Narrator: Garf Stevenson (GS)

Company Affiliations: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, XCAN Grain

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Summary: Former president of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Garf Stevenson discusses his work as a farmer and his career within the Wheat Pool organization from member to delegate to president. He begins by sharing the history of both sides of his family settling in Saskatchewan, his growing up through the Depression on the farm, and his long interest in the Wheat Pool and agriculture before his own farming career began. He discusses some of the major grain issues during his career with the Pool, like the Crow Rate debate, rail rationalization, increases in trucking, country elevator closures, modernization and growth of farm operations, and building inland terminals. He describes being the chair for the Pools' marketing arm, XCAN Grain, its interaction with the Canadian Wheat Board, and international trips he went on to market Canadian grain. Stevenson discusses the loss of the Pools, the CWB, and the growing loss of the Canadian Grain Commission's quality control functions. He recounts his involvement in the International Federation of Agriculture Producers and compares Canada's agriculture industry to its international competitors. Other topics discussed include his interactions with the National Farmers Union and the Pools' farmer membership, visiting terminal elevators in Thunder Bay and Vancouver, the Pools' relationship with changing governments and ministers, Thunder Bay's crucial role in the national grain story, and predictions for the future of the grain and agriculture industries.

Keywords: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; Farmer cooperatives; Grain farmers/producers; Farmer delegates; Fermer meetings; Grain marketing; Grain transportation—rail; Crowsnest Pass freight rate; Rail line rationalization; Country grain elevators; Inland terminals; Grain transportation—trucking; Agricultural policy; Grain trade—Laws and legislation; XCAN Grain Ltd.; Grain export destinations; Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); Amalgamation; Boards of directors; Privatization; Alberta Wheat Pool; Manitoba Pool Elevators; United Grain Growers; International Federation of Agriculture Producers; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Terminal grain elevators—British Columbia; Labour relations; Computerization; Farming—Supplies and equipment; Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); National Farmers Union; Russia; Ukraine; Southeast Asia

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: Nancy Perozzo continuing to head eastward and homeward bound. It is June 25th, and we are in Whitewood, Saskatchewan. I'll ask the person who will be interviewed today to introduce himself and his connection to the grain trade. GS: Yes. My name is Garf Stevenson, and I was president of the Wheat Pool for six years and vice president for six years prior to that and really actively involved in the democratic structure of the Wheat Pool since 1959. A farmer throughout that period of time, and I was involved with the Wheat Pool and other organizations in Regina for 31 years prior to returning to Whitewood. NP: What other organizations were you involved in related to the grain trade? GS: Well, primarily the subsidiaries of the Wheat Pool and the Pools because at the time that I was there, it was the three Prairie Pools. XCAN Grain, CSP Foods, and other associated organizations involved with farm policy like Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Saskatchewan Federation, and then overseas with IFAP, International Federation of Agriculture Producers. During that period of time, because I was a mixed farmer—some of us called it mixed-up farmers—involved with the cattle industry and the hog industry, I happened to be fortunate enough to be appointed to the first Hog Marketing Board, to set it up back in the early '70s in Saskatchewan. It was around for 20 or 25 years before the industry changed. NP: So, a busy person. GS: Yes, but very rewarding, and I always kind of refer to myself as just off the back 40. No great aspiration initially and then got involved with the Wheat Pool and the democratic structure and kind of worked my way up from there. NP: I always enjoy interviewing people who started out working on the farm because I find learning a bit about how their families got started is interesting. So were your parents and grandparents working on a farm as well? GS: Yes, but I always refer to us and the farm where I was raised as likely being unique because the farm was one of 36 farmers that came back from the war and were put on half a township of land that was taken from an Indian reserve. So virtually all of those farmers started farming the same day on their land in, it was called Armentieres, which is a French name, seven miles northwest of Whitewood. So within a very short period of time, they had to build a school, and there was 36 kids going to that school in the '30s. Of course, I came up through that period. Very close-knit community. Entertainment, sporting activities, everything involved everybody. Of course, there was a large number of us kids of the same age because of the age of the farmers that started farming

there. To that extent, it was expected when Chris and I got married in 1950 that you would join the farmers union and join the Wheat Pool and the local co-op, and it just went on from there.

I think the Pool played a role that likely will be tough to replace because they were so strong on education and leadership development. I went to countless leadership training courses and whatnot on the operation, how to manage--not get involved in management, but how to hold management accountable to a board of directors. It's interesting that as I've come back to Whitewood here, I see some of those that were involved in the local Wheat Pool committees still taking on leadership roles in the community and municipalities and town councils and so forth.

NP: Now, you said that it would have been your parents then who started in Armentieres?

GS: That's right.

NP: Where did they come from? Like where were their parents?

GS: My father was born in Ontario and, of course, came west in 1908 with his parents. They went to Edmonton, and there was a snowstorm, I think, in June, and they thought, "The snow hasn't gone yet." They turned around and went back to Ontario in a boxcar and turned around the next year and moved back west again. I just can't fathom the boxing everybody up in a boxcar or on a train, all your belongings, and moving west again the year following. They came to Whitewood, and there was a large family of eight or ten. Then, of course, my father joined up in the army and went overseas in the First World War. My mother was born in England and came to Canada at about 3 years of age. They lived in a number of places in western Canada before she met my father, and they got married in 1926.

[0:06:08]

NP: Did you ever learn why--. You can understand why they went back to Ontario. [Laughs] But did you ever discover why they weren't satisfied to stay there and came back again?

GS: I don't know. As you talk to the old timers, there was a terrific will to get out and kind of come west. Then there was that will of the Europeans to come to Canada. It's just unbelievable the difficult times that they went through to accomplish that. I talked to a farmer from an hour and a half northwest of Swift Current, and they talk about coming out to that point an hour and a half by car with their wagon. And of course, they tie a ribbon on the--. They always wanted to know how far they went in a day. Well, they

knew how far a wheel would carry you in a day on a wagon, and they'd tie a ribbon on there, and one of the family would count the turns of that ribbon. That would kind of tell them how far they'd gone. [Laughs]

NP: I don't understand that. How does the ribbon work?

GS: Well, it's a large wheel, which is maybe 6 feet high on a wagon, and of course, that wheel will go about 15 feet if it makes a round. They would count the rounds of that ribbon tied on that wheel.

NP: Oh, isn't that interesting?

GS: Yes. [Laughs] And some of those people moved their pianos and that with them as they went to a homestead.

NP: Mmhmm.

GS: Another issue—and it's on my mother's side—as I said, they ended up here in Whitewood in the late '20s. They then decided to move up east of Prince Alberta to Snowden. My uncle and my grandfather walked up there to stake out a claim on that land, a quarter section each. It took them about 10 to 14 days to make the trip on foot, and then they came back and moved up with a team of horses the next time.

NP: You think, "Oh, well. A nice hike." But then you realize they had to eat.

GS: Yes. And the tragic thing about it, my uncle had married a Native gal from the Ochapowace Reserve and had a little boy, and while he was up there staking out his claim, his son passed away. He was buried before he got back home.

NP: Ah. You mentioned that the initial settlement in this area was on Aboriginal land. Was it just expropriated or--?

GS: Yes. It was--. I don't know. I don't have a better word. I guess it had to happen that way, but it was half a township that was taken off the southside of the reserve, and it's kind of interesting that many of the people on the reserve worked for us on the farm from time to time. We had a fairly large lake right behind the barn, 42 acres, just over half a mile long. They would refer to it as their lake. Now, it was to a point all of our lake because it was federal government water. It wasn't just a provincial lake. It was a federal lake. But no, and we had a great rapport with the Aboriginals and great--.

NP: In the later years, was it part of a land claim--?

GS: It did in the end when our land was sold off back a number of years ago to--. When my son and his wife went separate ways, it went back to the reserve.

NP: Oh, okay.

[0:10:04]

GS: Yeah, they purchased it back through land claims, yes.

NP: A lot of the things you said about your history raise questions for me, which I hope to come back to later on in the morning. Was your father--. When did he start farming in '30? You had mentioned--.

GS: No, in the early '20s.

NP: So he would have been in at the time that they were starting up the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.

GS: Yes.

NP: Was he involved in that?

GS: Not directly, although, during the '30s, I can well remember him driving in with a team and sleigh from the farm to attend a Wheat Pool committee meeting. So that was just part of their makeup. I never heard--. There was quite a bit of controversy around that start up time about the problems at the elevators, with grain different grades and lack of farmer, we'll call it, rights for need of a better word. But I never heard particularly that problem. It was interesting, though, in 1937, my mother and father let me go up to visit my grandparents at Snowden, and of course, that was right in the Depression. When I went up there, I was 10 years old, and I didn't get back for two years. So I spent two years of my life with my grandparents up at Snowden because they couldn't afford to get me back home. [Laughs] I do remember my grandfather going to Regina because there was either a farm rally or a demonstration. It was the time of the Regina Riot—I'm not for sure—but certainly he was going to one of these mass rallies.

NP: I have not heard of the Regina Riot.

GS: Well, it's when--. And here again, I'm not a great historian, but there was the Regina Riot where actually the police, of course, tried to I guess generate some law and order, and there was actually rioters that were killed at that time because it was almost a rebellion. There were so many people looking for work and that travelling the rails, and of course, that all culminated with the farmers that were trying to get better prices for grain and so forth.

NP: So when would that have been?

GS: Well, that was--.

NP: In the 1910s or later?

GS: I thought it was in the--.

NP: No? 1930s.

GS: That would be in the mid '30s.

NP: Okay.

GS: Yeah.

NP: Because there was labour unrest big time in Winnipeg.

GS: Oh, yes. Yes. Yeah.

NP: And Thunder Bay as well.

GS: Well, it actually moved east. It started in the west, and it went to Regina, and then I think it moved east into Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, yeah.

NP: Yeah. Now, I did pass Sintaluta on my way here, and that name just popped into my head because I've read a little bit about the history of the Pools. So what's the--?

GS: That was really the Grain Growers organization that started in Sintaluta. I think the person there was Parrish that was leading that at that time.

NP: Oh really? Any relation to the Parrish & Heimbeckers?

GS: I don't know. [Laughs]

NP: I think they came out from--. Well, I guess it depends when, but I think they came from southern Ontario too.

GS: Yeah. I would think there would have been a connection to the Parrish at Sintaluta.

NP: So when did your involvement begin with the Wheat Pool?

GS: Well, it really started, I guess, as soon as I started farming in 1950. I took an interest in--. I guess I always took an interest in farm organization and the role of the committees and the cooperative movement. So in the early '50s, Chris and I were active in the National Farmers Union, or Saskatchewan Farmers Union at that time, and then the Wheat Pool in 19--. I went on the local committee, I think, in 1953. Went on to be a delegate in '59, then moved up to a director, I think it was, in '68. I went to be on the executive in '71 or '72, and then of course, went to the vice president position in '81.

[0:15:11]

NP: Okay. Let me see if I've got this because I would like to transfer that to summary information. **[Audio pauses]** Copy of it that I can have?

GS: Yeah, I can give you a copy.

NP: Perfect! We took a little pause for pen clicking. [Laughing] So you took the usual route from delegate to director to executive member.

