyed it when I left.

NP: [Laughs] When you left. Or by the time you left?

RS: By the time I left—and there was some question whether I would stay on for another term or not. But I'm just as glad I didn't because it gave me an opportunity to come back to the farm and get to know my kids a little bit better on the farm and my son on the farm. So from that aspect of it. But I guess I remember the learning curve that I had when I took that on, and I guess I never, ever pushed myself quite as much as when I was that because the buck stopped there, and you didn't want to make a fool of yourself, so you tried to keep on top of everything as much as you can. There was always issues coming up.

NP: Was Wally Madill still--.

RS: No. When I became president, Wally had left, and then we hired another fellow Don Heasman, and maybe this didn't--. Heasman did quite a bit in downsizing the Pool as far as employees and cutting costs. I had a great task of letting him go and maybe you can leave that out, you know.

NP: That's probably general knowledge.

RS: Yes, it is. But that wasn't much fun, during that period of time.

NP: That's never fun.

RS: But you know he was a very smart guy, but sometimes those people in that position, I find out that are not very mature in some ways.

NP: Was he from a farm background?

RS: No. He was a chartered accountant. I shouldn't be saying that.

NP: I can take that out. Or you can have a restriction put on it. Anyway--.

RS: Then he passed away after I'd left, and Gary Dewar came in from--. He had a terminal manager in Vancouver, and he was interim after Wally left. He was there until we hired this Heasman fellow. Then when he left, Gary came back and took over, and he was there when I left. After I left, they hired Gordon Cummings as chief executive. I don't know if you know Gordon or not.

NP: No, but his name has come up.

RS: It seemed like--. So that was kind of the end of my Pool days. I wasn't involved in hiring Gordon.

NP: When did--. The organizations did become--. There was the whole rationalization of rail lines, and then the major thing then would've been the reduction in Prairie elevators. So that would've been going on right during your time with the board.

RS: It had started during my time and Wally Madill's time. We started reducing elevators, and we started building inland terminals. I think the last one we were involved with Sask Pool at Lloydminster, a joint facility with them, and I was president at that point in time. It was opened after I left, and another big one at Camrose was opened up after I had left.

NP: Was that a contentious issue at the board level?

RS: No, not at the board. I think we all understood we couldn't continue to operate all these small points and so--. But it was okay until you went to the country. It was okay to tear his elevator down in that town, but don't tear mine down kind of thing, you know? So it was a fairly contentious issue, but you never hear about it anymore, and I think attitudes have maybe changed. Farmers have changed. There are a younger group of farmers nowadays and most of them are farming more land than people like me, in my day. And I think they're more in tune with the markets and what's happening on the markets. They have this daily--. With the computers and that, they know exactly what's happening pretty well anywhere in the world, as far as prices go and weather. It's kind of a different ball of wax. I guess one of the things that I feel bad about--. I never hear anybody complain about the demise of the Pools or the demise of the Wheat Board. It's one of the things I don't quite understand. We maybe didn't educate our young people enough into that thing. Anyhow, I guess time goes on, and you can't--. There's no use looking back. You have to live for today and plan for tomorrow.

NP: Now I'm going to take you back to the time when they started rationalizing, that term. I mean it was being done everywhere, governments, industry, co-op organizations. If you think about your own area of the province at that time, some small elevators were shut down there?

RS: Yes. There was. In my district there were several shut down.

NP: Did it change loyalties to where people delivered because now--?

RS: Well sometimes if another place was--. If your competition stayed in that town sometimes they just went to that other competition there.

NP: So some people who were on the far edge of a delivery point and were now even further away--.

RS: Yes, and the thing is, if you go into the country today, you don't see a three-tonne truck on the road. They're all semi-trailers and b-trains. We're hauling grain into Sterling here or Grassy Lake and those are 50-60 miles away from home. Where we used to haul, Milk River, which was over 17 miles. So I don't know with a diesel truck with the amount they haul, I don't think it costs him any more to haul than we did with the smaller trucks back in our day. That part is--. Agriculture has changed a lot since I left the farm.

NP: People mention the effect on communities.

RS: Drastic effect. Every town had two or three grain bars in there and toward the end their salaries were pretty good salaries, and there was taxes paid to the town, or the municipalities, and so that all disappeared and the towns had to either raise the mill rates or whatever to compensate for some of that. When they tore the elevators down, well those taxes were gone too. So it was quite a drastic change for a lot of communities. At the same time, farms started getting bigger and bigger, and there's not near as many people living in the country as there used to be. So that's one of the big changes that we see when we go back to the farm. We had a country school out there with 100 kids in there. All that's closed and our kids all go to Milk River—or our grandchildren have. Some of the towns around, churches have closed, and it's a whole--. I don't know. Is it evolution or what is it?

NP: [Laughs] Evolution or devolution. Tough, eh?

RS: Yes.

NP: I've been reading some history of the Wheat Pools and just this morning the point they were talking about, the people who would've been your grandfather's time, were out gathering signatures so that the Pools could go ahead. The guys who were elected saying, "No, I'm not going to be making big money. It's a little different if we were hiring somebody with skills but as a farmer representative." And they said they were altruistic and willing to sacrifice, and they saw a cause. Well.

RS: Well, they certainly did, back then. The grain companies were kind of really taking advantage of the farmers, and these people got together, and I don't think, even the directors of the Pools back in those days, they gave up an awful lot to make that organizing start. That's one of the things I feel bad about that we weren't able to carry that on somehow. You know, the organization, but I guess there's not much you can do about it. It's all disappeared.

NP: Was there any hint, at the time that you were active, that the Wheat Pools weren't going to be around. Did you ever have any sense of that?

