

Narrator: William Tebenham (WT)

Company Affiliations: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC), Stewart Elevator Company

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Interviewer: Ernie Epp (EE)

Recorder: Owen Marks (OM)

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Summary: Government weighman William Tebenham describes his movement up through the Canadian Grain Commission from trackman to the assistant manager for weighing, as well as his earlier involvement in the elevators shovelling boxcars. He details the main responsibilities of the CGC's weighing department, including inward and outward weighing at the terminals and grain elevator audits across Canada, as well as his own eventual managerial duties and weight-dispute investigations. Tebeham discusses a computer program he and his colleague developed to assist in weight-dispute investigations, which could track individual railcars across the continent through digital data collection. He describes other major changes throughout his career along with computerization, organizational restructuring, and dust control enhancements. Other topics discussed include veterans in the CGC, the unionization of the CGC, his involvement with union negotiations and disputes, strikes, working in Churchill, his personal relationships with people across the continent, connections to the Canadian Wheat Board, and memories of his family's proximity to the Thunder Bay elevator explosions.

Keywords: Canadian Grain Commission; CGC weighing department; Weighman; Grain weighing; Trackman; Grain elevator audits; Grain elevator scales; Inward grain weighing; Outward grain weighing; Grain transportation—rail; Grain transportation—ships; Computerization; Grain data; Data collection; Labour unions; Labour organization; Public Service Alliance of Canada; Union contract negotiations; Accidents and injuries; Management; Grain elevator labourer; Stewart Elevator (Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Elevator 7B); Boxcar shovelling; Grain unloading; United Grain Growers Elevator M (McCabe's Elevator; Thunder Bay terminal grain elevators; Grain varieties; Canadian Wheat Board; Canadian International Grains Institute; Dust control; Weights and Measures Act; Canada Grain Act; Grain elevator disasters; Grain elevator explosion; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Elevator 4A explosion; Churchill, Manitoba; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Vancouver, British Columbia; Quebec City, Quebec

Time, Speaker, Narrative

EE: Well, Bill, it's good to have you here this afternoon and to agree to an interview with us in this Voices of the Grain Trade project. As I said a few minutes ago, I've got a whole list of questions, and the first of them is could you start by giving us your name for the record and describing how you came to work in the grain industry?

WT: My name is William Edward Tebenham. I came to work in the grain industry in 1963, and in 1963, I procured employment at what was then called Stewart's Elevator, which today you call Viterra B—or Sask Pool 7B, as it was formerly called a year and a half ago.

EE: How did you get into it in 1963? Was there a family history of working in--?

WT: There was a family history. My father was a grain inspector, one of his friends was a fellow named George Marks [Note: Owen's dad], and quite a few others. Most of them veterans from the Second World War. When I was younger, a couple of times—more than a couple—when I was a young teenager, I used to go back with my father when he had to go and work overtime. I would go down to the elevators, and I would sort of be in the office and sort of help out with little menial tasks and things, and I got an appreciation for what was going on there. So in 1963, I was still in school.

EE: High school?

WT: And I had an opportunity to get summer employment.

EE: This was high school age?

WT: Yes. I was still in high school. At that time, I was at Hammarskjold High School. At the same time I was doing that, I was in the Navy Reserve, and then I had to go away. Actually, I finished my final exams in the radar room of the *HMCS New Waterford* tied up in Rotterdam, Holland. My biggest recollection of that is I quickly discovered in the radar room that the two sailors working in there had never even heard of the word “algebra” never mind what it meant. [Laughing] But anyway, to make a long story short, that came through, and I passed and all those sorts of things, so I carried on my summer employment into 1964, also into 1965. I believe it was 1965, I was finishing up two Grade 13 subjects, so I stayed at work at Stewart's Elevators. In the late fall, the manager of the elevator came along—his name was Jimmy Goose—and he said, “Gentlemen, we're having a little meeting in the lunchroom. I want to make an announcement.” And he said, “Our elevator, Stewart's, has just amalgamated with the elevator over in Fort William called the Searle, and we are now called Federal Grain. And I'd like to present you all, each individually, with a cheque in recognition of that.” And we were each handed a cheque for \$5. [Laughing]

EE: Something to frame.

WT: Yes. And as was the custom back then which usually happened—and as everybody knows, Thunder Bay is a seasonal port—usually the day before Christmas, we'd all get our little pink slips, our layoff notices, and away we would go. So that career ended in, oh, in June of 1967, at which time my father—who worked for the Grain Commission and knew everybody in the Commission at the time—came to me and said, “There’s an opportunity for you to gain employment with the Commission.” And I said, “Okay.” And so, I began to have a look at books and notes and studies and whatever to be a grain inspector. And so, I studied and there was an exam, and lo and behold, I came first. But at the very end of it, they said, “You have to do one more thing.” And they said, “You have to go and take a colour test.” And they come out with all these little cards with coloured dots on them, and when you looked at the card, you were supposed to be able to see certain letters or numbers in there. Well, I told them of numbers and letters they never heard of before, and I found out that I was partially colour blind. And thus ended my career as a possible grain inspector.

[0:05:32]

EE: Because you wouldn't be able to assess the quality of Northern Red or whatever, eh?

WT: According to the conditions at that time, at that time. So I said, “Okay.” And they said, “Well, over on the other side here over with the weighing department, they're looking for some people there.” So in June of '67, I started employment with them. Within one month, there was a big strike, and I was let go, at which time I went and worked at the papermill for one month, and then I got on at Lakehead Psychiatric Hospital [LPH]. I stayed there for almost three years, and I got my registered nursing assistant papers. And when I left, I was in charge of the male ward of 2-North at Lakehead Psychiatric—72 patients, myself, and two female employees. In 1970, I got a call to come back with the weighing department at that time. That was in September. And I came back on September the 28th. I remember it very well. There were seven of us. By November, I was no longer a casual. I got my appointment to the staff, which didn't mean you were full time, but you got an appointment. And that winter, I got laid off for two and a half months, and I never got laid off again.

EE: You worked 12 months of the year all the way through?

WT: Yes.

EE: Congratulations.

WT: Well, it worked out well for my wife and my young family at the time.

EE: I'm sure.

WT: And so--.

EE: So you were still in the weigh staff?

WT: Yes. I came back to the weighing staff. They still had the rules about the colour vision in there, so that was not an option for me. And so, I became what they called at the time a trackman. In the contract, it was called "general labourer in trades," and there's a story behind that too. I know what it is because I was there. But anyhow, aside from that, general labourer in trades. So in 1970, I was a GL-GHW-5 which was a trackman, which meant you went out and did all the routines associated with the unloading of railcars. And you kept your nose to the grindstone, and you didn't dare venture anywhere into the elevator associated with loading vessels or anything like that. That was a big no-no at the time. There was like a hierarchy. Some of the people who were in charge of the departments at the time were still veterans from the war, and so, naturally, there was this sort of military set up where seniority wasn't official, but that's the way it went. And you could watch what would happen when competitions came out for positions. You could pretty well tell.

EE: Was it reflective of the rank they had had in the forces?

WT: No. I would say not. You couldn't dig that out--.

EE: So it was seniority loosely in the time of having entered the service?

WT: Right. So if I'd been on for two years, and a fellow competitor had been on for ten, there was no way I was going to come in front of him, even if I got 100 percent and they got 10 percent.

EE: Yes.

WT: It wasn't going to happen.

EE: Apropos of the military then—brought back to a moment to the Naval Reserve, you mentioned you were in that as well—was there any sense that the Naval Reserve was recruiting for the Commission sort of informally, or not?

WT: Well, the Grain Commission, like the grain elevators and the paper mills as well, after the Second World War, home came all the veterans, and of course, they were welcomed in with open arms at the time. So it would seem only natural that if a person went later and applied and said they had a bit of military association with whatever, you might be perceived as being a little bit more compatible with the routines that they had set up and their expectations, because number one, you knew what orders were all about. You knew how to follow them, and you knew about the chain of command.

[0:10:09]

EE: Right. Yes.

WT: And I remember the fellow very well, his name was Ross Tipple, and actually, he ended up he lived across the street from my wife. He was a stern-faced--. He was 6'2". He was the perfect military picture of a person, but I do give him credit. He was a very fair gentleman. Very fair.

EE: And he was in charge of the weigh staff?

WT: The weighing department for--.

EE: The whole weigh staff for the whole waterfront for the Grain Commission?

WT: For weighing services. So that meant for all of Thunder Bay. We used to do services throughout all of Ontario. There were other duties that I'll get into later associated with the job. And also, it meant Churchill, Manitoba. Thunder Bay looked after that.

EE: I see.

WT: And so, I started on there as a trackman. At that time, there was also--. The next level up was an assistant to loading vessels. They would help with the task of making tickets and inspecting equipment and doing things like that. And then the next level above that was what they called the receiving weighman, where you would actually weigh the grain or be there with the elevator personnel to weigh the grain up on what they called the scale floor at the time—where trackmen weren't allowed. Big no-no. Then after that, you could apply for and be what they called a supervising grain weigher, which was the person in charge of the staff for weighing at the terminal elevator. And they were the person who were in charge of loading the vessels for the government, reporting all the figures and amounts and all those sorts of things.