GS: Yeah. And then on into the office, we call it, in 1981 to be vice president.

NP: Okay. So from 1981 to when did you retire?

GS: ’93.

NP: 1993.

GS: Six years of that was the vice president, and six years as president.

NP: Okay. Good. You said you’d always taken an interest in the Wheat Pool. Did you go straight from high school into farming?

GS: Mmhmm.

NP: What interested you about the--? What got you interested in the cooperative approach?

GS: Well, maybe because I’m not a skilled communicator, but I was interested in the communication process, and I’ve kind of had that thrown on my lap for a long time because even when I was with the Pool, I would chair the bargaining committee with the union. Basically, had a very good experience doing it. And even since I retired--. I mean, I’ve really only been retired now for about two and a half three years because I was involved with farm organizations all the time afterwards. I was appointed to different boards, university commissions while I was with the Pool. As I mentioned, hog marketing, healthcare, Agrifood Council in Saskatchewan, Milk Control Board in Saskatchewan. All of these jobs. It was interesting, within a year after I retired, I was asked to set up a conference on cooperatives in the mid ‘90s or something it was called. The first email we sent out was to the cooperative organization in China. Within 48 hours, we got a fax back, “Yes, we’ll send four people to the conference.” We ended up with 500 international people at that conference. Very interesting.

NP: Wow. That’s, well, comforting is one word that comes to mind, having organized very small meetings on my part, to get such enthusiastic response initially from a country so far away really is heartening, isn’t it?

DS: Yeah. But it was part of the history of the Pool. We were recognized worldwide as a large cooperative, a successful cooperative. The vision of the early organizers, you know? The first presidents and corporate secretary had great vision, and what they put together was a structure that served it well over the years. As I said, a lot of training, education, and methods of getting the involvement of people. When you think of the challenge to go to a meeting back in the early years where it meant a delegate, likely an active farmer, going to town on a train and going somewhere and coming back the next day from holding a committee meeting. A committee meeting was usually seven to 12 people, farmers.

NP: I'll come back to this too because it's a theme that seems to be coming up. You mentioned that you were also active in the Saskatchewan Farmers' Union. I'm interested in how you would compare or contrast the work of that group or the goals of the group and the Wheat Pool, where they meshed, where they veered.

GS: Well, often--. Certainly, every Pool member was not a union member. I would think that every union member was a Pool member. That's the way it was. The Farmers' Union was kind of the activist side of farm organization, and of course, this flows out even into politics, but certainly the farm union, sometimes they were a thorn in our side, but at the same time, they were a strong supporter. As long as I farmed, I was a member of the farm union. Maybe I had some concern about the radical—we'll call it the radical—or more aggressive side of the policies of the union, but by and large, good people.

[0:20:46]

NP: Could you give an example of one of those situations where their policy was more radical than the Wheat Pool's policy?

GS: Well, the discussions around the Crow. Our objectives were the same, but there was an element within the Farmers' Union that said, "Well, you just don't go and talk about it." We took a very active role in the discussions around the Crow Rate with some risk, but I think at the end of the day, we accomplished more than we would have had we not got involved in the act of dealing with the change in the Crow. That was an experience in itself, and as long as when Ted Turner was president, it was kind of my job to be a bit of, call it the point man, in Crow Rate discussions. We were in kind of a quiet room across, cornerwise from the hotel in Winnipeg holding these meetings, and everything was supposed to be confidential. "What's discussed here won't be discussed outside." And I just told them, "If you want me here, then what I talk about here will be responsibly dealt with, but I'll be talking to my people back home about it. [Laughs] You make up your mind whether you want me in these discussions or not." Well, I never got told to go home. [Laughs] So I guess they valued our participation. But as we came out of the meeting, some of the First Nations people were there with their drum going demonstrating and talking about the historic Crow Rate and having this *thump, thump, thump* in the background of the Aboriginal people--.

NP: Were the Aboriginal people--?

GS: Nothing--.

NP: Just not related at all?

GS: Not at all. But the fact that it was in the background, you know, historic discussions on transportation. [Laughing] And you had the noise of the drums in the background.

NP: Mmhmm. They probably wished that the discussion went back further to the granting of the land to begin with. [Laughing]

GS: Yeah.

NP: What sticks in your mind about those Crow Rate negotiations?

GS: Well, I remember going to Thunder Bay just before the--. There was evidence there was going to be change, but at the same time, there was an element within Thunder Bay that thought change would be good for them. They'd been sold that theory. I flew down to Thunder Bay and had breakfast with somebody there one day and told him that if the Crow Rate changes, Thunder Bay will suffer substantially. A lot more grain will be going west and that. No, no, somebody else had told him otherwise. I think what we predicted came to pass.

NP: That's an interesting comment because, again, listening to various takes on this issue, which comes up without exception, I think, in talking to the Pool people, that any impact of the Crow Rate was really irrelevant because of market changes, shift. Would you not buy into that?

GS: Those that wanted change and to get rid of the Crow, we were going to see all of this economic development, livestock production would increase, hog production would go up. Everything. And it hasn't happened. In fact, we're seeing less and less cattle being produced today, and everyone knows the disaster the hog industry is in. So that did not happen. No, it's--.

[0:25:05]

NP: Now, let's go back because even though that's certainly my take on it that it didn't--. It may have worked out to be a problem for Thunder Bay, but it was minor compared to other problems. [Laughs] So what was your--. You said things would change for Thunder Bay and not positively. What was behind that comment on your part?

GS: Well, the way the freight rates--. And here again, I've lost track of the detail in the last almost 20 years. But there was the split in the freight rate and moving the grain west, and I think a break-even point is somewhere around here. It's Whitewood or the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border where it's profitable or saves money to go west. It's part of that, yeah. And markets changed too. We have to recognize that Southeast Asia became a greater market than Europe.

NP: Mmhmm. Now, the Crow Rate change, then, would have shifted that line? Or initially it was still more profitable almost, unless you're in Alberta, to ship to Thunder Bay?

GS: Yeah, there was at one time grain moving from the Saskatchewan-Alberta border to Thunder Bay, and now it's shifted so that virtually all of our grain in Saskatchewan goes west, yes. That's a--.

NP: Right.

GS: Just one other thing. Also, the Pool were, I suppose, criticized at one point for not being alert to how great grain moving on roads would be. Well, we see the results on our roads today. I mean, a lot of our highways are suffering because of the large amount of grain moving on rural roads in Saskatchewan.

NP:That brings up another issue. If there's nothing more that you recall as being memorable about the Crow Rate discussions, the trucks moving brings up the whole issue of rail rationalization and inland terminals, which also came along with promises of--.

GS: Yeah. Well, you know, there's the whole evolution of methods of moving grain in all of that. I mean, there's more than just one thing that happens here. The large trucks, the ability to move grain. The larger terminals were more than competitive with the small elevator. They could offer prices and benefits that the small elevator couldn't, so we know that has happened. The other one is the railways would often come to us and say, "Well, you know, you're closing every second point for your efficiency, but to create any real efficiencies for the railways, we've got to take the whole line out, not just every second elevator." And of course, that was a fact. On the other hand, there was no way of moving large volumes of freight as cheaply as what it was done by rail. But here again, we see highways being built right beside trans-Canada railway tracks. You were driving on one this morning. Large trucks are coming into town. They say the streets can't handle it. "Well, yes and no, but we wouldn't have it any other way." That's the reality of the day.

NP: We wouldn't have it any other way? Is that the communities saying that or the farmers saying that or--?

GS: Well, we want to get our product out here in a hurry. It's got to be quick, and the railways have virtually walked away from bulk movement of grain. Not grain, but--. To coast it's still there, but picking up at every individual point, and even our freight coming into town, I mean, it comes in with a large truck. There was a time when it was loaded off of rail into a horse drawn dray and delivered around town. Well, all of that has changed, and of course, it's fresh product. All of these things come into play.

[0:30:08]

NP: Now, that raises issues about tax base of these communities.

GS: Very much so, yeah. The major impact on a town like Whitewood here that used to have four or five elevators in town, farm supply sheds and whatnot. Major impacts.

NP: Which elevators were operating here? Besides Saskatchewan Wheat Pool of course. [Laughs]

GS: Well, there was Paterson, UGG [United Grain Growers], Pool. I think there was another one. Consolidated, I think. Paterson, UGG, Pool.

NP: And Consolidated? There was a Consolidated.

GS: Yeah. And another one that the Pool took over a number of years back too.

NP: Federal?

GS: Maybe it was--. No. Searle, I think. Searle, yeah.

NP: Searle? Yeah. Okay. Searle was here?

GS: I think that was here at one time as well. But you know, some of these small towns had six or eight elevators. Just unbelievable.

NP: So who's going to pay for the roads?

GS: Well, it's coming out of the taxpayers, and of course, governments say, "Well, we're struggling to keep the roads up." And of course, it's the same thing with the elevators too. People would almost say, "We're going to lose this revenue for the town." At the same time, where was that coming out of? It had to come out of farmers' pockets because you don't run elevators for nothing either. So while it was a tax base for the residents of the town, it was a drain on income for producers because those costs had to be passed back to the producers.

NP: There were more farmers to carry the cost.

GS: Oh, yes. A lot more farmers, but there were not more acres. They were just being held by more farmers.

NP: And so the bigger farmers have to take a bigger bite?

GS: Yes, yes. Yeah.

NP: Now, in the Thunder Bay area, there's something called unorganized townships where many people flock to because they pay something ridiculous like $100 a year in property tax. Is that the same here, or do the communities have a catchment area that takes in enough of a rural area that there is a tax base?

GA: As far as I know, there is an adjustment in the assessments so that if someone goes out on a smaller acreage of land—a quarter or whatever—it's likely not just based on the assessment of the land. It catches some of that other, yeah.

NP: Yeah. So going back to the beginning of this discussion, which was the rail and elevator rationalization in order to keep costs down—and I assume they had to be kept down—when you look at today's situation, are the farmers any better off? Or the cost they're paying now just comes from a different source? [Laughs]

GS: Well, it's so changed. I don't get to the Farm Progress Show very often because I can't even ask an intelligent question anymore. [Laughs] As I say, I go out to have breakfast in the morning here at the local restaurant, and I sit with a bunch of millionaires. It's because of the inflated value of land. Everybody will tell you that productivity and production and the profit from farmland would not really service the debt or the value of the land that it's grown on. And that's partly true.

NP: So nobody's too worried right now?

GS: I have young farmers telling me that it's not fun anymore. When you're looking at putting in an acre of canola, we'll say, and spending $200 to $300 an acre on farm inputs, production inputs, and the risk involved, I think we're sitting on the edge of a bubble that could break. As long as it's raining and not raining too much, and the crops are good--. But I know last year with the disease that came into the canola crop, there was a major loss of productivity, and fields that looked like they were 40 bushels an acre turned out to be 15. A big hit. No, farming today, they seem to be doing pretty well, but of course, a lot of them are farming on a large scale. But here again, relatively large investment in machinery.

[0:35:32]

NP: One person I interviewed—and I can't recall now who it was—also mentioned the issue of leasing and that being problematic and being so big that it's almost like the general population where they say, you know, the average Canadian family is, what, a few months away from bankruptcy if things turn down.