RS: Some people would, yes. Every once in a while, they would mention that, or I think some years we had really good earnings, and our earnings kept going down every year, and our expenses kept going up. It ended up that Alberta Pool and Manitoba Pool Elevators had amalgamated and formed Agricore. Later on, they tried to buy out United Grain Growers, and that didn't work out. [Laughs] They eventually joined with United Grain Growers and formed Agricore United. But those were all farm organizations, and they're all gone. So you kind of--. I don't know why it all disappeared so quickly, I just kind of--.

NP: Did you sort of keep an interest in what was happening?

RS: Yes, I did. But after you're gone, other people are doing it, and so you know.

NP: Do you have some speculation about why they went?

RS: Well, I think part of it is one of the things we should've done earlier in the game was the three Pools should've amalgamated, and for one reason or another, that never happened. Part of it was nobody wanted to give up anything, and so in a way it was our own fault. Sask Pool was a big, huge organization and it was doing very well, and we thought we'd just be swallowed up. We didn't want to lose our identity, but we've lost everything. [Laughs] I don't know. So that's the part I feel--. I can remember some of the first meetings when we met with those people with Sask Pool and that and tried to get--. But I can look back at it now. I think I was just a delegate then, and we had to kind of join meetings. We should've maybe put a committee together and say, "You guys do this." But it didn't happen. Everybody was reluctant to--. Maybe we as in our positions were reluctant to give them up too. I'm not

sure what it was. I would have gladly given mine up. [Laughing] But anyhow that's what happened. I'm trying to think that there was something else I was going to mention here while we're talking about that.

NP: So there were discussions that early on then?

RS: Well, yes. Quite early. I know Doug was president one of the first times I was involved in that, and we'd come together with those organizations, and then they did try to--. They almost came to an agreement here once in the summer after I left, or a couple years after I left to have one Pool, but it fell apart I guess because of the demands of one of the organizations. They said they won't do it, and so it's too bad there wasn't a little more give and take I think. **[Audio pauses]** I think we all do that.

NP: Now, we were talking about the amalgamation of the Pools and the decisions that were made that in retrospect—wouldn't it be nice to know—turned out to be death knells. While we're talking about death knells, let's talk about--. No. I don't want to talk about death knells. I'll come back to that. In Thunder Bay, at one point there was an Alberta Wheat Pool Terminal.

RS: Yes.

NP: Was that still in operation when you were--?

RS: No, not when I was there. I think our grain was shipped to--. I'm not sure whether--. Manitoba Pool had a terminal there, didn't they? Or Sask Pool?

NP: They had several, yes.

RS: I think most of our grain went into those facilities. I think we did away or sold that maybe before I became involved there. We had a terminal on Victoria Island for a time, but then eventually that was dissolved too because it wasn't really packed out to ship cars out onto ferries and that kind of thing. A lot of our grain, especially from Southern Alberta, Thunder Bay was the place it went because it was durum wheat and the United States loved our durum, and so the Wheat Board really had a--. The US was one of our biggest customers, as far as buying grain. You kind of wonder why people are not satisfied ever of what's going on. I think one of the things that's happening today as the farmers are getting bigger, and they tend to be a little more individualistic. And they figure they can do it all themselves, and they don't really need any help from anybody else. When you talk about the demise in the Pools, that has something to do with it too because it was harder and harder for people to run as delegates and spend that kind of time doing that. They had their own farms to run, they were running big businesses, so they didn't have time to get involved. That was one of the issues of the day, I guess, and still is.

NP: I was thinking about this while I was talking about Murray Fulton who is with the University of Saskatchewan Co-op. Well he was—he's now moved onto another position. I said, "Was one of the reasons that the tide turned against the Pool that people became less involved?" And you're just saying this now that they had only so much time and the farms got bigger, so they're willing to pay someone else what they used to volunteer to do.

RS: That's right. I think that they'll find with some of the people with the Wheat Board gone maybe don't--. A lot of them have the skills, but a lot of them don't have the skills to do the marketing, and so they're going to be paying somebody to do that for them. So they maybe haven't thought about that.

NP: Same with moving the elevators. Somebody had to pick up the cost. I think when we stopped, we were talking about the ability of farmers to--. How things have changed and the ability that they can stand up for themselves and not need organizations like the Wheat Pool or the Wheat Board and you said yes, some, but others might--.

RS: I think others--. It depends on their level of skill of doing some of those things. If they don't have those skills, and I think most of the farmers though nowadays are pretty well-educated people, and it's maybe different than when I started farming. That was going to be my career, farming, so I never thought about doing anything else. On our own farm, it's changed an awful lot since I left the farm in '87, I guess. Then my son came back, and he had new ideas he wanted to do. So we went into continuous cropping and that has--. We used to somewhat till half of our land and half the winds would come up. So that has been a great thing, that continuous cropping, as far as farming goes because it has conserved this whole [inaudible]--.

NP: Is that the same as zero tillage?

RS: Zero tillage, yes. So that's one of the big issues. And besides that, my son farms three times as much as I did. It doesn't seem to take him any longer than it did me to farm what I farmed because they have the equipment and that to do it nowadays.

NP: One of the people that I interviewed was talking about some of these changes on the farm, but he was also a little worried, I think, because of the tendency to lease equipment and just the cost of equipment while things are good, he can manage.

RS: I just shudder sometimes I think about how much he's paying for fertilizer and chemicals as well as the costs of machinery nowadays, but it depends. Today my son is off to Saskatoon looking at a sprayer, and he took his two boys along. He's got a high wheel sprayer, but he wanted a better one. So he's over there today looking at this, and he'll come home, go online to Richie Brothers Auction, and bid on that from home on Monday. That's one of the big--. The computers and that have really changed

agriculture too. The information that you can get so quick. When you go on Google and type in a sentence, and you got everything you want right there.

NP: Do you have a sense that in the current day farming situation that the bigness of the farms will carry them through in lean years or the opposite?