So I was a trackman. I started out at what was called Sask Pool 7A at the time. I was there for one month, and then I got a phone call to say that a person next door—what at that time was called McCabe’s elevator—had gone home sick, and could I go over. Well, three years later, [laughing] I was still there. It was pretty much, probably, for that job, the most difficult place to work and the dirtiest. They had what were called bobcats at the time on ramps. They would bust open the doors of the cars and get in there with the little bobcats and wheel around and move the grain.

EE: These are the little tractors, if you will, in a sense?

WT: Yes. That type of thing too.

EE: Yeah, that kind of bobcat.

WT: Only there were tons of them. They had 20 different what they called hoppers where the grain could be emptied out from the railcars, and there was one, two, three, four, five, ten, fifteen outlets that they could use to get in there. It was rather a complicated set up, but I guess the elevator employees who had been there for years, they knew how it worked. And so, if you stuck with them and followed them around, you learned quickly. There I was as a trackman. And then one of the other jobs that came with working for the weighing department as they called it at the time, was we used to audit the amounts of grain in all of the terminal elevators in the country. So at that time, we were also responsible for everywhere in southern Ontario where all what they call transfer elevators are, and also we used to go and help out, do all the audits in Quebec and Halifax.

EE: And when you say “we,” you mean within the Commission?

WT: That would be a crew of people who would go with the Commission.

EE: A crew of people from here? I see.

WT: Yes.

EE: But they would be from here. The “we” was Thunder Bay people employed by the Commission.

WT: Yes. And so, I can remember very well in 1974 boarding a train for Montreal. And the whole crew, everybody, travelled by train. And therein lies the first funny story where we all got on the train—I’m sure there were at least 14 of us—and we got on the train, and we got as far as Sudbury. Now, in Sudbury, the train splits and half heads to Toronto, and the other half heads through

Ottawa into Montreal. Well, we had tickets for the train. One of the fellows got off, and because the train split, he went in the office and bought another ticket to go to Montreal. But he already had a ticket to go on the train through. [Laughing] It was hilarious.

[0:15:21]

EE: He was going to put in for reimbursement, of course, later on. [Laughing]

WT: Well, he hoped! So anyway, I got exposed to--. That was another aspect that was expected of the job, part of the duties that you would be involved in, this auditing sort of thing. And at my level, there were duties that were associated with that, which were different than duties for some of the other staff that went, like the weighmen who went who actually weighed the grain, and the person in charge of the staff, and all those sorts of things.

EE: Your title at this point was what?

WT: Trackman still.

EE: You were still trackman, but--. What were you auditing down there, then, as a trackman? What would be--?

WT: We audited every pound of grain that was contained in the elevator. According to the Canada Grain Act, you have to audit all the stocks in store at least once in every 30 months.

EE: Once in every 30 months.

WT: That was the law.

EE: Why 30 months? Because that's two and a half years.

WT: That was a figure that they had which allowed the elevator to have what they called a cutoff, and they knew from that point we had X-number of tonnes of grain in the elevator. 30 months would go by. They had to report every pound they took in and every pound that they shipped out. So what's left? Whatever we weighed during the audit.

EE: Had to be there.

WT: If the figure turned out to be more than what they were supposed to have or less than what they had—I think it was 1/16th of one percent—then the government could go after the elevator to make them buy the grain, or they had to give it up to the Canadian Grain--.

EE: Or give it up depending on which side the discrepancy fell.

WT: So they had room to play. So if you go on an operation like that, it doesn't sound like much, but if you have a big, big elevator and do lots and lots, you have more room.

EE: Yes. Yes, indeed. There's a lot of work. Could you rehearse the system of elevators, then, that you would be examining? I'm curious about the where of it all. You would be looking at elevators at Goderich?

WT: Yes.

EE: Port McNicoll?

WT: Yes. Port Mc-Five-Cents we used to call it. Just outside of Port McNicoll—and I've been on it—Gordon Lightfoot's sailboat is there. It's called the *Golden Goose*.

EE: Is it there?

WT: Yeah, but I didn't know that until I drove down the road and went to go to Port McNicoll.

EE: And where else were there elevators?

WT: Midland.

EE: Midland.

WT: Owen Sound.

EE: Owen Sound.

WT: Windsor.

EE: Windsor. Port Colborne?

WT: And Port Colborne. There were three or four of them there at the time.

EE: Flour mills as well, I think, in Port Colborne.

WT: Oh, yes. We did the whole shebang, Maple Leaf Mills, Robin Hood, the whole works.

EE: Yeah. Toronto?

WT: Toronto, at that time, yes, was actually one of them. So then we'd go into Prescott.

EE: Prescott.

WT: Montreal.

EE: Montreal. Several--.

WT: Quebec City.

EE: Quebec City.

WT: Baie Comeau, Port Cartier, and Halifax.

EE: Sorrel?

WT: Sorrel too. Three Rivers as well.

EE: Trois Rivieres. Yeah.

WT: Yes.

EE: How long would it take?

WT: It depended on the amount of grain that was in the building when we were scheduled to be there. So one of the elevators, we might be there for a week. If we went to the place you mentioned, Goderich, we could end up there for a month or two months.

EE: This sounds like it's winter's work.

WT: It's a horse of a different colour. But I changed the rules there later on in my career and made it much easier.

EE: We'll get to that later on, changes.

WT: We'll get to that later on. When I had the ability to get in there and convince people to do it.

EE: Yes. How long did you work as a trackman?

WT: I worked as a trackman from 1970 to 1980.

EE: A decade.

WT: At which time I applied for a competition. There was an opening, and I moved from being a trackman above an assistant grain weigher, above a receiving weighman, and became a supervising grain weigher in charge of the terminal.

[0:20:01]

EE: And ships hove into view.

WT: I jumped over a lot of people, and that was probably the first time that anybody had jumped, and they had sort of broken the mainstream. In the meantime--.

EE: Broken through the hierarchical structure.

WT: Yeah. The standard of the way things progressed through competitions and whatever. About two years before the competition, we had acquired a new weighman in charge of the whole district, and he had come from Prince Rupert. And he had a different way of thinking. He had a country background, grain elevator operation background kind of thing.

EE: On the Prairies?

WT: And he didn't know anybody. And so now it was an open field. And so I was--.

EE: This is 1978 or so that he--. Was he brought in, do you think, to shake things up? Or was it just a result of his arriving?

WT: No. The other fellow, Bross Tipple, had retired, and there was an opening here. And at that time, the government used to control Prince Rupert, and they got out of it. And so, the person who was in charge of it was sort of shot in. So there was no competition.

EE: Right.

WT: He was moved in to take care of that situation.

EE: It sounds sort of fortuitous, but a rather happy event in the way of loosening things up here.

WT: Yeah.

EE: He was efficient, effective. He knew how to run things well.

WT: Yes. Matter of fact, the gentlemen he retired in 1990, and he phoned me three months ago from his home in Fort [Capelle], Saskatchewan to see how I was doing.

EE: He's returned to the Prairies, has he?

WT: Yes. From his roots as they say.

EE: Saskatchewan farm boy or something? [Laughs]

WT: Yes. Yes.

EE: What's his name?

WT: Clayton Bakke. B-A-K-K-E.

EE: Bakke.

WT: Yeah.

EE: Good. Well, good for him.

WT: His son lives in town here too.

EE: Oh, yes. Now you said something about general labourer of trades earlier.

WT: That was the terminology used. We had to bargain through the Public Service Alliance of Canada. I remember very well in 1967 when the Grain Commission at the time was an association. The association at the time—and I know every one of their names—was, at the time, headed by a group of gentlemen, each and every one of whom was a grain inspector. And they had to go to Ottawa because we were becoming unionized.

EE: It was the '60s, wasn't it?

WT: 1967.

EE: That the Pearson Government opened the doors to unionization in the public service.

WT: Yeah. And so, they went. And so, they got the grain inspectors set up in what was called the Primary Products Inspection group, or PI group, as they call it.

EE: The PI, which later is the Professional Institute as well. They had no connection with the Professional Institute of the public service?

WT: No.

EE: It's just coincidental.

WT: And from what I found out from the Public Service Alliance people—who I became very well acquainted with later on—I found out that in those meetings, they set up the Primary Products Inspectors, which is fine, and I don't begrudge them one bit. My dad was one, and so was Owen Marks' dad. And good for them. Great. They're all set up. They didn't know what to do with the weighmen because there was nothing to compare them to.

EE: In the public service?

WT: That is correct. And so, the government decided to put them in General Labouring Trades, which is down, down the list.

EE: Yeah. The Labourers International Union is sort of about the, I would guess, in the ranking about the lowest level.

WT: The word "labourer" is underlined.

EE: Yes.

WT: Mmhmm. So anyway--.

EE: Trades, of course, is just a generic. You don't know what to make of that.