GS: Well, I think that's the same thing. We recognize that there's a large number of the producers or farmers out there that are living in very respectable circumstances, but as I mentioned earlier to you that I was a crop insurance agent back in the early '60s--.

NP: Oh, right. Right.

GS: I determined that I should give everyone in the municipality a chance to have crop insurance. It was quite an eye opener to go into every farmhouse in the municipality. Certainly, well, I guess you would say there's a wide degree of variation in a city from one area of the city to another, and you would see the same thing in farms. I mean, there were some real mediocre living conditions.

NP: And abilities, I would think.

GS: Yes.

NP: Abilities to farm well and safely.

GS: You know, that's a hard measure too because--. It's interesting. As we toured the Ukraine and Russia and that, and we would talk about the Ukrainians and that who had come to Canada in large numbers years ago—and especially north of here in the Yorkton and Kamsack area—maybe not highly educated, but very intelligent. Very smart farmers. [Laughs] They came in thousands to this country and made a major contribution to the development of the province and did it without wanting any unique recognition. Just did--.

NP: And a number of them stopped in Thunder Bay to build the infrastructure.

GS: That's right. [Laughs] Oh, it's amazing.

NP: Yeah. Since you've mentioned Russia and Ukraine, tell me a little bit about that trip, why it occurred, what you saw, what--?

GS: Well, quite a combination. On the one occasion, the three presidents went with Charlie Mayer, who was Minister Responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board [CWB]. So we travelled there for a week or ten days and saw some of their farms, their production, and so forth. Very interesting. Charlie was there, of course, to promote grain sales. And on another occasion, I was there. I think it was '87 and '91 I was there, '88 and '91. Quite a transition from one period to the next. Of course, they were having a different government environment. [Laughs] It's interesting. They said, "We have all these men in the army. As soon as they get out of the army, the government's cutting back on the number of people in the army. They'll be smart people." Well, they weren't. They weren't farmers. Just because you were in the army, it didn't mean to say you were an agricultural person. Then we were on one of the collective farms and saw the production there.

In the Ukraine, I mean, there's thousands of acres of wonderful farmland. We drove one day there on a chartered bus for five hours straight, and I suppose that was 300 miles. Never varied at all. Beautiful flat grain land. The security they had there, I suppose, is because we had a government official with us. There was a soldier, a policeman, at every time we crossed a road, allowance. Nobody else on the road at all, not even meeting us. Other times when we were toured around Russia with, well, Charlie Mayer again, the motorcycles and police cars in front and behind would parse everybody right off the road into the ditch. [Laughs] We must have cost them $1 billion there in a few days just with the lack of production while everybody was getting out of the ditch and back on the road again. It was almost cruel, but that's the way they did it. They couldn't afford to have the minister be in an accident. But a very interesting--.

[0:40:38]

NP: Now, I understand that—I guess it was maybe in the interview with Ron Depauw, who was a wheat plant breeder in Swift Current—that some of the grain that's grown here was actually initially from an area in Russia, Lake Lagoda, I think, area. So were you in that area at all?

GS: I don't think so.

NP: I would have paid more attention. My husband and I just took a little river cruise from Moscow to St. Petersburg, and we went either on or by Lake Lagoda, and had I known, I would have--. [Laughing]

GS: That would be interesting.

NP: I saw a terminal elevator there too. Did you visit any of their terminal facilities?

GS: Yes. Well, we did, although that doesn't just stand out in my mind that we saw anything significant there. We were, as I said, on a collective farm where all the children were in class there. Then their country must be really subject to erosion because they seemed to be cutting their crop about two inches off the ground, and every straw was piled up and fed to livestock. So it's certainly not like zero-tillage here where we have no dust storms anymore. But it was evident there that there was substantial dust moving around.

NP: You said there was a difference between your visit in the late '80s and the early '90s?

GS: Yes. I guess there was a dictatorship was more evident there in '87 than it was in '91 or '92 when I was there. They were talking about how much more freedom they have and this sort of thing. But I think it was the latter trip that we made to Russia. Many of our--. They weren't banquets, they were dinners with elected people and whatnot, and we would be sitting there, and it would be 7:30 in the evening, and our plane was leaving at quarter to 8:00, and there was no sign of anybody moving towards the airport. I would mention that it's time we got going, and "Oh, no. Don't worry. Don't worry." And sure enough, we'd get out to the airport, and the plane would be sitting on the runway waiting for us to show up. If you want to make friends with people, you don't hold them on the runway. [Laughs] So here was this number of Canadians walking up the aisle here, and we were the problem, the delay in the plane departing. So these are some of the little things that I recall.

NP: At that time, that was after—if I've got my dates right—that was after the big sales to Russia, or had they--?

GS: No, it was after that. Yes.

NP: Yeah, it was after that. How would you describe—in this case Russia and the Ukraine—how would you describe their attitude towards Canada as a grain competitor in some instances and supplier in another?

GS: No, the competitor part was never an issue. They also looked at us as a—and the people we were meeting with—as a resource that was of value to them because we were selling grain to them. I know there was some discussions there about grain and swapping for nitrogen fertilizer and this sort of thing, but a lot of our trips there involved around getting to their research stations. Oh, yes. And then seeing their combine factory, the Belarus combine. It's interesting. We were in the one factory there where they had a John Deere and a Massey combine sitting in the corner. They were copying some of these things. They saw us as a market for farm machinery. Well, it's really never materialized, tractors and combines.

[0:45:12]

NP: Did any of those—pardon me—visits involve discussions of the Cuban grain supply?

GS: Not that I was aware of. No, no, not at all. Here again, I imagine there were some of the meetings that Charlie Mayer would be at that I wouldn't be at. At the same time, Charlie was a great emissary for Canada as far as the Wheat Board is concerned. Did a good job, yeah.

NP: Now, we sort of veered off because it makes a nice little bundle, your visit to Russia, [laughs] but we actually got there through a discussion of modern-day farming here, I guess, comparing it with the situation in another country. So let's go back to the time during the rationalization. You gave some good information about the Crow Rate, and we started to talk about, well, what they would call in other industries, downsizing. What do you recall about the situation when you actually had to go and try to sell the idea of closing down elevators in real communities?

GS: That wasn't an easy job, and yet some communities would embrace it as being the right thing to do and "We've got to do it anyway." Some farmers would come to me--. And this was some--. And certainly farmers aren't backward and not know efficiencies. At the same time, some would say, "Well, I've got to buy a bigger truck." And I would say, "I'm not sure you have to buy a bigger truck. Maybe you've got to let somebody else haul your grain." That has evolved over time. There's very, very seldom, I think, where a local farmer with a small truck goes to an elevator today. It's usually a semi or a larger tandem truck. No, it was a challenge, but at the same time, the Wheat Pool at one time had over 1,000 elevators. I'm talking about Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. That was too many. [Laughs] The labour and the trucking. The trucks had outgrown some of those elevators too in size for proper unloading and so forth. So there had to be changes made, and of course, it was quite a difference for Sask Wheat Pool to move to large, inland terminals than the other companies because at one time we had almost two-thirds of the deliveries of grain in Saskatchewan. So anytime we had to build a large facility, called an inland terminal, that meant that we would have to gather grain from, we'll say, 30 or 40 miles around, and that meant closing our facilities. The opposition or a line company could come in that didn't have elevators in the area and put up an elevator, and he was viewed as being a service provider where we were looked at as being closing facilities, [laughs] which made it some--.

NP: Did you see a decline in membership as a result?

GS: Yes, we did. At the same time, I think the Wheat Pool was quite competitive. But certainly, their market share dropped off, so that's what happened.

NP: What was the checklist used to decide what went and what stayed?

GS: Well, location is one. I mean, is it on the corner of two highways? It's interesting. I can recall when we used to debate around going through a valley or over a river, the problem of hauling grain through. Well, trucks weren't capable in those days of crossing valleys like they are today. I mean, that's not even a consideration anymore. Now they'll haul 1,500 bushels, and they cross a valley with it.

[0:50:14]

NP: And why would they have trouble before?

GS: Well, a small truck, and just the difficulty of--.

NP: Of climbing the--?

GS: Of climbing the hill, yes.

NP: With a load.

GS: Yeah. It was an issue, especially for a farmer that may have to move all of his grain across there. It's such a change nowadays.

NP: Competition, I guess, would be another--. Like the chance of somebody else moving in or being there even now.

GS: Yeah, you open up a space for somebody else.

NP: Because there would be a lot of the--. Would it be fair to say that a lot of the points would have more than just a Saskatchewan Wheat Pool elevator there?

GS: Oh, yes. There were a lot of them that would have two or three.

NP: And if you went, they stayed.

GS: That would--. And there was some swapping going on. We would swap. If we had a low handling point in one place and somebody else had a low handling point here, we may swap out and get their grain at another location, and they would get our grain at the place we swapped out of.

NP: With private companies then?

GS: Yeah.

NP: Or would it be more likely with UGG?

GS: Well, we didn't call UGG a cooperative at that time. [Laughs]

NP: I think they didn't either, so you were on--. [Laughing]

GS: Anyway. No, that's the way it was. It was mostly with private companies that we swapped. And incidentally, I think we did less swapping, I think, with UGG than we did with the others. Yeah.

NP: Would that have been considered collusion in any sense? Like was that ever an issue?

GS: That never came up. No, that never came up. I think we have to recognize that there was a time when there was elevators that were pretty *[inaudible]* stationed throughout the province, and nobody was really left without access to another facility.

NP: Yeah. You mentioned UGG was not considered a cooperative. When did that happen? Like was that always so? Were they from the beginning so different?

GS: Well, we got mocked, I guess you would say, for holding long annual meetings because our annual meetings lasted five, six days. Theirs was usually one or two. We were much more active in the rural communities in holding information meetings and discussing issues with our members. It's interesting. At our board level, we didn't consider moving ahead on farm policy or major issues with 51 percent support on the board table. If we didn't have two-third to three-quarters or 80 percent, we thought we were not going to go ahead with something. At the other hand, we had 16 board members. Maybe we were overly emphasizing democracy. I don't know. But when we held a board meeting and there was a contentious issue and a major interest issue for producers, we would head back out to the country. Those 16 men would contact their nine or ten delegates, and they would hold meetings with the committees to discuss those issues. We were very conscious of carrying our membership along with us.

NP: Raising that question or that point about having your members with you and the democratic process, did you notice over time—excuse me--. Sneeze break. Did you notice over time less of an interest on the part of the farmers to devote time themselves to the democratic process?

GS: I think there was a start of that about the time I left. But I--. In the mid '60s, I can remember our corporate secretary at that time coming out, and he was what you might call my field man, and there was a staff person within each district that kind of helped handle the democratic and interface with the producers' issue. He came out, and he said, "Let's try something new. We'll hold banquet conferences once a year and invite all of our members into a meeting where the director would speak or a guest speaker." We did that, and I could--. In my own district or subdistrict, I would get maybe 150 to 200 people out to a turkey supper and spend an hour talking about Pool business policy issues of the day, and then the rest of the year, the committees would be dealing with those issues. But there was, as the farm numbers dropped off, there was a decline in, I guess, up to date Pool interest by producers. [Laughs]

[0:55:41]

NP: And when you think about that, can you speculate why?