RS: I think you got to be pretty careful and make sure you carry crop insurance because there's nothing saying that you're not going to ever have a disaster. We've been quite fortunate here in the last few years. We've had really good crops. If you didn't have something there to sustain you over those tough years and if you're highly leveraged, you won't have a chance. You'd be out the window.

NP: A lot of second hand, really expensive equipment on the market. You're dealing with a lot of issues that would've come up anyway in specific questions, but I'm just going to take a look at my questions here. One of the annual issues that seem to—I don't know if plague is the right word—concern the Pools is interactions with the railways. What was your sense of what was going on there?

RS: Back then?

NP: Yes, or anytime. [Laughs]

RS: I think one of the things that we've lost with the loss of the Pools is somebody to go to bat for the farmers and keep the railroads in line. That's not--. There's nobody there now that's doing that. We used to spend a lot of money in our policy side of the thing, sending people to meetings, and we had transportation experts in our office, so that's something that--. And they kept up with what was going on with the railroads. That's one of the issues of today and also in the paper last week the grain handling charges are going up in—I don't know if it's the primary elevators or the terminals—but they're really skyrocketing this year, and I think when the Pools were there, we used to set out handling charges and everybody would kind of fall in line. And we didn't try to gouge the farmers. The Pool had to make some money too. At the same time, we weren't always trying to become millionaires over this, and our CEOs didn't retire with six million bucks or whatever. It was a whole different ball of wax.

NP: Now are you talking about the actual handling charges or are you talking about the Canadian Grain Commission charges?

RS: The handling charges, yes. The Grain Commission charges is what I was thinking. That's a government issue. I think maybe if we had been around there, we'd kind of hammered on them a little bit. I don't know if anybody is doing that.

NP: I think part of that is cost recovery.

RS: Yes, it is.

NP: And because of no inward inspection any longer, the charges for other things have to go up to recover the costs.

RS: Maybe I'm just being a little selfish. [Laughing]

NP: Well, it's a power game, right?

RS: Yes, it is.

NP: So when you had your annual meetings, did the railway show up and usually give a talk or did they try their best to try and avoid coming?

RS: We had a pretty good relationship with people in railroads, you know? [Coughs] Pardon me. Now where were we?

NP: You were talking about the relationship with the railways.

RS: We always had a pretty good relationship with the railroad people. Both CN and CP, they used to like to wine and dine us a little bit, you know, that kind of thing. Then when they opened a tunnel in BC, that new tunnel out there, they catered to all their customers and had them go out and have a look at that and so that was kind of good. I remember once I went on a tour with a lot of the other ag people, and we went to Prince Rupert and--. We flew to Prince Rupert and rode back on the train, a railcar that CN had back to Edmonton, which was quite an experience. So we would talk about farm issues and railroad issues on those kind of things.

NP: Were the railways considered the bad guys?

RS: I guess--. I don't know. I think they were, in a way. I guess maybe what they were after then too was to get paid more fairly for what they were doing for us and I have to--. The Crow rate went up and was there and they were kind of stuck with that so something had to be done with that. Eventually, it was resolved.

NP: Was that a divisive issue? The Crow Rate?

RS: I don't know if it was so much with the railroads and that, but it was certainly a divisive issue among some of the agriculture people, because the livestock people thought if they were paying an unfair price for their feed grains because we were getting a big break on shipping our grain. So that became quite a divisive issue among the cattle people and the grain people.

NP: My understanding is that you can almost draw a line across Alberta. I don't know whether it was through Red Deer, was that it? For Pool and Wheat Board support, north yes, south no. Is that--.

RS: There's a lot of Wheat Board support in the south. [Phone rings]

**[Audio Pauses]**

NP: We were talking about the imaginary line for support, and you were saying that even below the Red Deer line.

RS: No there was a lot of people that supported the Wheat Board in this, but I understand what you think. I think what you're saying is that south of Red Deer the support was less for the Board, and that's very true. But I think there's still a lot of farmers that support it here. There was some farmers that, I guess you remember, tried to haul grain across the line and got tossed in jail and whatnot. But it's kind of interesting right now with the Board gone and the border open, I don't see many people hauling their grain across the line. [Laughs] So they thought--. And people would watch the daily prices in Shelby or Great Falls, Montana and so they would get upset because they weren't getting that price for their grain. We never did get the high, we never got the low, but we got the average price over the year, and so that was--. I think now most of these people know the cost of trucking it down there and you've got to factor that in also.

NP: Well, it's a little different if you've got one or two trucks going across and the whole neighbourhood going across.

RS: I don't think, if it came to being it, the grain was always that much higher down there. Those Montana guys like to carry guns, and they'd be out on the highway, and they'd be stopping our trucks. They're a little different ball of wax too. [Laughs]

NP: It's interesting you say that because early on I was interviewing someone and he said, "The cross-border issue is not an issue because there's not a whole lot of grain storage capability across the border, and they're not going to be wanting to see it filled with Canadian grain."

RS: No, that's right, that's true.

NP: So somebody was going to--. You've put it in a far more entertaining manner. [Laughs]

RS: I guess the thing is that we don't pack our guns around like they do. Most of them have that gun in their pick-up truck or something.

NP: [Laughs] The Wheat Board issue, was it even on the table when you were with Alberta Wheat Pool?

RS: Oh yes. If you remember, they wanted the continental barley market, and that was a big issue at one time. I was kind of involved at that point in time. Charlie Mayer was Minister of Agriculture, and the one time he--. Well, at first, they took oats out of the Board and that wasn't until--. And then they wanted to take the barley out, and so the Pools, at that point in time, we went to bat and went to court and found out that Charlie Mayer was overstepping his bounds, and he was kind of breaking the law in doing what he was doing. So that continental barley market didn't happen at that point in time. Anyhow, so we went back and had the barley stayed with the Board. But in southern Alberta here, it was a lot of people never really marketed the barley to the Board anyhow because we have such a huge feeding industry here that most of the barley went into livestock feed.