WT: And it includes all kind of people. Ditch riders on the Prairies, the people who operate the locks in the Seaway system. I don't know if it was the person who operated the boom on the *Paterson* ship in the Welland Canal or not, but--. [Laughs]

EE: They're General Labourer in Trades.

WT: They're general Labourer in Trades, and--.

EE: So this is a separate branch of the Public Service Alliance of Canada?

WT: It's one of the contracts--.

EE: Different from the--.

WT: That they had. There were several of them.

EE: Of course.

WT: Technical, all kinds of things. But we were put in there apparently because they didn't know where to put us. When it came time for negotiations for contracts, everybody would come into Ottawa where the Public Service Alliance's head office was, and they'd all talk. And they'd say, "Well, what do you do?" "Well, I--." There'd be two of us there, eh? "Well, where do you work?" "Well, we work in an elevator." And they'd all laugh, and they'd go, "Oh, yeah. What floor do you want to get off on?" They thought we were bellhops. Well, they found out differently very quickly.

[0:25:21]

EE: I daresay.

WT: Oh, yes. They did. Because when I was a trackman—started in 1970—by 1972, I was the corresponding secretary for the union.

EE: The Public Service Alliance in Thunder Bay?

WT: For the local here. Our local number is called Local 30, and that encompassed all the grain inspectors, the weighmen, the scale inspectors, entomology, and all that stuff.

EE: Okay. The Grain Commission people.

WT: Period.

EE: Yes.

WT: So I was the corresponding secretary. I even established a newspaper, and it was called—because it was Local 30—it was called *30 Kernels* with a K. [Laughing] And I had an old Gestetner, the kind you had to put the ink on with the tube and crank the thing.

EE: Oh, those were the days,

WT: Oh, my. And then I got up to be the vice-president, and I got to go to Ottawa on negotiations. And I was fortunate enough to be able to be face to face, like I am with you right now, with the president of the Treasury Board, and I negotiated a bunch of special conditions for the people who were weighmen in the grain elevator.

EE: Who was the president you were dealing with at the time?

WT: Might be a gentleman's name you might know, his Robert Anders.

EE: Oh, yes. Of course, MP for Port Arthur.

WT: I can remember signing the papers. He came up here after, and we signed them officially in the Landmark Inn.

EE: Those were the days.

WT: And the fellow I was with, unfortunately, passed away a few months ago. His name was Dan Horne. He ended up with a very serious medical condition which cost him his life.

EE: As a result of the work he had done? An industrial occupational illness?

WT: Well, no. I don't think--. He ended up with Parkinson's disease and a few other things, which were--.

EE: Presumably no connection, but sad enough.

WT: Not a good ending for him. I felt very, very bad for him. He was a good friend. He was one of my mentors. He was one of the weighmen ahead of me, and he helped me out a lot. Speaking of people who passed away, I mentioned that when I started in 1970, there were seven of us.

EE: Who came in.

WT: I was--. Ten years ago—not even ten years ago—I was the only one left.

EE: Occupational disease would you say?

WT: Could be. There were deaths. People died from various different things.

EE: Would you relate them to the work they had done, to things they were exposed to in the elevators?

WT: No.

EE: It's in that sense that I mean--.

WT: I couldn't go that far and say that. No.

EE: You wouldn't say that.

WT: Although, I can remember being back--. When I mentioned I used to work for Stewart's Elevator, I used to shovel grain out of boxcars, and that wasn't an easy job.

EE: But you survived.

WT: I used to shovel grain with a couple of local notorious guys in town. One guy was named Stan Pressinger, and the other was named Eddy Maddigan, and I used to be in the boxcar with those boys. They had shoulders like this, and boy, oh, boy, if you didn't keep up.

EE: Yeah. You just showed a distance of about five feet, I think, there or six. You're exaggerating a tad, but they were broad fellows, eh?

WT: Right there, right with them. I was tall. I was thin. I could fly through the grain. [Laughing]

EE: And they just blocked it, eh?

WT: I was 6'2". I was only 180 pounds of solid muscle. And at that time, to get into the cars to get the grain, we used to be each given an axe, and we had to chop through the wood to get at it.

EE: Across the door, eh?

WT: And do it. And we had the old policy at that time for doing--. [Coughs] Excuse me. That type of work. If you shovel ten cars, you can go home. So five in the morning and five in the afternoon. There were two of you in each car. So right away, everybody wanted to go home early. So whoever was bringing the cars in and moving this and moving that, well, we'd heap a lot of pressure on them. "Hurry up! We've got to get out of here."

EE: [Laughs] Day by day.

[0:29:51]

WT: It was a big--. Yeah. It was a big thing. And in those days, that's when we all got one hour for lunch every day, and I could see what was happening. A lot of the fellows in the elevators—not just the one I worked at—would end up at the local establishments at noon and come back and maybe shouldn't have come back in the afternoon to work. That is one of the changes that took place. The elevators smartened up, and they said, "We're going right through." They cut out the noon-hour business because it caused too much trouble.

It was the same after work at the end of the day. "We're going to work overtime tonight." And they had too long of a break before they started, and some would head out to the local establishments. Well, all you're doing is asking for trouble because that's when you have accidents. I saw one fellow lose a foot in a cable. We used to have these big shovels in the car when we shovelled grain out of the cars. And you'd pull on that shovel on a cable and whip it to the back of the car, and the slack would go down on the grating and create loops. And this guy came and stood in the loop, and that thing just snapped his foot right off. So very, very simply things could happen.

I remember when I first started shovelling grain, we didn't have all the technology and the pollution equipment and all those things, and people actually had bandanas over their face. If they did any good--. I guess they did because I wore one for a little while until they brought out real, well, what they called dust masks. [Laughs] People would laugh at them if they saw them today. I still have a scar on the back of my hand when I took one of the big wooden shovels. You'd have to go up and put it against the back end of the car to get down to the bottom, and I had shoved the thing back and there was a spike sticking about like that. It went right through my hand. I can remember every word of it. And I went in the main office, and the person there in charge of operations, his name was Peter Robinson—you'll hear that name from other people—he said, "Let me have a look at it." So he wiped it off and there was blood. And I said, "What are we going to do?" He said, "Ah, dust is good for it. Get back out there." [Laughs] And I went back to work. But that's how things were at that time. That would be unheard of today.

EE: This was in the '70s?

WT: Yes. And in the--. Actually, no. That was in the mid-'60s, '64-'65. Back in then.

EE: When this happened?

WT: Yeah.

EE: Just very early in your--.

WT: My early days and stuff where I was learning a lot in a hurry. But for me, the big advantage was that I got to work everywhere in that grain elevator because I worked for the company.

EE: Now, you were employed by the grain company rather than Commission?

WT: Yes, in the '60s.

EE: Yes.

WT: So I got to work on the scale floors and the annexes and the cleaner decks and the inspection office and everywhere. And so, I had a good sense of the operation, of the system, how the staffing went, who worked where and why. All the connections between the staff and things, and I got to see it very, very well. So in 1970 when I came over to the government, for me to go out to the elevator, I just marched right in. Other people over the years that we've hired would go, "Now, how do you get there? Do you have a map and where do I go and who do I see?" All the general questions. It's like coming to the Ryan Building.

EE: [Laughs] Yes.

WT: Well, if you've never been, you need a little bit of help. Everybody needs something.

EE: Who owned Stewart's?

WT: Hm?

EE: Who owned the Stewart's Elevator?

WT: That I do not know.

EE: No, I just wondered.

WT: But Stewart's became Co-Op 14, and then it became Sask Pool 7B, and now it's Viterra.

EE: Sure. Yeah. Sask Pool, further mergers, and so on and so forth.

WT: Yeah. Anyway, 1980, I became a weighman-in-charge, which put me in charge of the staff at the elevator and opened up the door for me to have a suitcase to travel off to Churchill, down to Montreal, off to Halifax, Goderich, and every place in southern Ontario, and out to Vancouver, out to the Prairies. And I think I put on over 100,000 air miles in no time at all. I got the real thing--.

EE: So you were a weighman-in-charge for the country then, was it? No?

WT: No. For the staff at whatever elevator I went to, I'd be the person in charge.

EE: But you were sent to the--.

WT: Yeah. To do all these various tasks. So--.

[0:35:03]

EE: You weren't displacing anyone. You were just--.

WT: Besides all the audits and stuff, there were situations that arose when there were strikes. And so if the Port of Thunder Bay was down, I can remember one case going out and working in Saskatoon.

EE: The Government elevator there?

WT: Yeah. Which got away from being a government elevator also.

EE: Okay. It had been originally a Government elevator.

WT: Well, you're right. It was a Government elevator. Working in Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, and Vancouver. So it meant whatever happened or whatever, away you went.

EE: Yes. The '67 strike you mentioned a while ago, was that a grain handlers strike?

WT: I have a funny feeling it wasn't. Something stuck in my mind at the time that it may have been associated with the railway.

EE: Okay, a railway strike would be another possibility.

WT: Yes.

EE: It certainly wasn't the Commission.

WT: Oh, no, no.

EE: You weren't allowed to strike yet.

WT: Because they were still an association then.