GS: Well, farm population numbers were starting to decline, and I guess there was, we'll call it, farmers' busyness. There's families on the farm. They are busy with kids and activities that require them to drive them here and there and pull them around this direction and that direction. Then there's other things that would come along. Potash mines, shiftwork—that's all had an impact on rural communities, and a lot of farmers are working in the mines. If they're on shift work, they aren't there for a meeting at 7:00 at night. Like in this particular area, we have three things that pull people in different directions. One is potash, which we have three mines here in 35 minutes, a major manufacturer of zero-seeding equipment–zero-till–and the oil patch. There's people going every direction from 5:00 in the morning until--. Even if they're working a day shift.

NP: Mirroring, really, society in general because I suspect a whole lot of voluntary work, which in a sense you could think of the Wheat Pool—although the profit coming back should be--.

GS: But you know, we talked about the Farmers' Union being active in this group. At the same time, there was another element out there that would conduct strikes in parliament buildings and kind of take over the lobby of the Leg or whatever because they were never involved in going to informational meetings. There were those that didn't know the other side of the issue. You know, these things kind of come and go, and they create quite a stir for a short period of time. I'm not taking a position on the Idle-No-More movement, but these things come and go. I think the Wheat Pool could never be criticized in my days for charging ahead and doing

their own thing. Everything that came before that board table was "How does it affect me and my neighbour back home?" On the other hand, if you're a board member on any company, you have to operate on the basis of perpetuating that company over the long-term. That's your purpose. That was schooled into our delegate body many, many times. There's your organization that must survive, otherwise it is of no good, and the other one is it's got to earn that respect from its membership.

NP: Rail lines, rationalization of the elevator system, Crow Rate—any other major issues that you dealt with in your time?

GS: Well, I guess there's one thing that's on the horizon, and I often say—and Ted Turner and I have talked this out many times—that maybe we were blessed to be involved with the Wheat Pool at maybe the greatest time in the '70s and '80s because all of the historic ingredients were there. I think we're going to face a major issue down the road for agricultural production with the requirements of chemical use or not chemical use, plant breeding, housing of livestock animals. Agriculture has just got a pile of things coming up. I think with the requirements down the road here, and the use of chemicals and on what land it was used—not what rates—may be imposed upon agriculture by people that don't know anything about it. I'm sorry to say that. [Laughs]

[1:01:02]

NP: For example?

GS: Well, 25 years ago, we had people coming and speaking to us at some of our conferences that Hollywood would have a major influence on agriculture production in the future. The housing of hogs, the transportation of animals, the slaughter plants, and then there's the organic and the chemical use. All of these things are very emotional issues that people with a great deal of money can generate call it anxiety or excitement around issues that they really don't know much about.

NP: Mmhmm. Well, are they not seeing this in spades in Manitoba with the--?

GS: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

NP: So real issues, not just--.

GS: You know, as I mentioned, I was into hogs in a fairly large way back in the early '70s. To wean the pigs and put two sows back together, maybe some of these people that don't know anything about livestock production should see what happens to those two sows when they get put back into a stall together. I've got a clue.

NP: Yeah. Genetic modification, another issue.

GS: And at the same time, producers have got to be responsible in our actions too.

NP: Yeah. It's finding that balance.

GS: Yeah, that's right.

NP: Yeah. Now, one person—and I can't recall who it was, but what does stick in my mind was he was a knowledgeable person—had commented on the difference between farming done in Europe versus farming done in the US and Canada on large scales, that they're seem to be achieving a bit more of that balance. Would you agree with that?

GS: Yes. I know we've often seen the dairy cattle in the Swiss Alps and this sort of thing, and how the flowers are growing right there and all this. [Laughing]

NP: Well, I've seen them in Alberta too. They looked like they had a lot of room. [Laughs]

GS: But no, it's quite different. Labour issues and competition for labour too is another issue that farmers are facing in this area. The cost of labour. You may not have to have the same price for labour as, we'll say, the potash mine or that, but it's got to have some relationship to it.

NP: It's got to beat McDonald's.

GS: Yes. [Laughing] Well, even that, the Tim Horton's that have opened up and struggled getting people to work there because of the area we're living in.

NP: XCAN, tell me about XCAN.

GS: Well, XCAN was a joint, really, export marketing arm of the three Pools. I think United Grain Growers were involved there too for a while, but I won't put that in there right now. No, the three Pools had XCAN, and I was chairman of the board, or of XCAN. We were the—outside of the Canadian Wheat Board—we were the largest mover of grain out of the Prairies, more than any other grain company. I think they played a very important role. However, even towards the end of my tenure with the Wheat Pool and Milt Fair, we had management people saying, "Well, we could do this too what XCAN are doing." Milt Fair, I know—my

CEO—he originally said, “Well, listen. As long as we have XCAN, we’re not going to be doing this. They’ve got some expertise and skill, and that’s the way it is. You guys go back and do your jobs.” [Laughs] But I don’t think that attitude prevailed in later years. But I think XCAN was an excellent organization doing a good job.

[1:05:44]

NP: Who headed up--? Do you recall any of the names of the people who headed that up, and are any of them around?

GS: Well, Ken Matchett was the CEO during my period.

NP: And is he still around?

GS: I think he’s still in Winnipeg.

NP: Okay. Good. M-A-T-C-H-E-T-T?

GS: Pretty close. [Laughing]

NP: Okay.

GS: No, a very, very capable person. I was disturbed that they didn’t keep going with XCAN. I would attend the annual meeting of the Wheat Pool after I left the Pool, and I’d say, “Where is the XCAN report?” “Oh, well, I guess it’s not here anymore.” So it was gone.

NP: So that disappeared with the amalgamation of Manitoba Pool and Alberta?

GS: No, it disappeared before that, I think.

NP: Oh, did it?

GS: I think the individual organizations decided they would take on that role themselves.

NP: Oh.

GS: Yeah, I think that's what happened.

NP: Efficiency not top of the list, I guess, eh? [Laughs]

GS: Well, I don't know. They must have thought they had good reasons. We'll put it that way.

NP: Yeah. We'll find out. Was Ken Matchett the last head?

GS: As far as I know, yeah. As far as I know.

NP: Yeah. Hm! What was the interaction between XCAN and the Canadian Wheat Board because they had their network of--?

GS: No problem. We knew that, like any other company, if we were going to export wheat at the Wheat Board handling, we had to buy it through the Board and go out and market it. A lot of this is determined by the attitude of your management people. Our CEO in the Wheat Pool, he didn't altogether agree totally with our position on transportation or Crow or other things, but as long as he was working for us, he knew that he--. And we could trust him that he would carry our policy forward. That would be it.

NP: Did Milt Fair retire, or I understood that he died fairly young?

GS: Yes. I retired in April, and he died the end of September. [*Note: died May 8, 2001. Editor]*

NP: Okay, and who came after?

GS: Or the end of December.

NP: And who came in after him?

GS: Oh. I'll get back to that. [Laughs]

NP: Some names—and I have no idea if it has to do with Saskatchewan Wheat Pool—there was a Cumming--.

GS: No, that was Alberta.

NP: Loewen?

GS: Don Loewen, you're right. [Laughing] Thank you!

NP: I don't know which Pool they were in, but--.

GS: I know his face. No, it was Don Loewen, yes.

NP: Okay. Let's see. Interactions with the Canadian Wheat Board.

GS: You mean from the Wheat Pool?

NP: Yeah. Just experiences.

GS: No, we would enjoy a good sit down with them and ask them why they were doing this or that. That was natural. Several of the people who were leaders within the Wheat Board were previous Wheat Pool employees. We always felt that they may have been harder on the old employer than what they were on the other companies, but anyway, that's just the way it seemed sometimes. But no, as long as I was there, we were strong supporters of the Canadian Wheat Board.

NP: And what kind of services--? I mean, most people who would know anything about the Wheat Board knew that they marketed wheat, but what other services did you learn about that you might not have known about had you not moved into a--?

GS: Well, they were the sole marketer of barley and wheat, and I think the feed barley then came out of the Wheat Board for malting barley and so forth. But no, the Wheat Board played--.

[1:10:15]

NP: Did they crop report and weather services and--?

GS: Yes, and some control over the railroads.

NP: Ah.

GS: This is another area that I think somebody is going to say, "Oh, my goodness. Why was the Wheat Board there looking after our interests railroad-wize?" I think it's already starting to show up. I know the government are putting in place committees or whatever to monitor railroad performance. Another thing that has showed up here—and I only saw one article in the paper about it—was the Wheat Board had ownership and control of all of the grain going to market export. So when a ship came into Vancouver, if one terminal didn't have enough of that particular variety, they would just pull over to another terminal and top their load up. That's not the situation anymore. Now, maybe they've addressed that, but that was an asset that the Wheat Board performed.

NP: And I guess that could get a little tricky because if you have--. They're very closely tied together, as I would see them, because although there are some big facilities there, if your shipments are late by rail--.

GS: Yes, or specific grades are not available in volumes enough to service that total sale, then you--.

NP: Yeah. So the companies are going to have to be very careful with--.

GS: Yes. And are they cooperating enough to--? You know, if this company makes the sale to an export buyer, then why would another company want to help fill out that order, that sale? So if they don't have that quantity in stock, it has been a problem, as I said.

NP: It reminds me of--. Do you remember the time when we used to travel by plane, and if one company had a plane held up for mechanical, they would actually book you on the competition's flight? Do you remember those days?

GS: Yes, I remember. [Laughs] They would get along in those days, yeah. So anyway, these are some of the things that the Wheat Board--. And I think there's many others that won't be met as well as it was in the Wheat Board period. I have very strong feelings about the Wheat Board and how things were changed. Down the road, if anybody thinks that world prices and that have improved since the Wheat Board's gone, it's not much to do with it. It's not the demise of the Wheat Board that has caused the prices to go up. It's the degree of supply and demand and circumstance.

NP: Strong feelings about the demise of the Wheat Board.

GS: Well, the political action that was taken to, say, get farmers' so-called freedom. Some of the arguments that were in place about freedom to move grain into the States and that, I don't think that's been a factor at all. We understand that some of the prices

that were quoted from south of the line were not to get rid of the Wheat Board and put the Wheat Board in a bad light were not evident and are not evident now. I supposed some circumstances have changed too that maybe there's other companies that are showing interest in coming into Canada now that wouldn't come in with the Canadian Wheat Board in place.

NP: Companies such as--?

GS: Well, there is a company that is being set up down here by the border south of Estevan with large facilities to move grain into the States.

NP: Is that an American company, or is it specially set up just sort of that unit?

GS: I don't know who's--.

NP: I read a little bit about that in the *Western Producer*.

GS: I don't know who's supplying the money. It's certainly American connections. We'll put it that way. [Laughs] I would think there's investment from both sides of the border.

NP: Do both rail lines service that area?

[1:15:00]

GS: I don't know. I didn't think so, but I'm not sure.

NP: Yeah. I know some of the Canadian companies have been purchasing American lines. Particularly interested in that because of the impact on Thunder Bay.