NP: And having the barley that went through the Board, it was a pretty specialized operation.

RS: It depended on where you were. If you worked close to these markets here, you probably hauled it to the elevator, and it was sold to the Board.

NP: So did you ever question the worth of the Board to the farmer?

RS: The birth of the--.

NP: The worth of the Board to the farmer?

RS: I guess maybe I did at times. I think one of the things about--. There was times that we were having a hard time and only having four bushel quotas and so it ended up some of those years, we never did, but some people were trading their grain for machinery. The price of grain at that point in time across the line was probably higher than we were getting, and that's what kind of caused a lot of the unrest. I don't think they were getting that much more than we were either. But really, overall, I was always a supporter of the Wheat Board generally.

NP: Did you get to know any people operating at the Wheat Board as a result of your--.

RS: Yes, I got to know some of the commissioners.

NP: Any comments on those people? Similar to what you said about others?

RS: Most of them are appointed by the government, you know. But it's kind of interesting. Somebody, well one of the guys I really remember, he was president of the United Grain Growers, and then he was appointed as Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Wheat Board. Everybody thought, well--. Oh, I can't think of his name now. Anyhow, they thought, well gee he's really going to change things. But he--. Anytime we had been at meetings, United Grain Growers was always kind of anti-Wheat Board, and we'd go to meetings, and he would always be kind of antagonistic about it.

But he was appointed as Chief Commissioner, and it's kind of interesting because he didn't really say anything for about six months, and then he found out--. He just used it as a learning experience and found out how good a job the Board was doing and some of his friends back at home were really annoyed with him, because he switched his allegiance to the--. I wish I could think of his name. Lorne Hehn! You've heard that name.

NP: Yes.

RS: Lorne Hehn. I would be at different meetings with him at times. I remember one time we went to Charlie Mayer and asked me to go to Geneva for a bit of a GATT, short GATT thing. Lorne was along with that meeting. Actually, Lorne was a really nice guy, especially after he changed his allegiance. [Laughs]

NP: [Laughs] Well sometimes once you know more--. When you became a director and then moved up in the executive, what did you learn about the Wheat Board that you didn't know?

RS: I guess I didn't realize that they had such a broad scope around the world. You know that we sold to 70 countries or more around the world and I--. You used to just haul your grain into the elevator, and it was gone. So I guess that was part of the education that I had too, was learning about these organizations and what they really did and how they really helped the farmers.

NP: A lot of services that, if you're farming and paying attention to farming and not looking further, you just aren't aware they're there, like satellite systems looking at crop growing and--.

RS: Yes. Those are the new issues, I guess. The new things that are out.

NP: Because your son is still involved in farming, and the Wheat Board does still exist in a dual marketing system, what sense do you get about whether he--.

RS: He says he could live with it or without it. [Phone Rings] **[Audio Pauses]** He had contracted some of his grain to the Board but not all of it. I guess he doesn't have the dedication to some of those organizations that I had. Maybe it's my fault, but I think they grew up in a different world, too, and times have changed and so--.

NP: Do you think they had a sense for both--. I don't know a whole--. Well, I shouldn't say that. I didn't know a whole lot about the whole Pool philosophy or the Wheat Board philosophy, but both the Pools and the Wheat Board paid any profits back to the farmers? Was that not the sense--.

RS: Well, the Pools, like in Alberta Pool, we had a system where we'd have dividends would be going into a pool. You didn't get it paid out. They just kind of built up over the years, and then they had a numbering system that every year they tried to pay out so many farmers. Maybe they'd been in there 10 years or 15 years, and they'd be paid out and that's the way the Pools handled that. The Board paid. They took out all our expenses, and they paid everything back to the farmers in the final payment.

NP: I guess the big issue was whether they were efficient enough.

RS: Yes, I guess a lot of people think they were very inefficient. I don't know. That's a hard one to--. Unless you--. I don't know. Personally, I thought they did a very good job generally.

NP: How widespread would you say the support was for the Board up until the end? As far as you could see? For or against, not wanting to--.

RS: Who was it had the--. I'm trying to think had that last--. Put out a plebiscite and 62 percent of the farmers were for the Board. But it seemed like in the last--. Harper and Ritz are hell bent on doing away with anything that has any sense of regulation. They figured--. So they just dumped it. They didn't ask the farmers if they wanted it or not. It would've been kind of interesting to have had a plebiscite, maybe to see where the farmers were actually lying. If you had it today, I don't know where farmers would come out because there's not many of my generation left in the game. So I think the younger farmers--. And really, it's been kind of a bonanza since the Board left because our prices have been better than they have ever been. Whether they would think, "Hell I'm doing okay, I don't need the Board," so--.

NP: I think that's a pretty common sentiment. What can you say about the connection with the Canadian Grain Commission?

RS: The Grain Commission was--. I remember when I first became a director, and I went for two weeks to what's called Grains Institute in Winnipeg. Maybe you're familiar with that Grains Institute.

NP: Yes. International Grain--.

RS: Yes. And I guess that was really an enlightening experience to me. I didn't know anything about it at that time, and they set the grade standards and everything for our particular crop every year and that kind of thing. I really learned a lot about them then and came to respect what they were doing because they get a lot of bake and milling testing. One of the things we find is we go to the US for most of the winter. Anyhow, what we find down there is we can't ever find a loaf of bread we really like. [Laughs]

NP: I know. Isn't that annoying?

RS: I think it has to do with the quality of our grain because our millers here—or our bakeries—have the best of milling wheat probably in the world to bake with. Down in the States, they don't have that same grading system. They have more of a hodgepodge of grain that's coming, and it's mixed together. So they don't sort of, you know, the falling numbers for the bakery and that is a whole different ball of wax down there. I kind of think that they do a pretty good job.