EE: Yes, quite. Later strikes were--. The Commission has never struck, I don't--. Have the employees? Twice, and--?

WT: So each group can have its own strike. The grain inspectors being Primary Products can vote to go the strike route—conciliation, strike, or arbitration, and the weighing department can do the same. And so, I can remember the weighing department being on strike more than one, the General Labourer in Trades group.

EE: Okay. And both of these components were part of that one local within the Public Service Alliance?

WT: All within Local 30, yes.

EE: That must be a bit of a challenge to union harmony, shall we say, if components make different choices that way.

WT: Absolutely. Because what happens if my group, let's say, General Labourers in Trades goes on strike? We set up a picket line at the terminal elevator. Well, who are we going to prevent from coming into work? a) the elevator employees, b) the railway, and c)--.

EE: Your brother--.

WT: Your brothers and sisters.

EE: In the union.

WT: From the other groups.

EE: Do those divisions still prevail, or were they simply wiped away?

WT: Yes.

EE: They still do prevail?

WT: Yes.

EE: That's, if I may say so, stupid. Was there a possibility for solidarity amongst the--? Could they be absolved? Because this is rank, pure and simple, isn't it?

WT: Well, it all had to do with how much money you made an hour. If you wanted to get a raise and they wouldn't give it to you, then you went on strike. So you either go the strike route or you go to arbitration.

EE: Do you know numbers for the components of the local? A sort of average wages for the inspector versus the weighman?

WT: Well, when I started in 1970, at the time, I had worked for the elevator. I was making \$2.35 an hour. So I came over to the Commission, and my new rate of pay was \$2.10 cents an hour.

EE: Oh, a quarter of an hour less.

WT: At the first contract—not the first one, but the second one, 1972—one of the conditions I got for the employees was called a meal allowance. So they would have to give you an extra half-hour's overtime for you to go and get something and do whatever, but they gave you money to buy it. I still have my first cheque for \$1.

OM: [Laughs] Did a lot.

EE: Could you turn it into something fluid, or did it have to be something you could chew on?

WT: I turned it into a note in my scrapbook. I never cashed it.

EE: No.

WT: No. I kept it until this day. I still have it.

EE: A victory at the bargaining table.

WT: Yeah. I won a dollar. So that was 1980 and strikes and things. So--.

EE: Well, I'm just wondering, you hadn't done a comparison. Are you able to do a comparison on the spur of the moment of the differential in pay between these components? Let's say the inspector--.

WT: Oh, weighing versus inspecting? Well, it would have to go by level. So if we go up and, say, take the weighman-in-charge, the supervising grain weigher, and take the supervising grain inspector, the PI-4—which your dad was—some years they were almost close, right on. Other years, the grain inspectors would be ahead. And over the last, oh, few years, the grain inspectors moved ahead, and the weighmen hadn't gotten a raise in almost ten years. And the contract things came out, and one of the disparities was that the grain inspectors were on a national rate of pay. So what the grain inspector in Halifax got, so did Thunder Bay and so did Vancouver. But not General Labourer in Trades. They had regional rates of pay. And so, when the new contract came out, the highest cost of living was in Vancouver. So in Vancouver, the weighman-in-charge made more than the grain inspector. And so, they've been working on that for 30 years, trying to reduce those regions to try and get them into a national rate of pay.

[0:40:53]

EE: Obviously, we could discuss this if we had paper for a long time.

WT: Oh, forever. Yes.

EE: Could I ask sort of a summarizing question? Whether it was to anyone's advantage to have these distinctions, or how--?

WT: Like regional rates of pay or are you talking about the local?

EE: Well, I can understand that for the guys in Vancouver, but how detrimental was it? Maybe turn the question around. How detrimental was it to the harmony of the—the efficiency—of the Grain Commission?

WT: It was terrible.

EE: The effectiveness of government service and relations within the union, within the local, to suggest three different ways of coming at it.

WT: I would say that it was a detriment to the Public Service Alliance of Canada, which was the union representative. It was a detriment to every employee except if you lived in Vancouver and worked in Vancouver, and it was also a detriment to every local because it created all these disparities. And so, depending on where you lived, so went your rate of pay. And yet, here we are travelling around the country working here, there, and everywhere. And I would go to where--. And this fellow from Quebec would come in and help us in Goderich, and I'm making \$20 an hour, and he's making \$15.

EE: Yeah. As a final question maybe—because I've been a member of parliament, I might ask the question all the more—do you think that it was of any benefit to the government of the day to live with it? I won't charge them with maintaining it, but they lived with it, obviously. Did they have to live with it?

WT: Well, there's an old saying that says, "United you stand, divided you fall." And if we can make all those regions divided, we'll keep disparity within that Public Service Alliance of Canada and create havoc.

EE: I think you're answering the question, then, as I feared that you might have to. Okay. Well, we're in—point made—1980 or so. Let's press on. [Laughs]

WT: Okay, 1980, okay. When I became supervising grain weigher and my Gulliver's travels began. I was away from home quite a bit. Also, because I was a supervising grain weigher, it meant that at my terminal elevator, I was responsible for the loading of every vessel that came to

the dock, which included overtime and weekends. And I can remember very well doing 30 day stretches of never being at home, and that meant from 8:00 in the morning to almost midnight.

EE: For daylight hours for sure.

WT: Gone. Like a month. My wife knew I was there because the alarm clock went off in the morning and I was out the door again. Gone. It was quite a bit of that. And sometimes you could get an employee from another terminal elevator to come and spell you off, but sometimes you couldn't. A, they would be busy themselves. They were tired, and all those things. Or the biggest reason of all is if you happened to be at an elevator that was undergoing all the latest technological changes and getting into the electronic age and things weren't working well, which could impact greatly on you and your image and the final outcome or the goal of what we were trying to do at the time. I ran into a stretch like that where there wasn't a single soul in the Commission who would come and work at my elevator for me because things were so difficult and precarious. Like anything could happen. And for a lot of them, I don't blame them because they hadn't seen this system. They didn't know what it meant when things went wrong, when computer screens blank out. All these grain flow things are flying here, there, and everywhere, and it certainly is what you'd call a big mess.

[0:45:18]

EE: Was the elevator you were in leading in making these technological changes, leading in the city?

WT: No. But they had a complicated set up themselves. The way the elevator was set up itself, in order to have the systems working, they needed to connect to far more things and interact with far more things than some of the other places did. Also, the new systems were acting up and nobody knew what the problem was. And so, you had to be able to think on your feet and act extremely quickly to keep the situation under control, because the worst thing you can do is have a vessel leave the dock and nobody knows how much grain is onboard. And when that vessel runs aground somewhere--.

EE: Who's responsible, eh?

WT: Who is responsible? And the job for weighing, of course, is to certify the amount of grain that's on that vessel.

EE: Yes. And so--. [Laughs] Yes. If the system that you were now depending upon broke down, you've got a real problem.

WT: A very, very--.

EE: Did you end up in the ships estimating the amount of grain in hulls and that sort sometimes?

WT: Yeah. There were many, many, many things, and I instituted a few later myself to make sure that some of those little disparities could be looked after by most staff members, and so they wouldn't be in a quandary if they came across it. They knew there were formulas or things they could invoke that would at least give someone else higher up the best picture possible so that you could arrive at a safe result.

EE: I'm thinking of the ship as a particular focus. Would every ship carry, let's say, the equivalent of the construction blueprints that would--. Or evidence of the configuration of every hold in the ship and which quantity and so on?

WT: Yes.

EE: This would be up on the bridge or wherever?

WT: Yes. When they went--. Before you began to load the vessel, you'd get like a bill of lading, a report. And a lot of them—they were different at every elevator—and a lot of them would give you a diagram of the ship, and it would show all the holds in the ship, and they would write on there which kind of grain and the amount they expected to go into each one.

EE: Yes. And according to the depth of the grain or--. Would they have marks on the wall of the holds?

WT: Yes, they do.

EE: So that you could tell just at a glance if it's full to that point, that's what it's holding in the way of--. Now what would it be? This would be volume, of course, but volume can be turned into tonnage readily enough.

WT: Tonnage, yeah. And you could see it on the screen. So if I was sitting in the control room at the elevator, and I knew that there were three scales pumping grain out going to a hold—and we'd be in constant communication with the ship—we would know when the captain of the ship or the first mate said, "That's it for that hold." *Boom*, the numbers are right there. And so, for an ordinary lake boat, you could say, "There's 2,300 tonnes in hold number two of [No.] 1 of Amber Durum," or whatever you wanted to call it.

EE: How much do the various grains vary in weight amongst them? Say, if you have a bushel of--.

WT: Oh, like pounds per bushel and all that sort of stuff?

EE: A bushel of wheat is, what, 60 pounds a--? Actually, I remember a bushel of barley is, what 48?

WT: That's pretty good. When did you work for the Commission? [Laughing]

EE: I'm a farmer's son from Manitoba. A bushel of oats is 30-something?

WT: 34.

EE: 34. Darn! The old memory.