GS: Yeah. Well, I thought they turned sod in this just a few weeks ago.

NP: Oh, did they? Hm. Interesting because--. Oh, we'll talk about it offline anyway. Talking about the Wheat Board makes me think about the demise of the Wheat Pools. Comments on that? And then I'd like to tie them both together and then move on into a different direction.

GS: Well, I'm not going to have an awful lot on the demise of the Wheat Pool. I was disappointed that our joint discussions didn't accomplish amalgamation of the three Pools earlier. I was involved in some of those discussions, and we just didn't seem to get there. [Laughs] I know some of them happened afterwards again, and there was, I guess, aspirations of some within management that they may have the leadership down the road. But anyway, that didn't happen either. I would think that had the Wheat Pools amalgamated in the period there, the very late '80s, early '90s, it may have prevented what occurred. It's always hard to say what I would have done had I been there another few years. I know the financial structure and the liability of the organization to pay out equity was an issue, but rather than go on the stock exchange and have shares, I think there was a way of protecting the organization and moving forward without doing that.

My thoughts would have been along the lines of splitting off of those things that were directly related to agriculture like the grain end of it, procurement, the livestock division, and maybe the *Western Producer* publications would have been a good thing to maintain in the direct ownership of the membership. And then if you wanted to raise capital for the industrial divisions like the CSP Foods, oil crushing, canola crushing, flour mills, maybe some export activities and so forth, maybe that could have gone public. I don't like the thought of having--. Which a cooperative, of course, can't be bought out by somebody buying their shares because that's not possible. But by going to the--. I think the Pool's role and service to farmers was too big to put at stake of somebody buying the shares and removing it from farm ownership. I think there was other ways to accomplish longevity.

NP: Now, what would you say would be the--. What's the word I'm looking for? Impetus. What would be the impetus to take the public approach as opposed to what you were suggesting as an alternative? Somebody had to make the decision. Someone had to--. Or some situations had to lead to one approach versus another.

GS: Well, you mean why was the drive to go public?

NP: Mmhmm. And why was it accepted? Because there was still a board.

[1:19:57]

GS: That I can't answer. [Laughs] I wasn't there to hear it. There is the problem of confidentiality of board members and shareholders in the interest of shareholders that becomes a factor when you go to a public share offering. But I guess to put at risk the whole organization the way going public did has proven not to have been the way to go. I'm not saying the Wheat Pool didn't come out of this 15 years later being a pretty strong organization, otherwise it wouldn't have been of interest to investors throughout the world, but the security of the equity was always top of mind and, of course, servicing that equity. I still think there

must have been a better way had we—or had they—pursued it, rather than go the way it did. This is pretty vague answers, I know that. I don't want to be--. [Laughing]

NP: Well, and you weren't there, right?

GS: No. But it changed quite quick after Milt Fair and I left.

NP: Now, what I'm thinking is—and in talking to the people that I've talked to along the route, and I've spoken to people who were mostly in it before the real wave of changes—but what comes to my mind is a lot of those people, your generation, they were leaving. Like they were hitting retirement age, and there was really quite a substantial changing of the guard. Would that be a fair--?

GS: Yeah, that contributed to it, I think. It was also a--. When things are going, we'll call it, relatively well, but maybe not really well—just relatively well—people get carried away. I can well recall attending the annual meeting a year or two after I left and shares had just gone from whatever they started out at, $11.50 or $10.50, it was up over $24. I mean, everything was "This could go to $30" and it never did. It never went any higher. It went the other direction. I think there's that. This happens in politics and everything else. I've been involved—and I've never been involved in politics even though I've been accused of it—I've seen that happen. When you look at the CCF/NDP, that was made up out of people that we say are reactionary. I've seen governments that have just been elected by a huge majority almost being out of it, high fiving each other at important meetings, and within ten years, the province was bankrupt. So people with short-term success kind of lose it sometimes, and maybe I don't say mentally, but kind of lose focus. Maybe that was a bit of it. I don't know. And here again, you hire leadership, and they're aggressive. They want to do great things and perpetuate the company, and of course, if it involves risk, sometimes it doesn't happen. Sometimes it leads to the demise of the company.

NP: Trying to get a balance between the power of the board and the--.

[1:25:01]

GS: Well, yes. I don't know. I didn't have a great education, but I've been involved in hiring an awful lot of really smart people and capable people. But at the same time, part of the responsibility of a board member is analyze, ask probing questions, accountability, and if you keep those things all in mind every minute and measure it against the answer you got at this meeting and the next meeting and all of this, that serves you well over the long-term.

NP: Now I ask a question that requires you to be a crystal ball gazer. [Laughing] So I am perfectly aware that--. I find it interesting from the outside—because I have no farming background at all—but I find it interesting that within a very short period of time two organizations that had really strong farm control or input aren't there any longer. And having one go and the other stay at least left farm strong input on one side. So who are the winners and losers in--?

GS: What organizations are you talking about?

NP: Well, the Canadian Wheat Board and the Wheat Pools.

GS: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

NP: So what are we left with now? We're left with producer groups and National Farmers' Union type of organizations. But who are the winners and losers in the disappearance of those organizations? If it's even fair to put it as winners and losers.

GS: You're talking about the producers being a winner or loser?

NP: Yeah. Because they were farm organizations, so--.

GS: Yeah. Well, I think the modern farmers of today with his computer, I don't think he's making many direct sales to China. So he's really delegating that off or passing that off to the large companies that are capable of supplying that service. The Wheat Board and the Wheat Pool, I think that we'll never get another Wheat Board. I see great difficulty in the Wheat Board surviving as another company out there in the way they're striving to do right now. I don't think it will work.

NP: Why not?

GS: Well, I just don't think it's on the farmers' radar today. Very few people, I think, are putting their grain through the Wheat Board and the services they're supplying.

NP: Lack of facilities a part of that?

GS: Well, lack of ownership of facilities, yeah. And even though they've signed contracts with all the different companies to handle their grain, it's very easy for the other grain company to say, "Well, run it through me here, and it's a lot faster. I'm giving you the same price on the market today anyway. If I'm giving you a few cents more, then you don't need to wait until the final pool

is established and all that sort of thing." So that's how. I think the Wheat Pool could have been supplying us a service that is still needed. One is as a competitor out in the marketplace, and the other one is I think there's an asset in having the Wheat Pool there that likely isn't there to most of the farmers today. Now, they've maintained the name Viterra, so that's a bit of an attraction. And of course, we're dealing with a lot of farmers who are farming today that they really don't know what the Wheat Pool was 15 years ago or 20 years ago, so that doesn't make sense. It's hard to put a money value on some of these things.

[1:30:58]

NP: Well, value isn't always money.

GS: No. But part of it is roads, and part of it is services. I understand that the Grain Commission role has changed over the years. I also know that the government are offloading some of the costs of some of those things that were being supplied by government now more and more. It's only $1 or so per tonne, but it adds up. I don't know whether farming is so profitable now that these things don't matter anymore. [Laughs] That's kind of sarcastic, but that used to matter.

NP: Yeah. In a conversation with Murray Fulton, we were talking about this and going beyond the financial aspects because if the farmer-owned organization was losing money, was it really a financial benefit to the farmers? [Laughs] It goes back to another comment that I made earlier on, and that was, in a sense—if you think of your resources as broader than just the financial resources and time being an issue—what I learned about the Pool movement was it really took a lot of dedicated people who donated an awful lot of time. Are modern-day farmers with what you had said earlier about the pulls on their time, are they trading a voice for some relaxation? [Laughing]

GS: You know, the old debate about household income and farm income and wives working. That's a tough one, and yet having more amenities and life than anybody ever dreamed of 40 years ago, I mean, it's totally turned around. Now they're too busy to do things, and yet they've got all these other things. We can't even fathom the amount of travel that some of these people are doing. I mean, they're all over the world. Maybe what happened in Calgary is a good wakeup call for a lot of people. I mean, some of those people have lost everything, homes and everything.

NP: Because our recorder doesn't know what you're talking about, could you just give a bit of background? [Laughs]

GS: Well, the flood in Calgary. These people have lost everything. And I believe that some of these farm operations are on the edge of that sort of a bubble, that if everything doesn't work out right, they could lose everything. I mean, there's some really large

operations, and they're doing a good job of farming, or appearing to do. But just horrendous investments, large seeding equipment. It's not uncommon at all to see several millions of dollars out in the field operating.

NP: Mmhmm. Doug Livingstone had a comment on that as well, and saying that there were big farms back, I don't know, in the late '20s or whatever, and--. Now, just to add to that positive comment that you just made—[laughing]—what about the impact of foreign companies? That's another thing that with the Wheat Board and the Wheat Pools, they were homegrown so to speak, and there are Canadian grain companies operating where head offices are here, and taxes are paid here and so on. Any comments in the positive realm and maybe not so positive about foreign ownership?

[1:35:44]

GS: Well, that's there today, and I don't see it as being an issue that many people are worried about or concerned about. The whole plant breeders' rights and the ownership of the genes and all of that in the grain you're producing, here again, it's part of that bubble. Can farmers afford to be paying for the price they have to pay? On the other hand, if you don't do this research and add those costs, you likely don't get the productivity out of the soil you're farming. I mean, it's the research that has gone into the canola and all that that's causing us to get yields something that we never dreamt of years ago. I mean, in my day, ten bushels an acre was considered a crop of flax, and now if they don't get 30, they think they're not doing well. So it's so different. Is there security in what we're doing today relative to the risks? I don't know.

NP: Is your crystal ball getting a little cloudy? [Laughing]

GS: Well, sometimes I guess I'm kind of glad I'm retired. [Laughs] At the same time, I wasn't the slowest in the pack back in my day, so I supposed if I had have been born 40 years sooner, I would have been ready for this sort of thing. Or later, I should say.

NP: Yeah. That as we get older, more things become more foreign to us. [Laughs]

GS: Yeah, and maybe we question what's going on. Maybe that's part of our identity with the age we're at.

NP: Mmhmm. Now, you had mentioned early on--. Wouldn't you like to have your father at this table to see what he'd have to say?

GS: There's one thing I should mention, and you mentioned about the time. I think we should mention too the role the wife had to play because I was, like on our anniversary there in 1970, I was in Singapore, and I got Chris out of bed that morning to recognize that it was our wedding day. [Laughing] You know, I mean, really to think of the travels, and we were farming on a relatively large

scale at that time. The family had picked up the slack, and the kids being teenagers, and Chris teaching school, and hired men, and all of this sort of thing—a fair challenge. It couldn't happen--. I couldn't have been where I was if it wasn't that she was back home here to do that.

NP: Well, I'm hoping that the--. Unfortunately, there have not been too many women involved in the grain handling and transportation area, and I'm certainly hoping the other story—the sort of the farm and farm family—is being told.

GS: I know Doug Livingstone and Al and Ted--. Although Ted was living in Regina, he didn't do an awful lot of Wheat Pool off the farm. He did a short period of time.

NP: You mentioned the International Federation of--?

GS: Agriculture Producers.

NP: Of Agriculture Producers. Tell me a bit about that experience.