NP: What would have been your experience on a local farm level with the Canadian Grain Commission? Anything like, did you ever see an inspector or the scale guys or--.

RS: Once in a while, you'd see a guy in the elevator, but I really didn't know what the heck he was doing there. [Laughs] But that's the way with a lot of things I guess.

NP: It really is an eye opener, isn't it?

RS: Yes.

NP: To get into any organization--.

RS: I guess that's one of the things that I have found and being involved in the grain industry and agrarian politics in general that I have really learned an awful lot from just being involved in it. I was kind of--.

NP: Was the Alberta Wheat Pool involved at all in grain research?

RS: We funded the--. What is it? In fact, I think [inaudible] was one of the first--. I can't remember the name of the organization, but we did--. And I sat on the board of that for a little bit, but you know I--. And it did fund a fair amount of research. We did a lot of in-house research of our own as far as canola and that kind of thing, and we had some agronomists were testing for varieties here. They grew them here and then they'd take them down to Southern California in the wintertime so they could grow another crop so it would speed it up. But now with the gene--. With what they can do with the genes they can do that so darn quick they don't take 10 years to develop a new variety anymore.

NP: Was genetically modified product an issue at the time?

RS: Not then so much, but I often wonder why that's an issue today because I don't think you can buy any kind of vegetable in the grocery store that isn't genetically modified. Or anything that you buy on the table I think is probably genetically modified, and I don't--. You know if you can grow better varieties and have higher yields and better quality, what's the big fuss?

NP: I think the difference is between variety development biologically, so cross pollinating and so on, and taking genes and taking the gene from another species and putting it in. The Europeans are a little annoyed.

RS: Yes, they are. I don't know.

NP: Was flax ever a product that was grown much here?

RS: We had grown some flax, but very little flax. Most of our--. On our farm we grew spring wheat and durum and barley in those early years. Then we'd grow some—well it would've been rapeseed at that time—and now we're growing a lot of canola and a lot of peas, special crops I guess we'd call it, and still grow a lot of durum. Those are—and spring wheat—those are our big crops today.

NP: Was there any impact on the shift from wheat to more non-wheat products? So canola really took off there. Did that have any impact at all on Alberta Wheat Pool, or it didn't really matter what people grew?

RS: I don't think so because they would handle both of those products and some of the elevators were handling peas and that and lentils. But I don't think that that would've--. They would have just adapted to that.

NP: I think we probably talked about major changes that you saw over your time and the cause of them. If you think back, and if you haven't already answered the question, what was a major challenge? Your major challenges through your time with the Wheat Board?

RS: With the Wheat Pool?

NP: Yes, with the Wheat Pool, sorry.

RS: Okay. You know that's hard to answer. It seemed like every year there was kind of a challenge. I suppose, you know, some years it would be lack of production, and it would really hurt the bottom line of the Pool. Sometimes it was political issues, I suppose.

NP: So if you think of challenges and lets just divide them into production and political, which caused you the most grief?

RS: I guess sometimes the political ones would be because there was always two sides to a story and sometimes some of the people on the other side would get a little bit belligerent about things. I guess that somehow we could never come to a common agreement on things. I think that's what's happened in our whole agri-politics in Alberta today. We have all these commissions, and they have their own set goals, and there's no common organization to kind of bring it all together because everybody seems to want to go their own way. That hasn't changed over the last 20 years I don't think, and I don't know if it'll ever change.

NP: Well, it may take a disaster.

RS: Yes, it could well be.

NP: We're talking about the flooding in Calgary, that's going to bring people together.

RS: Yes.

NP: Now you had—when we were off tape—you and Jean, your wife, you were talking about your visit to Thunder Bay. Can you tell us about that visit and what you thought of the Thunder Bay waterfront and what you saw there?

RS: You know that's been 20--. That was our 25th anniversary and we're coming up to our 56th so--.

NP: [Laughs] That was a long time ago.

RS: So. Excuse me. I can say I didn't really realise what was in Thunder Bay and that's why I wanted to stop there. I was quite impressed to see what was happening there, and I'm maybe disappointed in what you're saying that it's not being used as much as it used to be. Where has that grain been going? It's going to the West Coast and is some of it maybe going to Churchill? I'm not sure. But Churchill never did amount to much, and I don't think it ever will.

NP: Global warming might prove you wrong.

RS: It might. [Laughs] Yes, they opened that Northwest Passage, I guess, and we'll see some very major changes.

NP: Why did you want to stop in Thunder Bay? Because you're a far way away here.

RS: I guess we drove across Canada, and this was our second honeymoon, I guess. Anyhow, I kind of wanted to see what was happening in other places and in the grain business. And also, we stopped at every legislature across the country and visited every legislature that was across Canada and got into Halifax and seen where Canada was born and those kind of things. Those have always been an interest to both of us. Also, I guess I didn't--. When we were in Prince Edward Island there was three grain terminals in PEI, which I didn't realise, and so I had to visit one of those.

NP: Oh really? I didn't know that. Whereabouts? That's the birth place of my mother!

RS: Is that right? Well, I don't know what towns they were in anymore, but we did stop--.

NP: So they were the small elevators?

RS: Well, they were a small terminal. Not huge things.

NP: So PEI or Halifax?

RS: Prince Edward Island.

NP: Well, I'll have to track that down. [Laughing]

RS: Anyhow.

NP: I hear that Jean wasn't too impressed though, with the stop in Thunder Bay.

RS: No. She didn't like the night there. I guess it was kind of a hum all night.

NP: A hum from--?

RS: A noise from the terminals and we were camped right--. Or in a motel, close by to those terminals. But it was a great trip. We learned a lot about Canada.

NP: You never got inside one of the terminals?

RS: No, we never visited one. I had--. At Vancouver we would have an opportunity all the time to visit our own terminal in Vancouver, so I pretty well understood the operations of those.