WT: And then You move up to barley and then you move into rye and then what we used to call rapeseed. You have to say canola. And then you get into the wheats.

EE: Yeah, canola. And flax.

WT: Flax. And then you get into the durums and the wheats.

EE: Yeah, I don't know those others. What is flax, a bushel of a flax?

WT: 56.

EE: 56. Oh, yeah. That sounds vaguely familiar too. [Laughs] And these are all--. A bushel is a volume. In fact, how much is a bushel?

WT: So, like, a bushel of wheat was about 60 pounds.

EE: How large is a bushel?

WT: Of what? [Laughing]

EE: Well, it must actually--. Because if a bushel of wheat is 60 pounds, a bushel of barley is 48, a bushel of oats is 34, that's passed on a volume measurement initially.

WT: Yes. It is.

EE: I'm just wondering because we've forgotten what that volume is.

[0:50:06]

WT: So now, that was one of the big changes that went through. And today--. And I can remember three months ago still doing my job talking to farmers—which I won't get into—I'm referring to kilograms per hectolitre, and then they're in bushels and pecks and long tons and short tons, and I've got to--. Oh, boy. [Laughing]

EE: Yeah, the farmers can be a bit of a nuisance in these particular areas.

WT: Well, sure, because farmers on the Prairies, some of the places are weighing in pounds. Everything in the ports across Canada is all in kilograms!

EE: I probably should say in terms of if someone's listening to this someday that I'm a farmer's son who began my university education in the fall of 1960, and my summer employment after that was really in Winnipeg where I cut lumber and so on. So when I pull out these weights for these bushels, this is stuff I learned, let's say, in the 1950s on the farm through my being on a farm.

WT: Yeah. I made out on my own, later on at work. I extracted and made formulas so people could tell exactly how much grain was inside a hopper car, how much was in a boxcar, how much grain if you had a big spill on the ground somewhere, all those things for no matter what kind of grain it was.

EE: Right. Because the volume would be the guiding--?

WT: Right. So you're looking at--.

EE: But in this case the volume, a bushel, is the amount of wheat that weights 60 pounds? [Laughs]

WT: Very good.

EE: And I guess--.

WT: Go to Level 2. [Laughs]

EE: I guess depending on the grade of wheat, there could be a miniscule difference in volume.

WT: The grade? Yes. The grade of wheat can interact with what we would call now the kilogram per hectolitre weight for that. Not all wheat weighs 60 pounds per bushel.

EE: No, I daresay it doesn't.

WT: No.

EE: Does some weigh more?

WT: Oh, yeah.

EE: And this would be the better the quality of the wheat?

WT: That is correct.

EE: In terms of, say, milling quality, the heavier it would be.

WT: That is correct.

EE: Well, this is an interesting little interlude. [Laughs]

WT: Anyway, moving along with the weighman-in-charge thing. I got also involved with working in the main office.

EE: Let me ask you before we leave the weighmen, we have done some other interviews and had the sense of movement amongst elevators—people, you know, working one, moving onto another and so on—but you’re speaking pretty firmly here of working in one elevator for one period of time.

WT: Okay. Usually--.

EE: Could explain these two different experiences?

WT: When I first became a weighman-in-charge—supervising grain weigher—at that time, the way they ran it was that once a year, usually in February or March, they would assign a weighman-in-charge to each terminal in this port.

EE: This is the Commission was doing that?

WT: That was your home for the year. Period.

EE: Right. Okay.

WT: And of course, today, they still try and do that, although it always doesn’t work. There’s sickness, there’s vacation times, there’s projects, there’s all kinds of things. So you can move, but the idea behind it was—and it has a basic soundness to it—was that each and every employee would gain the experience of working at each one of the terminals in this port. And so that would increase your knowledge base and your

capability, allow management to be more flexible with the movement of people. Before I started on the job in 1970, there was no such thing as a Port Arthurite working in Fort William and vice versa. There was a boundary there called the Neebing River, and thou shalt never cross it.

EE: And so the Grain Commission respected the reality of the two cities?

WT: The boundary waters of the Neebing, yes, they did. [Laughing] I remember back when they used to have the offices in the Chapple's Building in there. I left it in my office. I had a sheet of paper from way back years ago where rules and regulations for members of the weighing department across the country, and one of the article numbers—I forget whether it was 27 or whatever it was—this is how the government operated. “Rule 27: There shall be no unnecessary talking.”

EE: [Laughs]

[0:55:04]

WT: Today, the more you talk, the more you find out. It's gone full cycle around. And I underlined it, and I left it on the wall when I left work in December.

EE: Longer than the bridge thereof, eh, as the old phrase has it?

WT: Yeah.

EE: The sense that some of the interviews have given that people really didn't have a work home, that they moved around quite a lot, still doesn't seem to be borne out.

WT: If you were a trackman, if you were an assistant, if you were a receiving-grain weigher, your life was not your own. You could be moved two, three times a day.

EE: Right. Okay. So that was accurate then.

WT: Depending on your position. The supervising grain weigher was the only steadfast person you could count on being at that terminal.

EE: Right. Okay. Sure. And the Commission wanted someone in charge who knew the place and so on.

WT: You bet.

EE: Was there any kind of concern about--. Was there any reason to be concerned about any kind of favouritism or prejudice or bias or influence? Was there anything of that sort in these assignments?

WT: Absolutely, there was, because as we all know, you can't please everybody, and so the person or persons who were not happy immediately start conversations with others and start indicating that some are being favoured over others. "How come those two employees always get Manitoba Pool 1, and it's the cleanest one on the waterfront, you know. So we never get there." Those sorts of things that were always in the minds and conversations.

EE: Okay. So the sorts of jealousies amongst the employees. I was thinking of influence from the company as well. Or was there any way that the terminal elevator people—that organization, the company headquarters, wherever—did they have any kind of influence on--.

WT: Wanted people?

EE: Could they influence the Commission employees or inspectors in ways that would be to their advantage, maybe to the detriment of the trade?

WT: I suppose it could happen. It would be a very, very simple thing for them to, let's say, woo somebody to befriend them. You mentioned in the beginning the sincerity business. Very much alive.

EE: Yes. Sincerity is everything. If you can fake it, you've got it made.

WT: Right. Or on the opposite side of the scale, if the terminal elevator management didn't appreciate a certain government employee coming to work at their elevator, it was not without the realm of them phoning the management downtown at the Grain Commission and say, "We prefer if that employee wasn't here at the present time, that you put them somewhere else." And--.

EE: That might be acted upon?

WT: Oh, you know. And the other way around, we can have government employees working at the terminal, and you could have grain elevator staff causing problems for government people. And now you've got the Grain Commission management phoning the terminal saying, "We'd like something done about this employee or that too," because we need that harmony at the elevator. Have to get along. Have to.

EE: This could obviously begin at personalities, people just end up, for whatever reason, disliking each other.

WT: I think--.

EE: But more importantly, within the trade were there possibilities for abuse of the whole system to the financial advantage of the company as against those of Canada's international trade?

WT: Before my time, I had heard of a few stories of that particularly happening where, say, they could provide--. “Well, let’s go out at lunch. Let’s go back. We’re going to work tonight, so come on out for supper and we’ll buy, and buy the drinks,” and all that stuff. And then, they’d start doing back at work and go, “Well, do you think you could just--. Well, let us go on that a bit, eh?” Slowly try and edge their way in, always keeping in mind that they had bought things for the people. So in a way, it’s a bit of like a bribe.

EE: Yes. That’s a bribe for certain activities, although, I guess, the limitations on it are that, say, you’re loading a ship, and you’re loading a ship with a grade that someone is buying. You couldn’t underfill the holds, for example, without it being very clear to the person taking delivery that they hadn’t got what they were paying for.

WT: Oh, yeah? When I worked for the grain elevator, when I worked on the scale floor, within one week, I knew how to steal grain right in front of the Grain Commission.

[1:00:01]

EE: This was back in the ‘60s when you were working for Stewart’s?

WT: Yeah.

EE: Do you want to say a little bit more?

WT: Hm. [Laughing] I’ll just say I knew how.

EE: Where would you put it?

WT: It never went.

EE: Okay. So it remained in the elevator for sale again.

WT: It was supposed to be on the vessel, but it was back in the elevator. It was weighed, and it said on the ticket, “This much went to the vessel,” but it really didn’t.

EE: Now the crew—the captain, the first mate—the crew of the ship--.

WT: They were pretty good.

EE: But they don't always catch it?

WT: They knew their watermarks. So especially, well, you've got to know--.

EE: If the plimsoll lines haven't been achieved--.

WT: You've got to know being there. So on a windy day out when the waves are lapping at the side of the vessel, it's harder to get a watermark. So you pick your time is what I'm saying. It's just like they could if they wanted to. In the old days a long time ago, the spouts would come out of the elevator into the hold of the ship, and the government staff would have a sampler out there with a scoop and a bucket.

EE: Right. We've heard about that.

WT: And the grain would come down, and he'd grab the scoop. Now, you'd have four or five spouts coming from different scales in the elevator, which come from different bins in the elevator. So you look out the window and go, "The sampler's down at spout number five. Let the crap go on spout number one."