GS: Well, I went to a meeting—I guess it was the annual meeting—in Canada here, two or three of them, and then over in London. I didn't go to one in India. I let my corporate secretary go. But it was really a gathering of likely 3 to 400 people.

[Woman]: Would you like a muffin?

[Audio pauses]

[1:40:12]

NP: You were just starting to talk about the International Federation of Farm Producers in the--.

GS: Yeah, Agriculture Producers.

NP: Agriculture Producers.

GS: There would be delegations there from South Africa and all over the world. It was really a melting pot. [Laughs] It's interesting we have so many South Africans around here and farming, and the way they're trying to get out of South Africa--.

NP: Still?

GS: Oh, yeah. Very much so. It's become a race issue that they're leaving, and yet, there was no evidence of that when we were meeting back 25 years ago, although maybe we were talking to the other element and that sort of thing. But these were very informational, and the wives were able to go—or the partners—and some of the wives, they would take tours of London down the Thames and whatever. During those meetings, we have pictures of meeting the--. What do you call the Queen's husband?

NP: Prince Phillip?

GS: Prince Phillip, yeah. We have pictures of him in the cheese factory in Windsor. Just things like that.

NP: How would you compare or contrast Canada as an agricultural producer internationally from those meetings?

GS: Well, I guess what's happened here is we're recognized—if you were around last week here at the Farm Progress Show was dryland farming—we're skilled at that. [Laughs] That's why maybe we can have a little rain.

NP: We smirk because of all the rain. [Laughing]

GS: But we certainly are recognized throughout the world as leaders in that area. So the thing is, of course, at many of these meetings, we'd go and have farm tours or whatever, and of course, in Britain, they would have grain crops that were producing 120 or 140 bushels an acre of wheat. Part of it is their moisture supply, and the other one is the longer growing season. We have to grow a crop in 90 days, 95 days or we get frost at both ends of our growing season, and their growing season is around up to six months, and that's where you get the higher production. Now, plant breeding and so forth and research is changing some of that, improving our yields, and of course, there are others more than just grain crops. It was livestock production, milk production, and so forth that came into play in those meetings. I don't know whether there's such a thing going on. I don't think anymore. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture I hear a little bit about it, but I think it still exists. Whether they're holding international meetings on a large scale, I'm not sure.

NP: Something just crossed my mind that probably would have fit in elsewhere, but I'll ask this question anyway. Tell me about the rise of—this actually probably should have gone back in with the Canadian Wheat Board discussions—but the rise in the movement for freedom in marketing from what you saw on a local basis. Was that a fast ascendancy? Had they been around for a while? Was there a reason for disenchantment?

GS: Well, you mean outside of the Wheat Board?

NP: Mmhmm. Outside of the Wheat Board.

GS: Well, really, that was just a statement that the Minister of Agriculture would use "freedom" because he was--. Any Joe farmer was free to go to any elevator he wanted, and they could pay whatever price they wanted to offer that farmer with the Wheat Board. You could pay another 5 cents if you wanted to, but no, they chose not to do it. So there was all that freedom. As far as freedom to market a load of grain, was there much before. Maybe not to truck it across the line, but really, he used that because he didn't know anything about agriculture. I'm being pretty frank here.

[1:45:31]

NP: Is he not on the farm? Or did he not have a--?

GS: I think he had an ostrich one time.

NP: Oh, okay.

GS: Now, I'm getting this information from radicals, and I'm a little bit like that myself.

NP: [Laughs]

GS: He doesn't know anything about agriculture, and I'm not saying that everybody in agriculture is unique or anything like that, but that was a--. But remember, the farmers of western Canada put the government in, and they must have wanted that more or less. I think they did a very good job on conning everybody into believing that there was mass interest in getting rid of the Wheat Board. Those from within the board--. And Avery Sahl was one that used to be on the advisory committee to the Wheat Board years ago. He had very strong views and did an excellent job of writing articles in the paper and so forth, but--.

NP: So from your vantage point, there wasn't a ground swell of disenchantment or--?

GS: No. No, there wasn't. And on the other hand, I would have to say there wasn't a ground swell of overriding the way they voted politically and deciding to support the Board either. There wasn't a ground swell. I think we're in a province here that has been

strong federal government supporters, and they can almost do anything they want and get away with it, up until lately. But I think this Senate thing is shaking a lot of views. Yeah, that maybe there isn't somebody looking after the shop.

NP: Hm. Big shift in gears here towards focusing more on the terminal operations. What was your first experience with a terminal elevator?

GS: Well, my tenure with the board started about '68-'69, and up until that time, oftentimes the board of directors of Sask Wheat Pool would go to Thunder Bay by train and actually hold a board meeting on the train going and coming home and then visit the terminals at the same time. We did that one time going out to Vancouver to see the terminal. We boarded the train in Edmonton and went out to Prince Rupert, I should say, and held a meeting on the train. But no, flying to Thunder Bay, it was kind of a wake-up call for me to see the large terminals and the facilities there and just the horrendous volumes of grain that could go through those plants. The issue of Churchill often surfaced. Why did not more grain go through Churchill? Well, Thunder Bay would put the quantity of grain that goes through Churchill on an annual basis in a short weekend. [Laughs] It was just that comparison. Of course, we had terminal No. 7. That was our idol. I think we had four or five more terminals, different numbers.

NP: At least.

GS: Yeah. But large--.

NP: In the end after some large buyouts.

GS: Yes. But no, it was interesting, and I found the employees there--. And oftentimes, we'd have a big banquet and 2 or 300 of our employees at the banquet. Give them an update. The president always had to speak, give them an update on how the organization was doing that year, and express our appreciation to them. Yeah.

NP: What kind of grief did you get from terminal operations if any?

GS: No, I didn't get a lot of that. I mean, there was concerns, yeah, but we had unions to deal with it at the terminal and head office in Saskatchewan. It was all pretty good. It's important to have strong leadership, and strong leadership is the type you hear about, which is good. But at the same time, they can make decisions on behalf of their members that they can carry through with. It's--.

[1:50:24]

NP: Can you remember some of the names of the union people you dealt with?

GS: I can't, no.

NP: Frank Mazur?

GS: Oh, yes. [Laughs] Yeah. Of course, he was representing all of them. Oh, was there a Bud Hargraves? I know he was in the--.

NP: He may be nationally.

GS: Yeah.

NP: But Frank Mazur was locally.

GS: Yeah, yeah. I know Frank. There was others.

NP: How would you describe Frank?

GS: I wouldn't be able to say because I didn't interface directly with Frank enough, no.

NP: Okay.

GS: It would be our management people. Hugh Wagner, of course, is another one in Regina here, and I have good rapport with him. The role of the president was not to get into management. So I would go to our senior management and say, "Okay, I'm going to go out and take Huge Wagner out for lunch today. We're not going to get into any details on contract discussions or anything like that, but all I'm going to tell him is if we're going to get there, we're going to get there together. If we're going to have conflict and not achieve our goals, then neither one of us are going to get there." In some cases, we'd have a contract signed before the termination of the one we were in. Our COO would come back to the board meeting and "Yeah. Between Hughey and I, we've decided we don't need to go to the end of the term. We can get this kind of an agreement." That saves all the resources that you put into labour negotiations.

NP: That's right. And strikes.

GS: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Now, I guess it was probably Alberta Wheat Pool, but I guess you as well were dealing with Vancouver, which I understood was a little bit tougher.

GS: Yeah, I think that's right. Of course, some of it is the location. It's like trying to hire farm help around Whitewood here and all the competition from mines and oil. There was a lot more opportunities in Vancouver. Of course, the expectations would be higher. Yeah. No, I think that's right. Vancouver is a different situation.

NP: Were you starting to rationalize terminal elevators as well when you were still there?

GS: In what way?

NP: Closing them down, making decisions to close down.

GS: Yes. I think so. I think--. Was No. 4 one of them that was shut down earlier? I think so.

NP: Now that one was where there were two explosions where people were killed.

GS: Okay, okay.

NP: I don't know if that--.

GS: I don't know.

NP: The history of that made its way to--. It would have been before your time on the board.

GS: Thunder Bay, I mean, that was starting the downsizing there. And of course, the argument there was, "We've got to do this if you want to maintain the jobs that you do have." But it's never easy.

NP: What about automation or computerization, I guess. That was a big thing that was occurring in the terminals during your tenure on the board.

GS: I'm not as familiar with the issues around that. I know the computers in the elevators arrived just about the time when I was on the board before I became president.

NP: Yeah, that would be about right.

GS: The big issue there was how was this going to affect the operation of the technology and that sort of thing, and it apparently survived fairly well because I think they're on their second or third round of computers now.

NP: Now, in discussions with it would have been Ted—yes, I guess—the name of Jim Macdonald came up as the terminal supervisor.

GS: Yeah. I just remember the name more than--. Yeah. But not well.

NP: Any connection with the shipping aspects, the lake shipping aspects?

GS: Not specifically. That would come up in the XCAN because of the delivery of product into the export market, but that wasn't a big issue.

[1:55:10]

NP: Who dealt with that? If Ken Matchett's around, he would know?

GS: He would know, yes. He would be your best bet.

NP: So XCAN might have had its own division dealing with--?

GS: Well, we never--.

NP: A person, anyway, making the connection.

GS: We never actually owned any shipping. You buy freight, and that was very complex.

NP: Yeah, and somebody had to arrange that.

GS: Yeah. And then there's all the insurance and all of these things come into play. I know you would find Ken very interesting to talk to because we had South American sales into different areas in South America. Quite interesting. [Laughs]

NP: Were there ever any big losses during your time? Like ships sinking or elevators burning down or--?

GS: Well, we lost a few--. Of course, the three Pools had our own insurance company. We had our own insurance that we paid into and then got revenue from it because--. And so, it was in our own best interest to manage to reduce the number of fire losses or whatever. There was one elevator at Luseland where we, I think, we built a wood elevator, and it got burnt down. Another one, I think while it was being built it burnt down, so we decided to build a concrete. [Laughs] And that was the first concrete that we built.

NP: Where was the first?

GS: Luseland.

NP: Loose--? L-O-O--?

GS: L-U-S-E-L-A-N-D. Luseland.

NP: L-U-S-E-L-A-N-D?

GS: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Okay.

GS: So that never burned down. No, we called it Pool Insurance. It worked well. It shared the losses if there were some, and at the same time, you got a relative return if you got a good experience.

NP: We interviewed one fellow who was about 100 years old, I think, and he was responsible for persuading the owners of wooden elevators—and you can imagine it was quite a ways back, and they were the primary elevators—to go to, I think, ball bearings instead of whatever they were using.

GS: Is that right? [Laughs]

NP: He said it was amazing the number of fires they prevented.

GS: Yeah. They would be bushings, yes.

NP: Yeah. [Laughs] One year they showed a fantastic change. That was an accomplishment worth noting. I'm just checking my notes here. I think we've really dealt with an awful lot of things. So on a more personal side then, when you think of incidents or events that were highlights in your career, what pops into your mind?