NP: Do you recall your first visit to a terminal elevator? Was it on the West Coast or was it one of the government terminals on the Prairies?

RS: No, it was on the West Coast, actually. The Alberta Pool had a program—whoops I'm sorry—they had a program where every year a delegate from each district would get an opportunity to go to Vancouver with the director from their district, so that was my first time. When I was a delegate, I went out there. It was quite an eye opener to see that terminal and the big ships coming in and all the longshoremen and all the people that worked there, and the people that work in the terminals. The Grain Commission has a head office right in the terminal, and they always keep an eye on it, making sure we're sending the proper grades out, I guess. So it was an interesting thing.

NP: What impressed you most, would you say? Was size--.

RS: Well, yes. I think at that time we were just ready to open an extension onto our terminal in Vancouver, and so that was--. I think we had the largest terminal in Vancouver. Another thing I guess I can remember, I think Richardsons had that terminal, and they had

an explosion out there not long before that and had some problems with that. So the safety issues around those things and the dust and that were something you always had to be aware of.

NP: In Thunder Bay there were two major explosions, and I guess over 30 people were killed.

RS: Yes.

NP: So, yes.

RS: That was quite a while ago, wasn't it?

NP: Yes. In '45 and '52, I think.

RS: Oh okay.

NP: You've already talked about international connections. Did Alberta Wheat Pool ever have any incidents in their elevators, safety related?

RS: Not that I know of.

NP: Not while you were there?

RS: No. I think only we'd have fires in country elevators. When I first became a director, I think that we had just built a new elevator or moved a new one into Granum, and it burnt up and then not too long another one burnt up at Grassy Lake. So that was kind of a contentious issue among the districts because they wanted us to rebuild, and we were in the process of industrialization and so we didn't rebuild in those towns.

NP: Was there a philosophy of when you decided to--. Or what was the philosophy of the Alberta Wheat Pool of when you decommissioned a country elevator? Did you offer them for sale? Did you destroy them?

RS: Some were offered for sale. It depended on where they were, I guess. If they were on a main rail line, I don't think they were, but if they were out on a siding someplace, some of those were sold to farmers. They, I think, still use them today, some of them.

NP: Why if they were on a main line would they not offer them for sale?

RS: At that point in time, they had this producer car thing, and I think that was one of the things that I always thought that we maybe were wrong in always kind of opposing the people producing cars. I think if we would've said, "Yes, we'll help you load your producer cars or weigh your trucks for you," I think we would've had a better feeling amongst some of those farmers. Instead of that, it seemed like our policy was no producer cars. So in a town, another thing would be, it took up some of the track spots at the same time. Railcar spots.

NP: Competition issues? Or worry about competition?

RS: Not so much a competition. Just that we could've maybe used where that was sitting if we had another facility there for a longer track spot.

NP: When you think back on what has happened, other than getting rid of the elevators—the small elevators—was there any option?

RS: I don't think so.

NP: Like adding--.

RS: You couldn't afford to—[clears throat] pardon me—you couldn't afford to operate all those country elevators anymore because human resource costs were high, and there wasn't the handling in them to cover all those costs sometimes. They had to go. There was no doubt about that. Especially when the trains went away from the old boxcar thing and had the--. You could load unit trains. There was no way we would've ever survived the--. And railroads hated spotting three cars in a place. They just hated that. They didn't mind seeing them come down. It was kind of a nostalgic thing for a lot of communities to see their elevator tipped over in a big cloud of dust.

NP: Were they salvaged? Was the wood salvaged because that was--.

RS: No, it didn't seem to be. I think they just hauled them out into the landfills. That's what happened anyhow. I don't remember. Sometimes, earlier on when the Hutterites would come in and tear down some of those things, but they became a little bit more wealthy, and they don't want to monkey with that kind of stuff either. But generally, the machinery was maybe salvaged, but the wood wasn't.

NP: When you think of the wood that was in them, it was pretty nice wood.

RS: Yeah.

NP: I think I saw someone, read something about someone, who started a wood salvaging business and did quite well because they were such fine pieces of timber.

RS: Yes. To get them apart though with the big spikes in them, it was not--.

NP: You weren't going to do it with a claw hammer.

RS: [Laughs] Yeah.

NP: When you look back on your career, and it started way back when you started farming until—and your time through the Alberta Wheat Pool—what are you most proud of? What gave you the most satisfaction?

RS: I guess seeing my kids go to university, for one thing. I guess I'm proud of the opportunity to be president of Alberta Pool, was a big thing. I think those are kind of maybe the big highlights. Maybe locally, I guess I'm proud of I organized a history book to be written in our local community, and I kind of ramrodded that. I don't know. I guess just involvement in the community over the years and that kind of thing. I think it's been a pretty good ride. [Laughs]

NP: [Laughs] I would say so.

RS: I don't know where the 80 years have gone though. That's--. It just seemed like yesterday.

NP: That's true. Now I'm going to make a statement, you don't have to agree with it but I think you do from what you've said previously, in my reading and understanding of Canada's development as a grain trader, we accomplished—the country—accomplished a great deal to become an international grain trader in spite of being so far from port, harsh weather conditions, and a very sparse population. What role did Alberta Wheat Pool play in accomplishing that? What piece did it play in making us a world-class grain trader?

RS: I think in the early years they built an elevator system that would accommodate that, that was eventually changed to high-throughput system. But I think that had to be--. You had to have the places to haul the grain into and sell it and I guess that would be it. As well as maybe being involved--. Some of the early directors were pretty involved with international wheat agreements and things like that—way back before my time. I know of one of our former presidents, his dad would spend time in Europe, and he was one of the first directors of Alberta Pool. That was Alan McPherson. Those early people had a real impact on what the Pool became. We were just lucky to come along behind it, I guess.