EE: And that covered with good grain before they get back?

WT: You could. You could.

OM: Hypothetically.

WT: Hypothetically, you could. [Laughs]

EE: And I guess, depending on who you were selling to—the purchaser was—do you have any knowledge of the--.

WT: The terminal elevator wouldn't care because the terminal elevator was only interested in getting it in to make money—and they get elevation fees to get it—and then they get money to clean it, and then they get money to shoot it out the door. That's all they're concerned with.

EE: Sure, sure. Yeah. But the Wheat Board wanted to satisfy the customer, shall we say. I'm going to play the farmer here.

WT: Oh, yeah.

EE: The Wheat Board wants satisfaction, so I'm curious, did countries vary in the care with which they would check over the cargos that came in?

WT: Yes.

EE: And how did they rate?

WT: Especially with the grade, because on occasion you would see strangers in the elevator, and then you'd ask where they were from. Well, that guy's from Algeria. That guy's from Brazil. That guy's from England. They're there making sure that what they ordered is actually onboard that ship.

EE: And so you could have a mixed sort of inspection crew from various countries?

WT: Oh, sure. Sure, you could.

EE: [Sneezes] Pardon me.

WT: And when I was in weighing and used to load the vessels, there was an old saying that's 100 years old there, "Just remember, young fellow," they said, "there's many a slip between the scale and the ship." [Laughing]

EE: Well, as a historian, I have some vague sense at least of the fact that whole system was developed on the demand of Prairie farmers to ensure that they got what they thought they had coming for the grain that they had grown.

WT: To protect the rights of the producer.

EE: Yeah. Right. In a more sophisticated wording.

WT: It got so much more sophisticated it's unbelievable.

EE: Yeah. Anyway, we should press on through the '80s.

WT: One of the reasons I left. [Laughing]

EE: We should press on through the '80s then. You were chief weighman.

WT: Okay. So here we are.

EE: I appreciate all the elucidation you've given us. It's been fascinating.

WT: So here we are as a weighman-in-charge at the elevator, and I got involved in the staffing and the things, and I started to get called downtown. And I'd be given projects or help out with projects. I got into the staffing things. I got into the competition processes, you know, the government administration red tape and *duh-duh-duh-duh-duh*, which still exists today, I'm proud to say. Prouder that I don't have to be involved in it, but anyway.

EE: [Laughs] Happier.

WT: All of the management roles and things that were there. Downtown, we had in the weighing department what were called walking bosses or operational supervisors. We had three of them. Two of the fellows, who are dead now, sort of befriended me, and I learned so many things about knowledge, skills, abilities. But the complex way that the system works, that I had a big heads up over a lot of other staff members. And then the other part of it is—if you want to listen, if you don't want to listen, that kind of thing—but I got involved in all kinds of things that the staff at the elevator didn't.

[1:05:17]

EE: No. But your initial test had demonstrated that you were a bright fellow, and it was that kind of intelligence--.

WT: Well, I got the job.

EE: That was showing in this work, your--.

WT: Well, I got the job.

EE: Your intelligence was leading you towards the top, and you were learning these things.

WT: Well, if that's true, thank you. But anyway--.

EE: I think so.

WT: So I got the job and got involved in all these other things, and I started watching and looking. So up above me the next step is these walking boss positions or operational supervisors. Up above them was one assistant manager for weighing and then the manager of weighing. In 1990, there was another competition—everything happens in ten-year cycles—and I applied and went over top of the walking bosses and became the assistant manager.

EE: Now this made some waves for a little while, I suppose.

WT: Especially with the people who had been mentoring me downtown. But anyway.

EE: They were surprised?

WT: Yeah.

EE: The competition was, what, exams and whatnot written for Ottawa and assessed--.

WT: Well, one was totally surprised, the other two weren't so surprised.

EE: They feared it might happen.

WT: The Fort Williamite was totally surprised, and the two Port Arthurites sort of figured that that might happen.

EE: Yeah. But the decision was made in Ottawa.

WT: No.

EE: No?

WT: The decision was made by an interview board consisting of people who came in from the head office in Winnipeg.

EE: Okay. Right. Yes, of course. I guess the Commission is run out of Winnipeg not Ottawa.

WT: Yeah.

EE: The political department, the ministerial departmental, that's not involved at all?

WT: No.

EE: The Commission, even in those days, was sort of at least half arms length I guess, was it, from government?

WT: Oh. Oh, yeah. For sure.

EE: Because we have the development of agencies, the Canadian Revenue Agency for example, at arm's length from the ministry.

WT: Yeah. So anyway, I became the assistant manager, and you know, I don't know why or how things happen. It was three years later that they did away with the walking boss positions, and all three had retired, and they didn't replace them.

EE: So we should say a little bit more about walking bosses then. Are you--.

WT: They would--.

EE: Implying that you were involved in the decision not to have them?

WT: I never--. I used to fill in, help out, and act in those positions during the 1980s of my involvement downtown and all that stuff, so I knew exactly everything. You'd have to schedule the staff every year. Who's turn is it to go and live in Churchill for a month in an [Atco] trailer, in a room that is smaller than a jail cell and other wonderful decision-making things like that.

EE: Who did get banished to that position? [Laughs]

WT: Oh, I remember it well because I had to go there and work too.

EE: So you did it at least once, eh?

WT: Oh, more than once. I've been up there by train. I've flown in there. I've done lots there.

EE: Did you have any sense that people were being punished in being sent there?

WT: It could be used as a vehicle for that.

EE: A disciplinary tool.

WT: But I put out a schedule thing, which put people into groups, and there'd be group A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J. And every year, the group things would change according to the time of year. And so, if your services were needed, you went. If not, you're off, and *la-di-da-di-da-di-da*. So it was fair for everybody until it was your turn. [Laughs]

EE: Everyone took his turn at doing that.

WT: Yeah. Unless you could get a replacement, you're it. Have a nice trip.

EE: A cable connect--. Satellite dishes and so on?

WT: Yeah. Yeah. CBC. There was an entertainment room in the trailer that had a refrigerator, one table, four chairs, and a lightbulb hanging on a string.

EE: It wasn't the recreational room of the [Mussel White Mine].

WT: No. We had polar bears shot right outside the landing on our steps. I've been very, very close to them. And when I first went to Churchill, which was by train, I knew something wasn't right because when we arrived in Churchill, the train backed into the town. "What's that for?" He says, "A speedy getaway." [Laughing]

[1:10:09]

EE: He was only half joking.

WT: And then they said-- I said, "Well, do I have to go to work right now?" "Well, you're supposed to." I said, "Well, I'll tell you what. I'm not going to work until I get a tour of the town, so I know where I'm at." So ten minutes later, I was at the elevator at work. [Laughing]

EE: And you'd had the tour?

WT: Oh, yeah. The tour had been included. And then they said, "Now, be careful when you're out, especially at night—because you work every night, seven days a week—of the polar bears." And then they said, "Do you realize a polar bear can run 30 miles an hour?" I said, "No, I did not know that." They said, "How fast can you run?" I said, "31." [Laughing]

EE: And they didn't issue a gun to you either, I guess?

WT: Oh, the RCMP had the big rifles, and they used to fire what they called sound shots. They were a horrible bang, but they were meant to drive off the bears. Some bears it worked, some it didn't.

EE: Yeah. Some had heard them before and had not been killed. [Laughs]

WT: Oh, boy. What a place.

EE: Anyway, back to walking bosses.

WT: Walking bosses, we had three for the department of weighing, and they divided it up into what they call the North End, which would've been United Grain Growers [UGG] A, Sask Pool 4A and B, and Richardson's at the time.

EE: The Current River mouth.

WT: Yeah. That's right. Beside the shipyards. And then there was what they called the Central Region.

EE: Interlake. Uh--.

WT: Intercity.

EE: Intercity, rather. Sorry.

WT: And then we had the--.

EE: Kam River below, eh?

WT: Fort William guys. No. Yeah. Which included Cargill and Searle, Mission Terminal--.

EE: Some really big ones.

WT: And on the river--.

EE: And some very small ones.

WT: I can remember my father telling me there was a group of elevators on the Kam River, and they were called the Five, Ten, and Eleven Store. There used to be a store in town called the Five, Ten, and something store too. When I started, there were 23 elevators. When I finished, there were eight.

EE: Was the elevator right beside the Bowater plant, was it still in operation when you started?

WT: Beside Bowater?

EE: You might want to drive down sometime and take a look at it just on the downriver side.

WT: Where you go across the bridge?

EE: No, no. It's on this side of the river.

WT: On this side?

EE: Yeah. There's the groundworks of what, I think, was an elevator a long time ago.

WT: No, I don't remember that.

EE: Okay. So that was gone.

WT: I remember Northwest--.

EE: Of course, Paterson's went in '78. It was being torn down when I moved to town, so.

WT: Oh, yeah. Yeah. How about the Northwest Elevator?

EE: The which?

WT: The Northwest.

EE: What about it?

WT: It was an elevator over there.