GS: Well, this is a bit of a personal note, I guess. You know the education you get in a rural school. Well, that's all I got. I never went to anything more than Grade 10, but I kind of operate on the basis of if the door opens, you walk through it. I did that all the way through. I can remember Jim Wright, the corporate secretary from way—but he was a field man—and he come out and picked me up and took me for a drive, and they thought I should run for delegate. That's in '59. This is nine years after I started farming. So I'd be 32 or something. He kind of always prides himself on getting Garf to run for delegate because he eventually went and was president. [Laughs] It's quite a--. From '59 to '81, which is, what, 22 years to get there? I kind of always operate on the basis of if I was eight or ten years in one spot and didn't move to a higher position, well, maybe I should do something else.

I remember the premier coming out one time, and it was during the big doctors' healthcare debate, and asked me if I would run for an election in the province. I phoned a friend of mine down in Arcola and asked him because he was involved with the Saskatchewan Federation of Agriculture. And oh, he says, "If you're doing okay in the Pool, maybe you should stay there." I did that because in politics it's so cruel. A person can be doing a good job, but he's tagged with an image. It's not fair. I stayed away from that, although I've been accused of--. One time a guy come, and he accused me of being political. I says, "What party?" He says, "The Liberal Party." "Well," I said, "I never voted Liberal." [Laughing] I mean, that's the way it is.

[2:00:37]

I guess the big thing that impacted in 1970, I mean, I was just on the board for two years, and the federal government came to the Pool and wanted somebody to go to Southeast Asia for six weeks on a feed-grain sales mission. I remember I was out in the yard on the farm and got this phone call, and we decided, yes, I would offer to go. They took me to Ottawa, and there was four missions went out that year—one to South America, two to the Caribbean, I think, and one to Southeast Asia—and I got to Southeast Asia. Everybody says, "Well, you got the best one." There was myself and a professor from the University of Manitoba and a management person from Canada Packers and a fellow from the poultry division of Guelph University and then the Grains Council.

I don't know if you remember it or not. It was a council set up, and the Pool wasn't very happy with it because it had views that weren't like our own. Pressber was the name of the fellow from the Council. He kind of took our hand and took us through Southeast Asia and kept track of everything.

But it was almost an experience that affects your life. We were in Korea where the trucks were backing in and grinding feed grain and actually running over rats to a sophisticated production in Taiwan and the Philippines and then down to Singapore and then to Bangkok and back home. Hong Kong. Three and four and five days in each country, and we were just going damn near 20 hours a day and receptions with the ambassador and council representatives in each country almost every evening. I mean, it was hard work. [Laughs] But we were in Kuala Lumpur and all of--. About ten countries. To see a little boy come out of a fishing boat and begging, you've got it all.

NP: So when you say it was life changing, how did all those experiences translate into--?

GS: Well, it was the same time as the Beatles, [laughing] and then Laporte was shot, and I was overseas when they found he was dead. It was just at that time. And then to go over and have kind of the long-haired Beatle issue here—guys not wanting to work wanting a living—and you go over there and see people just busting their back carrying 200-pound bags of feed up and loading it into a boxcar on their backs, small Korean people. Just enormous. So anyway, we were setting up the Hog Marketing Commission about that time, and Bob Edwards, a hog producer at Nokomis, and I decided we'd try to bring a Korean over. So we did go through all the hoops to bring him over for one year and have him work in our hog barns. Mine went home after the one year, and then he got married and wanted to come back. So he had two boys by the time he finally got back. Well, I couldn't bring somebody in because you had to give Canadians first chance. So anyway, I put an ad in the paper all across Canada that I wanted a Korean-speaking hog manager. Well, of course, they couldn't fill it, so I brought him back. [Laughs] But just the fact that I'd been to Southeast Asia caused me to end up hiring a Korean. But it was--.

NP: And he stayed?

GS: Well, he stayed for a while, and his wife, she never--. It was the same time as the boat people were coming out of Vietnam, and we tried to get them to go to language lessons here in Whitewood. They didn't want to because they were Vietnamese, and these were Korean. So anyway, she never did learn the language, and she was on the farm out there, and she couldn't speak English. Then they had a baby in the trailer. Anyway, they left and went to Toronto, got a little store on the corner of the street. A terrible thing. He committed suicide about two years ago, but he got his kids all through university and that. But you know, the 7/11 took over from the little grocery store on the corner. But he always wanted to come back and visit us, and he'd send us Christmas gifts

and cards every year. But just the connection with the Orientals, I guess. You don't go through Southeast Asia without having some reflection. [Laughs]

[2:05:44]

NP: No, that's true. And you see that shift in small things, even like restaurants and menus and--.

GS: Well, you see our restaurants here are--. There's three businesses only—four businesses--. There's the restaurant and the Can-Am, and there's the Can-Am that's owned by another Korean, and the restaurant's owned by another, and then the motels are owned by a Korean, and the Whitewood Inn is Korean.

NP: You know, that's what I noticed. I've said to people that Thunder Bay is really very isolated. I mean, compared to--. You might think, "Oh, a little Prairie town is pretty isolated," but you don't know isolation until you live in Northwestern Ontario. [Laughs] As a result, we don't get a lot of the current migration. So I was really—taken aback is not the right word—but surprised, I guess, by almost all of the places I stayed were highly staffed by Southeast Asian people.

GS: A little place here in the Esso here, they have a little bit of a restaurant, and two Filipino girls are working in there. One of them ended up getting married here to a farmer at Wapella, so it's good. It's been good.

NP: Oh, it is. It's just what was happening in the early 1900s with a different group of people. I hope the results are the same in--.

GS: Well, we always, years ago--. Like, when we were over in 1970 to the Philippines there, we kind of looked at the Filipinos as people that aren't very industrious, but those that have come over here, they are. The Kentucky Fried Chicken in Regina is pretty near run by Filipinos, and this guy that manages them all, he says, "Boy, without the Filipinos, we wouldn't be in business." But he says, "They are good."

NP: Well, and we've seen that. I lived in Winnipeg for years, and the Filipino population there, you know, has long-standing been--.

GS: Yeah. My mother died in Morris south of Winnipeg there and where my sister was, and the girls in the hospital there were Filipino. They'd go to the airport in Winnipeg just to be where there was people and sit in there for the afternoon. [Laughing]

NP: Yeah. We don't realize the culture shock happens in both directions, eh? An expansion of the previous question, which was personal highlights, what would you say you're most proud of in your grain-related career?

GS: Well, I don't know whether proud--. I guess satisfied would sound more like it. I think I was satisfied with my years as president. I had a board that, I guess, bought into my leadership, and I always had people who were interested in taking their place. I used to have farmers come into the office and wanted to sit in my chair. They said, "This feels good." [Laughing] But anyways, that's the way it is. But I've got to say too, the CEO and me had a really good relationship. And we could have a performance review, and I could sit down with him and really talk about where we're heading. We used to always have what we called a State of the Union address. [Laughs] We picked up on it from the Americans, but that was what the CEO did. He sat down at the board and talked about his vision for the future, and then that became the basis of a performance review the following year. "How did you do in moving along that route?" No, I think I had great satisfaction. And the fact that I've been out of the Pool now for 20 years, and for 17 years, I had other jobs. I had a good experience in the other jobs.

[2:10:14]

NP: What were the other jobs? Grain related?

GS: Agriculture related. Agrifood Council was one where all of the different commodity organizations in the province reported to Agrifood. And here again it was visioning and research, getting into the future, and then with the university and healthcare.

NP: Oh, right. The ones you mentioned earlier on.

GS: Yeah. And some of these, you're not very popular, but that didn't--. Everybody has a right to their own opinion, even if it is wrong. [Laughing]

NP: I agree with you there! [Laughing]

GS: I mean, you're put in a place to make tough decisions, and sometimes they're not liked. Sometimes you've got to clean up the mess that somebody else left, but that's where it's at.

NP: There's no reason for my next question following upon your last statement about sometimes you have to clean up a mess. [Laughs] But in your time with the Wheat Pool, you probably worked your way through a few ministers, federal ministers.

GS: Yeah. Mmhmm.

NP: Any comments on working with those ministers, and what were the talents that you appreciated, the lack of talent you sort of wish was--?

GS: I can't be very critical. We had a lot to do with Hazen Argue at one time, and then there was Charlie Mayer, and Mazankowski, Jean-Luc Pepin. All of these, we--. Of course, we did organize--. We rented a plane one time and took 150 people to Ottawa and met with Pepin about the Crow Rate issue. We took mayors of some of the cities, and I know Ralph Goodale was on that trip, but he's been around for a while. That was the Crow Rate issue. But by and large, pretty good. Certainly respectful. I know when--. Oh. Who was the Prime Minister when Len Gustafson was appointed to the Senate? We kind of went to bat for him. [Laughs]

NP: Conservative or--?

GS: Conservative, yes.

NP: Mulroney?

GS: Mulroney, yes. We would be in touch with Mulroney's office trying to get Len to be responsible for the Wheat Board. I think he was responsible for the Wheat Board for a period of time too when he was member of Parliament. Then he moved on up to the Senate. There was a fellow from the University of Alberta one time, and I was at a seminar with him in Saskatoon, and he says, "It must be tough to be a premier of Saskatchewan because the Wheat Pool are on your tail all the time." And it was right. We had a view on everything, and it wasn't vindictive. We fought hard, but I think it was always respectful. I mean, we met with anybody of any importance that came to Saskatchewan. We met with them. When I was in the office with Grant Devine in power, I went over to the Netherlands with him on a mission, and he would go to his meeting, and I would continue to have breakfast with his wife. [Laughs] But this was the way. We were always interfacing with--. What was it I was going to refer to? Well, there was an opening of an ethanol production plant at one of the feedlots in Saskatchewan here. I was getting phone calls in the morning, "Don't you sit with Grant Devine." Well, I mean, that's that other element out there saying, "Don't do this. Don't do that." I said, "Well, I'll be on the platform with him, and that's it. Forget it." Just an awful lot of interesting times.

As I mentioned with Grant Devine, he would always have the guests that we were honouring sitting likely between him and myself, and it happened to be the ambassador from the US, Mr. Ling. I just kind of casually said to him at dinner, I said, "It's a funny thing that the US generates more millionaires likely every day than anywhere else in the world would not have overall healthcare for

their people." "Well, sir--." Just *bang* like that. But as long as he was ambassador, I would get a card from him. If I was ever in Ottawa, he would take me out for lunch, and when he went back to Washington, he wrote me a personal letter how nice it was to--. [Laughs] But we kept communication open, but we had views. It was--.

[2:15:50]

NP: Yeah. That was a happier time, I think. And I don't know, it might be part of this growing older and maybe rose-coloured glasses looking back, that you could discuss differences and remain civil and sometimes friends. I don't know that we have that kind of discourse.

GS: I think that's still really on today. The Canadian Wheat Growers was a thorn in our side, always very right-wing radical, we'll say. Critical of the Board and whatnot. I used to have real battles with their leadership, but it's surprising how well you get on as soon as you get out and walk across the field. [Laughs]

NP: I've had some difficulty tracking down someone to speak, to record. I tried Alana Cook--.

GS: Cook, yeah.

NP: But she had bigger fish to fry. [Laughs]

GS: Yeah, she's the one--.

NP: Paul Earl, we did interview.