NP: As one person said, or maybe a few people had said, it was first generation, second generation, and the third generation forgets.

RS: [Laughs] That's right. Well, we're in the fourth generation now.

NP: So we held off a little longer than most. Are there any questions I haven't asked that you wished I had asked?

RS: I don't know. I can't think of anything.

NP: Anything you just wanted to say that you haven't had a chance to say?

RS: I don't think so. It's just been a good ride.

NP: One of the things that we're trying to do, Friends of Grain Elevators—and this Voices of the Grain Trade is part of it—is we're trying to persuade the federal government to recognize Thunder Bay as the hub of grain exports for--.

RS: It certainly was in the early years.

NP: And it certainly was until about probably 1985/1990. It started to shift for obvious reasons.

RS: Well, there's still a fair amount of grain going through Thunder Bay.

NP: Just about, I think probably—given the increase in southern rail exports—probably a quarter to a third.

RS: Yes.

NP: Still goes out but markets have really shifted, which is the major thing. So if that centre comes into being, which is a big "if", but we can dream, right? What aspect of the Pool do you think you'd like to see represented there? So we're looking at the export market focus.

RS: Oh okay. Gee, that's a tough one. You know what I'd like you to do when you're in Calgary? Visit the grain academy.

NP: I'm not going to be able to. I think it's underwater.

RS: Oh, that's right. You would get a pretty good focus from that of what we are all about—or what we were all about. That's too bad. You know that's a toughie.

NP: Well, think about it. I was thinking about it this morning a bit, and I thought, "We don't want to step on toes." We're looking very much at it from this perspective of the rail shipping, the handling, and the water shipping. But what happens is--. And it probably maybe even reflects the issue that you mentioned that the Pools weren't able to come together, so Alberta talks about Alberta Wheat Pool, Saskatchewan Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Manitoba. But nobody talks about the broader view so maybe we do it in Thunder Bay. [Laughing] Because we have nothing. We have no egos to--.

RS: To defend, eh? [Laughs]

NP: [Laughs] So it's not--.

RS: We're selfish, aren't we?

NP: Well--.

RS: As human beings. I guess maybe--.

NP: I don't think so. I think when push comes to shove, which it did in the early days, those guys--.

RS: Yes, but then we had the opportunities in our time to make this happen and somehow it didn't happen. I guess that's one of my biggest disappointments is that the Pools didn't get together, and yet some people will say, "Well, we wouldn't be big enough anyhow." So I don't know.

NP: What, altogether you wouldn't be big enough?

RS: Yes. So I kind of thing we could've held our own, but anyhow.

NP: Yes. I don't know, and maybe you would agree. I don't know that anybody saw the implications of not coming together.

RS: No, probably not, no.

NP: Because there was really rapid fire--.

RS: But you know, we owned a Western Co-op Fertilizers. It was kind of a Pool/Co-operative owned thing. Confederation Co-op's was involved in that and Sask Pool and us. We used to get a fair amount of revenue from Western Co-op every year. And we had that big fertilizer plant in Medicine Hat was ours too. Some of the things we really kind of blew it in a way because we did have a lot of things. One of the things that I suppose, maybe during my time, you're trying diversification and that kind of thing, and some of that we bought a small flour mill in Camrose, and that didn't really work out and then we bought a brewery in Red Deer and people didn't drink enough beer, I guess. [Laughs]

Anyhow, that didn't pan out, but some of the things we did were quite successful, I think we operated--. And now I'm maybe being a little selfish here because I'm from southern Alberta, but we did buy out Demeter Agro, which was a mustard processing plant down in Warner, and also bought out a bean plant in Bow Island. We built another bean plant at Taber. So those are some of the accomplishments during my period of time that—and also started the joint elevator in Lloydminster with Sask Pool, which was kind of supposed to be kind of a get together and get things going together. But it didn't happen. Some of the high-throughput elevators were throughout the province that were starting to be built at that time. But then rationalization kept snowballing.

NP: Did Saskatchewan Wheat Pool start competing with Alberta Wheat Pool when it was still Alberta Wheat Pool?

RS: Yes, they came into Alberta and built--. Well, it's one terminal just south of here. What did they call it? I think they built four or five terminals in the province.

NP: That must've been a bit of a--.

RS: And a lot of people were annoyed about that, you know? Anyhow, I didn't think it had to be--. If we had been smart enough to get together, we could've been one entity.

NP: I think in talking to Murray Fulton, he said he's written about what happened and felt that it was a failure of leadership or bad decisions, but it's very easy to say that after the fact.

RS: I guess I often blame myself for not being more aggressive in pushing that forward. I know one of the last talks I made was to the three Pools in Calgary. I guess we usually had a joint Pool meeting, and one of the things I was trying to stress to all those delegates from the three was that we had to get together. Somehow, they kept trying to get together, but it didn't happen.

NP: Who would have more influence there, do you think? The CEOs or the president, or was it really a question of force of personality?

RS: I think personality had something to do with it. I know when they--. I guess when they came down to the nitty gritty here, I think that meeting was in Lethbridge here, about them all getting together was one of the summer meetings of the Pool. I wasn't involved but it sounded to me like either Sask Pool had a CEO. It wasn't Milt Fair. It was this fellow that followed Milt Fair.

NP: Was that Loewen?

RS: Don Loewen, yes. Anyhow, they said it had to be him as a CEO, and so that was put to kibosh right there, and so it didn't happen. Maybe if they'd had been a little more, said, "You know, we'll have to search for a new CEO," which would've been the proper thing to do. But they were quite adamant that Don Loewen be the CEO, and look what he did to Sask Pool. He pretty well broke it because--. And then maybe the board didn't pick up the pieces either. They let him--. He had maybe too much control. You're supposed to let your CEO go, but you've got to pull the strings sometimes. I don't know.