EE: Okay. The Northwest Elevator.

WT: I don't know if that was the one, though, that you referred to there.

EE: I need research some of these things, but I saw it on a picture. I think a picture at the city archives shows it. So I drove down there quite deliberately to satisfy myself that there was evidence of one, and there is.

WT: Okay.

EE: Sort of beside where you drive into the Bowater, the papermill, on the downriver east--.

WT: Down by the old Winston Apartments or--?

EE: No, no. It's much closer to the papermill.

WT: Is that right?

EE: It's right beside it.

WT: If there was, I never worked there. That would be before my time.

EE: Sure. Anyway, back to the walking bosses.

WT: The walking bosses. There they are! [Laughing] All three in their glorious colours coming out. Anyway, they were in charge of each region, and they would look after the general staffing of each terminal in their particular thing. And once a week, they would meet either in the North End, Intercity, or Fort William End in a little office they had. And they would have a board with everybody's name on a tag in all the elevators, and they would decide where the staff was going the following week and what shift. Who would be on what? So they were given the inside information, for example, that Sask Pool 7 was going to have a 4:00 to 12:00 shift next week, McCabe's was going to have a shift starting at 10:00 at night until 6:00 in the morning—which I participated in—and all those sorts of things. Vacation time, scheduling who goes where, and all that sort of stuff.

EE: This would be a reflection of grain coming from the Prairies. Was it known a week in advance what was coming in and where it was going?

WT: They knew roughly and still do today. They get a projection of how many railcars that would come into the city and that was something that I watched over the years.

EE: And the other part, of course, is the ships that would be coming in.

WT: They changed too, the number of them--.

EE: That would be known as well, would it?

WT: A, because the amount of grain changed that was moving through the port became less, but also the ships became bigger.

[1:15:10]

EE: From the mid-'80s, the grain movement began to decline.

WT: From the big boom in 1983, it hasn't been going anywhere since.

EE: So '83 was actually the big year, was it?

WT: I'm pretty sure that was it. I was there.

EE: I found it so very interesting to be running for parliament in '84, the summer of '84, And Frank Mazur, of course, was one of my supporters.

WT: Oh, Frank. I knew Frank.

EE: Yeah, I'm sure you did. And he would talk about 1,800 grain handlers up and down the waterfront. And I don't know whether there are 180 working these days.

WT: Today, I don't know.

EE: It's just--. And his successor, of course, is now a Steelworker's rep because of the--.

WT: Herbie?

EE: Grain handlers are now steelworkers.

WT: Herbie Daniher?

EE: Yes, Herbie. And Herbie probably does as much for miners and whatnot these days--.

WT: I remember Herbie.

EE: In the union as he does for grain handlers because--.

WT: I remember Herbie when he was an elevator employee. [Laughs]

EE: I'm sure you do. Herbie's worked his way up, as Frank did in his day.

WT: Yes, he did. He went after it and got it. Good for Herbie.

EE: Yes, indeed. Did the system of walking bosses make sense at an earlier point?

WT: Yes, because they were like the guiding light. They would come along and come to the elevator and make sure that the weighman-in-charge was doing his job with respect to making sure all the tasks were being performed, the employees were following all the rules and routines, and they weren't all playing games. People weren't skipping out, leaving early, all those other things that would go on. But they were also a huge resource and wealth of information because they all had worked their way up through the system and had gone through every single layer of it and worked their own way up to where they were.

EE: They were personified institutional history I can well imagine.

WT: Oh, sure. And very smart, the two fellows that I befriended. Very smart.

EE: But not needed by '93 for what kinds of reasons? Fewer elevators, fewer staff?

WT: Yeah, it was a whole change in the way--.

EE: Change in information available?

WT: The Commission was looking at the supervision of staff, and at the same time they were beginning to look at creating one staff. So it didn't matter whether you were a weighman or a grain inspector, a scale inspector, a protein lab person, an entomology person, you were all one.

EE: Capable of doing any one of those jobs?

WT: Any--. Lower levels, yes. So today you could be sampling grain, tomorrow you could be recording railcar numbers and checking equipment. The next day, you could be taking samples for entomology testing, and you could do all those things. I have to say that overall looking at the whole Commission, that at the lower level or the entry level, that's definitely the way to go because it gives you all of that flexibility. It allows the employees not to be entrapped in a mundane job. It gives them variety. We often refer to, "Well, how'd you like to be in a prison stamping out ashtrays every day?" "Well, no thanks." You'd certainly get fed up with that in a hurry. But it also opened up the door to allow those people to have knowledge to be able to branch off and choose which direction they wanted to go in.

EE: Yeah. To the extent that they could choose.

WT: That is correct. So it was up to them if they wanted to apply to, say, to be a weighman-in-charge at the elevator, they wanted to be a grain inspector, they wanted to this, they wanted to that. And so, it had my support for sure.

EE: Did you have a sense that the Commission led--. Is there a commissioner at the top of it all? A person?

WT: Yes. The chief commissioner.

EE: A chief commissioner. Did you have a sense that there was a chief commissioner who had a vision of this and led in this direction?

WT: No.

EE: How did it happen?

WT: Who had a vision of a political appointee, and that's what it was. No matter who it was.

EE: The chief commissioner was political?

WT: Oh, definitely.

EE: Okay. So people below him then who--. Always men, I suppose, were they?

WT: But they carried the most clout too. [Laughs]

EE: Of course. But this is a vision of how an organization should probably function—flexibility in the staff and so on and so forth.

WT: Oh, sure.

EE: Did someone actually have that vision and lead in this direction, or was it a more sort of growth within the organization?

WT: I think it was sort of a global thing, and it also became—and more and more over the years—it became issues related to the budget. “Here’s your money. This is all you’re going to get.” Treasury Board says, “That’s it.”

[1:20:14]

EE: Well, I--.

WT: So in order to accomplish this--.

EE: I’ve been sufficiently in labour to know that flexibility is very often opposed because of exactly those consequences.

WT: Oh, sure. Absolutely.

EE: But you were saying? [Laughs]

WT: Yeah. So you could do--. If you could get this through--. And the hardest thing to do was to get it through to the people who are already established in their positions. In other words, the biggest challenge is dealing with change.

EE: And confronting the different units within Local 30.

WT: You bet. And the other thing that came along with disrupting things were all the technological changes that were coming through and getting all of the staff to buy into the technology of what it meant and what it did and what it did for us as an organization and what it didn't do. So in 1970, when I joined the weighing department, there was 120 employees. When I left, there were 19.

EE: And it was all attrition? Retirements? Or were people let go?

WT: Well, yeah. You could say that because eventually everybody retired. The problem was, of course, that they didn't replace them.

EE: No, quite. Oh, yes. I realize, but--.

WT: Attrition.

EE: It was attrition then.

WT: Oh, sure. They didn't throw people out on the street. However, on the downside, people like Patricia Kent--.

EE: Who we interviewed last week.

WT: We had people who were what we called term or casual employees for years and years, and there's no way on the face of this earth that those people should have been kept in that circumstance.

EE: It was not kind of them, that's for sure.

WT: No. And it wasn't kind for the organization because all you did was create this whole persona of disrespect and, you know, "What are they going to do to me next?" And all that sort of stuff.

EE: Now would that kind of feeling begin to transcend the distinctions that had developed when the PI people were above the General Labourer in Trades?

WT: Yeah. That's still there today.

EE: Yeah. And the Grain Commission hasn't attempted to right--.

WT: They're not going to get rid of it.

EE: Of course, the organization, the corporation, the Commission, does not run the union. That's one of the fundamental principles of it.

WT: Well, that is true.

EE: And neither does the union, of course, run the Commission.

WT: That is also true. But now both sides of it--.

EE: And ne'er the two shall meet. [Laughs] Except--.

WT: Well, that is true too.

EE: At negotiating time.

WT: With respect to the way it leans, I would suggest very strongly that it dumps all of its eggs into inspection. It is not ready to look outside the box, shall we say, and look at the advancements that other departments have made—such as the one I made—and fully incorporate them in. They passed up millions.

EE: Say a little bit more about--. You're being just a tad cryptic for the--.

WT: We're going to get there in the story because that goes onto the next phase. After I became the assistant manager for weighing, I mentioned that the walking bosses' positions were done away with in 1993. They also declared me surplus.

EE: Aw. Then things become very interesting.

WT: Yes, they did.

EE: You were surplus, sort of red-circled in a sense? But you weren't let go.

WT: Oh, that too. No. I was just sort of half-handedly informed that--.

EE: And you were the assistant manager.

WT: This position would be redundant and *la-di-da-di-da-di-da*, and I never heard anything from Winnipeg. Not a word. Not a letter. Not a nothing.

EE: You were the assistant manager told that?