GS: Yeah, okay. Yeah, Alana Cook, she was the Deputy Minister when she let me go out of the Milk Control Board. But that was expected. [Laughs] One government appoints one person, and somebody else another. Alana. Just a minute. Harvey McEwen.

NP: Harvey. And where's he?

GS: He's Francis, Saskatchewan.

NP: K-U-E-N? McKuen?

GS: I don't know.

NP: Well, we can get that later.

GS: No, it's--.

NP: It's one of these names that depending on the census taker's spelling of it way back--. [Laughs]

GS: Yeah. I think it's C-E-W-E-N. M-C-E-W-E-N.

NP: E-W-E-N?

GS: Yeah, try that.

NP: Yeah, that's quite different.

GS: Harvey.

NP: A broader question. I'm getting tired of my spiel heading into it. Canada is a big country, not a particularly forgiving climate, pretty substantial distance to port, and yet, it became an internationally significant grain trader. How do you think that happened?

GS: Well, over a hundred of years ago when that waterway right into the middle of the country from the east, of course, was everything, oftentimes I'd hear people say, "Well, you've got this. That's the benefit." And you're right. The harsh climate, long distance--. Internationally, they used to just be amazed at our trains, long trains, almost a pipe of grain moving across the Prairies with container cars, the Wheat Board cars, the provincial cars, and the--.

NP: The hopper cars?

GS: The hopper cars, yeah. It's amazing. The railways that we do have on the mainlines now—and there's not very many branch lines left—but they are really piping that grain to the port. These trains are long now. Man, oh man. I mean, we hear them all night long going through here. [Laughs] I guess the other one is the grain quality, and this is what I'm a little afraid about is they seem to be reducing the basis for the quality and maintain controls of the product to market. It appears that we were getting detail where it's

costly to maintain and not necessary, but I'm not sure, the Grain Commission inspection and all that. And just what I pick up out of the paper, it seems to me that they're not riding hurd on that like they used to.

[2:20:42]

NP: Any sense of who's spearheading that--?

GS: Well--.

NP: Shifting gears?

GS: Well, I think it's individuals and others who say, "Well, it's not necessary. We're responsible to end unload anyway." But a lot of fertilizer suppliers and chemical suppliers in the province operated on that basis too. We could compete with the Pool and large companies because we were local. We knew what you needed, and we were okay, but they were not financially okay and went under, and farmers lost a lot of money because they had bought fertilizer that wasn't delivered. *Bang, bang, bang.* Bankruptcy, so they had to [inaudible] it. And of course, I've always been a bit of a stickler on bonding. If you weren't bondable, maybe you shouldn't be in business anyway. [Laughs] A lot of these service industries were not bonded, but the farmers felt they were performing a good role because they were selling for less. Well, of course, there's always a reason. Anyway. I hope that's not happening in the grain area too. When Europe got into financial trouble, we said Canada didn't because of our banking requirements. It was great. It kept us out of trouble. That's not slacking, that. [Laughs]

NP: Mmhmm. And I think part of the issue too is volume. Volume, is that it? Or production, yields. Yields versus--. Some refer to it as Cadillac production and feeling that they would balance off without the regulations.

GS: Yeah. You know, it comes back to the organic issue. Apparently, the organics can't be tested in the product to know if it's totally organic, but it's a trust issue. It's like the time I went to buy a bull, and I wanted a purebred bull. And the lady said, "Well, he has no papers, but we can get that fixed up. Come back tomorrow." Well. [Laughs] It was a paper transaction. It wasn't a breeding issue.

NP: [Laughs] I'll get my counterfeiter out, and we'll have these papers in no time!

GS: I mean, you need the checks and stops in place to make sure that things are right.

NP: I have a couple of self-serving questions, and then just a chance for you to say that there's some questions you'd wished I'd asked, but I hadn't. So first the self-serving questions. As the letter sent to you indicated, our major goal is to try to get an interpretive centre set up to recognize what one of our group members called the "grain industry nexus" that was developed in Thunder Bay to act as a receiving point and handling and inspection point for Canada's grain and ship it out to the ports of different countries. So if by some stroke of good luck we manage to get Parks Canada to agree with us that it's important, what part of what we've talked about today related to Saskatchewan Wheat Pool—and probably the focus on the international aspect of it—do you think would be important to feature in such a centre?

GS: Well—and you tell me if you think that I'm not thinking in the right area—just the mere fact that you're from Thunder Bay, I think you've got to put a high priority on the importance and the role that Thunder Bay terminals played. From there on, I kind of think we're all the branches leading into the tree trunk at Thunder Bay. We're just part of the things that fed into that significant port.

[2:25:27]

NP: So we're not dreaming in technicolour to think that this is a national story to be told in Thunder Bay?

GS: Oh, yeah. Yeah. You know, if you encapsulate the long-term history, I think, of how it all came about. As I said, when Jim Richardson did that seminar with me and about three or four or five others, I think Ted Allen--. Ted Allen, is he still living? He was head of UGG.

NP: Not certain. Not certain if he is, if he's well.

GS: I think I heard something about him being in a home or something in Calgary, but I'm not sure. But no, I think James Richardson spelled out how Winnipeg became kind of the centre. I mean, everybody came to Toronto, and then they shipped them west for the great things out west, [laughs] and then Winnipeg became that financial centre around grain. But I don't think you should ever downplay the role that Thunder Bay played, and the image I had as a starting member way back then, it was all Thunder Bay and the big terminals and what went on there and the ships. And the big, significant role that the shipping companies played—Paterson and whatnot—in moving grain east.

NP: Mmhmm. So it's a big enough story on its own?

GS: Well, yeah. But I don't think you'd want to wipe out these branches out west. [Laughs]

NP: Well, what good would any of it been--? [Laughs]

GS: Yeah, it wouldn't have been at all. But it--.

NP: And what good would the other have been other than as the nation builders feared at the time just heading the stuff south? Which I find, earlier when you were talking about the turning of the sod of the big treatment facilities, and I compare that with a 1915 issue of the Thunder Bay *Times Journal*, which talked about, "We've got the facilities here. We should be shipping western grain through a Canadian port." I'm thinking, "Well, it just took 100 years for that to happen." [Laughs]

GS: But you know, to think that a lot of that bulk commodity was going through small boxcars too at one time. Just unbelievable.

NP: You see early pictures of the grain elevators and just the stacks and stacks and stacks, lines and lines and lines of cars.

GS: You know, I forget how many elevators Sask Wheat Pool built in one year way back. Just unbelievable. You had crews all over the province. Percival here supplied a high proportion of the labour—it's the next town west here that's closed. A lot of those guys had connections with work crews on elevators. Just amazing.

NP: Hm. Just--.

GS: They were Swedish people.

NP: Ah, okay. Yeah, you look at pictures of the terminal elevators being built, and just 100 people standing on top of this elevator working, and now you hardly see a person in an elevator.

GS: Well, the switch from boxcars, the thing that used to go in and break that door and let the grain out the door, and then the car had to be tipped back and forth. Just unbelievable.

NP: And you sort of wonder, "Who thought of that one?" [Laughs] Don't hoppers sound more--? [Laughs]

GS: But you know, we were not quick to change. I can remember buying a grain auger and filling up one end of the granary, and the granary was only about half the size of one of these bins that these seed hoppers pull seed around in when they're seeding. We

would put a grain auger in one end and move the auger around the other end. We never cut a hole in the peak and the grain--. [Laughs] You know, we weren't too quick doing it too.

NP: The grain car issue, was that--?

GS: Oh, yeah. That was a big issue. You mean with the switch to hopper cars and--?

NP: Well, the hopper cars and farmer and government purchases.

GS: Oh, yeah. Then of course, farmers' rights to load their own grain, and all of these things were a factor too.

NP: Yeah. Now, this will be almost the final question. [Laughs] Producer cars, what--?

[2:30:01]

GS: Well, apparently producer cars is a struggle right now because of the elevator configuration, and every elevator isn't going to help producer cars because they want to have the--. I don't really know how they're facilitated right now. I imagine it's the producer has a contract with some elevator company at port, and then they have to go to the railway to get a spotting of a producer car. I don't know the--.

NP: Yeah. A lot of hassle, would you say?

GS: Yeah, yeah. Stewart Wells, he would likely know more about that.

NP: Mmhmm. He did comment on it.

GS: Oh, he did? Yeah.

NP: I like to get people commenting from various perspectives, and then--.

GS: I have to watch out here that I don't pretend to know something about it and you know more about--. [Laughing]

NP: Sorry, I went off track. One of the things we've been asking our Voices people to let us do if they don't mind, we've been told that probably getting National Historic Site status for a terminal elevator is pretty likely, but that just means we get a plaque. Well, we want to go further than that and get an interpretive site, which apparently becomes a heavily political issue. So we've been amassing a list of what we call interested parties, people who think, as you've just stated, that it's a nationally significant story that deserves to be told. Would you mind if we put your name on that list?

GS: No, I don't care. No, it's fine. Yeah.

NP: Okay. Any questions that I should have asked that I didn't ask?

GS: I don't think so that I'm aware of. I think you've done very well in covering everything and keeping me half on track. I think the other—and no doubt you were picking up on this—a lot of the people in the terminal were from Italy, weren't they?

NP: Yes.

GS: Italian names. That was always a fascination to me that the nationality issue was so evident there.

NP: Well, you know, it actually sometimes split down between elevators. So there were certain elevators that if you didn't speak Gaelic, you'd have difficulty getting a job there.

GS: Oh, really? Is that right?

NP: There were Ukrainians, Polish–quite a melting pot, but of Eastern Europeans. Finnish, but they tended--. There would be some of them, but in the early years, they would be mostly working in the lumber camps, but occasionally you would see them. But if you went into a spot in Thunder Bay—and I was from the Fort William side—called the East End, it was just a melting pot of all of these. Very few of the people who built this infrastructure came from, as here, came from Southern Ontario here. Lots of lots of farmers who pulled up stakes from Southern Ontario or moved up from the States, but the people who came, they could--. Normally, they'd say in the early days the Italians would work in the car sheds because they could do the work. They could communicate to each other, and the fact that they couldn't speak English was not an issue. And those who rose to positions eventually did so as their language skills improved.

GS: That's interesting.

NP: Yeah. It's--.

GS: You know, we always had to give the awards for 25 years and 35. Some names I sure struggled with. [Laughs]

NP: Yes!

GS: You'd get somebody, and they'd take you and brief you on how to say some of them ahead of time. It was quite a struggle.

NP: Yes. The Italian ones were usually easier. The Ukrainian, Polish ones, I'd have difficulty with as well. But when you grow up with them, you go to school with them, it just rolls off your tongue. Well, Perozzo, for example, is Italian, and although the Perozzo family themselves, most of them worked in the paper mills, but on my husband's mother's side, there were actually a long line of people but with a very easy to spell and pronounce Italian name B-E-L.

GS: Bel?

NP: Yeah. With just one L. The toughest thing they had was to convince people there should not have been another *l* on the end. [Laughs] And one of them, actually, early ones died in an elevator accident, so.

GS: Furthermore, you mentioned Murray Fulton. Do you have his phone number?

NP: Yes, I will. I'll have that. But can we just officially sign off, say goodbye to your listeners, and thank you so much for a very good interview.

End of interview.