NP: Something came--. So the amalgamation of Alberta and Manitoba, was that after your time?

RS: Yes. That happened a year or two after I left, I think.

NP: So they were able to come together.

RS: Yes, they got together, and they moved their office into Winnipeg. So Charlie Swanson was the first president of that. Then it went on to become Agricore United when they got the UGG and the other Pools involved.

NP: We kept watching the signs change on the terminal elevators. [Laughs]

RS: [Laughs] That was an expensive thing.

NP: Oh, like a million dollars to paint an elevator.

RS: [Laughs] Oh god.

NP: Apparently Viterra is leaving the name the same.

RS: Yes. Now Viterra, I think it's owned by a European company, if I'm not mistaken.

NP: Do you have any sense of what implications that has for Canadian grain trade?

RS: I don't know if it has--. I don't know. We deal quite a bit with Viterra and with Richardson's now and Parrish & Heimbecker, and so we had to go to all these so-called big boys. And I don't know.

NP: Does your son--. Is it sons or son?

RS: Son, yes.

NP: Does he have a sense that there's enough competition?

RS: You know he's never--. They're a different breed of cats these young guys. He'll go wherever the best price is.

NP: Well, that's competition.

RS: Yes. So that's what he does, and although there's a Lethbridge terminal just out here that's about 6 years old, he has a share in that, so he hauls some grain to that, but that's maybe a little bit like the old co-op was. But there are some of those in Saskatchewan—several of those farmer-owned terminals.

NP: So this is a farmer-owned terminal?

RS: Yes.

NP: Okay, so we might be seeing the resurgence then. [Laughs]

RS: Maybe we'll have a go full circle.

NP: That's right. Well, it wouldn't be unusual.

RS: Yes.

NP: Murray Fulton and I were talking about this 100-year cycle.

RS: Yes. [Laughs]

NP: Things get bad enough and you say, "Hey, just a minute now."

RS: That's right.

NP: Okay. Well, it's been enjoyable and informative, and I know that I've just cut into your eagerness to get on the road.

RS: No, not today. Anyhow, hopefully it's been helpful to you. I don't know. I've forgotten so much about being involved, and I need to go back and kind of see where I was, I guess.

NP: Did you keep any memorabilia of your time with them?

RS: Yes, there's quite a bit.

NP: Yes, what--.

RS: My wife kept it.

NP: Oh, did she? She's a very unusual wife because most of them are encouraging their husbands to get rid of it.

RS: Well, she kept a lot.

NP: “Nancy, can you take some of this?”

RS: [Laughs]

NP: So what did you keep? Copies of your speeches or what?

RS: I got some of those, but I don’t have all of them. I don’t think I kept as many of those as I should’ve, I guess. But she kept a lot of newspaper clippings and things like this.

NP: Yes. We were talking about what you kept, and you know, if you’re looking through the stuff, if you find a speech that you think, particularly, if it had to do with trying to pull the act together, I would really appreciate getting a copy of that.

RS: I thought I had that one, but I don’t know what I did with it.

NP: Or look through and think, you know there’s something that would actually--.

RS: Fit into that.

NP: Fit into what we’ve talked about. We would appreciate that because with all of these rapid changes, some of it might have gone to archives, but some of it may not have, and I hate to see those things lost.

RS: A lot of our stuff from Alberta Pool is at the Glenbow.

NP: Oh okay.

RS: In Calgary.

NP: Well, that’s good to know. Did they have a pretty good collection of photographs and things such as that?

RS: At the Glenbow? Or at the Pool?

NP: At the Pool, which would’ve gone to Glenbow.

RS: Yes, I would think to ask the people that were in there.

NP: Maybe even something on the--. Gee where's the Glenbow? I hope it's not on the water.

RS: It's right downtown.

NP: Oh no.

RS: Well, you know, maybe by the time you get there, it may have receded.

NP: Except what's it done to the collections?

RS: Oh well, the Glenbow would be upstairs.

NP: Oh, it'll be upstairs, okay.

RS: Yes, it's all in--. I know I went there one time, and they have all their old minutes since--.

NP: In particular we'd like to know the history of what was called the Union Terminal and then became the Alberta Wheat Pool and then it was taken down, so I would like to see what--.

RS: Oh, okay, okay.

NP: So maybe sometime when you're going into the Glenbow, maybe I can set you on a little project since you're interested in history and see if you can find anything.

RS: [Laughs] This is on the Thunder Bay terminal?

NP: The Thunder Bay terminal, the Alberta Wheat Pool terminal. So pictures and decisions.

RS: Okay. I don't know if there'd be--. I don't know if they'd be--. You know they might have some of those at the Grain Academy but I'm not sure. That was set up in Alberta Pool started that, or one of our country--.

NP: Oftentimes in those cases they got copies and left the originals, for good reason. You'd like to have it more than one place.

RS: Yes, that's right.

NP: So if you, in amongst all your travels and whatever, if you want to take a little field trip and check that out for me that'd be great.

RS: We lived in Calgary for 20 years after I retired from the Pool, and we stayed there until five years ago, and we moved back here. But when we first moved, we had a son in Edmonton and a daughter at Sherwood Park and they had rugrats, and oftentimes we would have to be called out to babysit, so we went up there. Our oldest boy is a geophysics professor at the U of A and our daughter, they live in Red Deer now, and he does a lot of work in--. She's kind of an analyst, I guess, and she's working with some of the health units around Red Deer. But she has a master's, I think, in adult education kind of thing.

NP: Well, something to be proud of, that you have those accomplished children. So I'm going to shut us off here with my thanks. Oh, one more question. We're compiling a list of interested parties, like people who think it's a good idea to have a centre to recognize the contribution of the Grain Commission, the Wheat Board, the Pools. Can we add your name to the list? You don't have to say yes.

RS: Sure, yes. That would be fine.

NP: Good.

**End of interview.**