WT: Yeah. So anyway, part of my duties was investigating grain loss or reported grain loss between the Prairies and the ports. And so, that meant that if a farmer from Beausejour loaded a car and sent it to Thunder Bay, and he put 90 metric tonnes of grain in the car, and we gave him a receipt and it said there was 83, he could ask for an investigation. The person he would contact would be me for Thunder Bay at the time. And so, I would contact our staff at the terminal elevator where the car unloaded, and they had certain files there of documents indicating when the car arrived, what cars did it travel with, what was the weight of it, copies of the weighing transactions—different things. And we created a computer program for them to report this stuff. That was one of the things I did. So anyway, that's good. So now you got all the facts on paper on one sheet of paper instead of 15, and you don't have 40 different people, you've got one piece of paper with the news.

[1:25:57]

And so, I would then have a look at that, have a look myself at the weighing transactions—we kept a copy of every weighing transaction, and they still do today downtown—and ascertain whether or not something happened at that elevator that that weight got misrepresented. And so, I would then write an official letter back to the grain company or the private producer telling them of my findings. Number one rule, nothing but the facts. No conjecture. “This is exactly the way it is. If you want to see a copy of your weighing transactions, all that stuff, that's fine.” Number one rule, tell the truth. Don't bend it, especially towards in favour of the terminal or the farmer. Either. You've got to sit in the middle.

So anyway, I'm sitting there one day, and I'm writing a letter and it's in regard to this car, CPWX-600149. Someone came through the door from the main office with a fax message for me. I said, “Oh, thank you very much.” And I put it down. I looked at it and it said, “Please investigate the unloading of CPWX-600149.” And I looked and said, “I'm already writing the letter.” And then I looked at the date on it. It was for the shipment that had happened before this one, and somebody else had reported a big loss. And I went, “Oh.” So now do we have a problem with the railcar?

EE: With the car itself.

WT: Yeah. I said, “This is too coincidental. One person is missing eight or nine tonnes, the other one's missing six or seven.” Like two shipments in a row. So what I did was I got a file folder out, and I wrote CPWX-600149, and I put it in the drawer beside me. And I thought, “I'm onto something here.” So anyway, to make a long story short, what happened was, the drawer couldn't hold all the file folders by the time I got going because there were too many of them.

EE: For that car?

WT: I started putting two and two together and finding out that that wasn't the only car that might have troubles. And then I started checking the records to find out how this car had behaved previously, and how it had behaved since the problem. And lo and behold, same results or worse. Whole compartments of grain were going missing. So A, did the person not load it but said they did? Did it get lost in transit? Did somebody steal it while it was in transit? Did it get misrepresented at the scale when they weighed it, or did the terminal steal it? Not reported.

EE: Because it went to different terminals, I presume.

WT: Yeah. Sure.

EE: All over the waterfront.

WT: And so I'm looking at Thunder Bay, and now I'm looking at Sask Pool 7. "Oh, next time it went to United Grain Growers A, next time it went to Cargill, then it went to Parrish & Heimbecker [P&H]."

EE: And always short some?

WT: And then I started looking at the records and going, "Well, there's four trips to Vancouver, one to Prince Rupert, and one or two to Montreal." So I started fishing the records out. Next thing you know, I had stories about the car. And so, we had the introduction of having computers, and I had taken a couple of computer courses at this facility.

EE: At Lakehead?

WT: Lakehead University. That was after my third-year industrial relations course.

EE: Management side?

[1:30:03]

WT: Yeah. Anyway, I took those on my own. So anyway, I said, "Okay. What's this thing on here?" "Oh, that's called an Excel spreadsheet." You know what happened? It couldn't keep up with it, and so in 1993—at the end of it—I got a hold of a staff member from weighing, his name was Douglas Rutledge, and he doesn't live here anymore. He's retired.

EE: To another city?

WT: And he is a computer genius, and I had him brought downtown, and I said, “You’re going to work with me for a while. Would you like to? And we’re going to work on a project here.” And I created, which today is called the Dispute Resolution System. It is a computer system in Winnipeg in the main office. Human resources, finance, operations, everything, there’s five servers there. Computer services. My program occupies one of them all by itself. It’s so big. But anyway, I can track any car, anywhere, any time, any results, anywhere in North America and Mexico. And I know everybody in North America and Mexico now. I have over 900 contacts out in the grain industry where I can call. For example, if I called down to Atalanta, Georgia, that’s where Norfolk Southern Railway is, they’d pick up the phone and go, “Hello, is this Bill?” Or I can phone the Mexican government. I can phone the Mexican railway company. I can phone all over—Burlington Northern, Union Pacific, everywhere. This program can do anything.

EE: Now, the Commission has the program, so this is something the Wheat Board can depend on the Commission--.

WT: Myself and this Douglas Rutledge made it, and we started using it to compile data. So basically, what we did was every person who loads a car on the Prairies has to report to the railway to say that, “CPWX-600149 was loaded on March 19 with 90 tonnes of [No.] 1 Red 12.5.”

EE: And that feeds right into the program then? That car is being watched.

WT: You’re darn right it does. On the other end of things at the terminal elevators, when the cars unload and they grasp the grade and the weight, the staff at the elevators key punch it into the computer. I’ve got it automatically into my computer. The other thing that happens is the staff at every elevator every day, every time the railway brings new railcars in, the staff goes out and writes out all the car numbers and reports the condition of anything they see or find. They come in, take the whole track list of things that they have, key them in. They still don’t know it, but anyway. When they push the print button to make it—a list—I got it.

EE: Because it goes straight into the server as well, electronically?

WT: Staff don’t know that, but I set it up so I did. So all I’m doing is gathering information. So now, I have the picture from everywhere plus everything else. What a lot of people don’t know is that Toronto, Kamloops, and Winnipeg, the railway have scales too. They’re not overly accurate, but they can give you a pretty good idea.

EE: Accurate enough for your purposes.

WT: I have access to all of those, and I have access to all kinds of stuff everywhere. For example, if you loaded a car full of grain and you sent it to, say, you have a customer in Florida. And you send it down, and it goes through Burlington Northern, then over to Norfolk Southern. Well, they have these little scales too on the track. Truck scales, they’re called. If you wanted to find out how much your grain weighed when it passed over that scale, you have to pay \$75 US to find out that number.

EE: But you can access it through--.

WT: I got it for nothing. They love helping me because I help them. Because the other thing I can do is have access to all the systems everywhere, I put it in the program too, and I can find out where anything is.

EE: Any car is.

WT: Any one.

EE: And that of course is of great interest to railway companies.

WT: The railway phones me to find out where some of their stuff is. See, the railway has--. It progressed too.

EE: Individual railway companies. CP Rail wants to know where all their cars are because they--.

WT: Do they? No, they don't. They know to a point because on the mainlines they have installed what are called electronic readers, and they read the barcodes that are on the side.

[1:35:11]

EE: As the cars go by.

WT: Okay? How many thousand of miles of track don't have readers? So in other words, what happens is, very simply, when the cars come from the Prairies, they can track them, and they come in to, say, the Neebing yard. Okay?

EE: Yes.

WT: They don't have readers at the elevators.

EE: So that's where your system--.

WT: So all they know is the car arrived at the Neebing yard on March the 17th on Saint Patrick's Day when there's a big party going on. They don't know what happened after that.

EE: Where the heck is it after that, eh?

WT: Where's the grain? Where's it gone?

EE: Yes. But you know.

WT: Oh, yeah.

EE: And that is of value to them.

WT: Yeah. So anyway, to make a long story short, because of that program at the time, I got the director of operations in Winnipeg interested in it. Her name was Elizabeth Larman at the time. Nice lady. Anyway, and I went out and up to Winnipeg, and I talked to all the grain companies, and I got to know who's who and what's what and *la-di-da*.

EE: Who the movers and shakers are.

WT: Oh, yeah. Well, just as a matter of being able to provide a solid government service.

EE: Indeed.

WT: Protect the interest of producers.

EE: Indeed. [Laughs]

WT: So I found out how they operated, what systems they had, and would they be interested in something like that? Would they? And I said, "Well, how much are you losing?" And they started checking. Anyway, to make a long story short, I went up and had a visit with one of the big grain companies, and we went through the books from one year to see how much was going on. I said, "Now, you've been dealing with me now with this new program for two years. Tell me in the last year what's happened?" He says, "We've made a million and a quarter off--."

EE: More?

WT: "Your program."

EE: Off the program.

WT: That's one company.

EE: Did you say, "Would you like to share the wealth?" Or you were providing a government service.

WT: Well, we can go out and have a business meeting lunch. [Laughing]

EE: Which is the best way.

WT: That sort of thing. “And I’ll buy.” I had a hospitality allowance. That was all right.

EE: Because the Commission never bonused you for this particular achievement.

WT: No, no. But--.

EE: And Mr. Rutledge didn’t get any--.

WT: Because my position had been declared redundant or red-circled and surplus, I never heard a word. And so, I guess that was the bonus. I’m not sure. But as the leadership in Winnipeg changed and different things--. As I said in the very beginning, they put all their eggs into one basket, into inspection. Don’t get me wrong, I have nothing against inspection. Coming from a background where my father was a grain inspector, and I respected him and what he did, and I know the value of what goes on. What I’m disappointed in is the overall position of the Commission not being willing to protect the interests of the producers in the grain industry through every means at its disposal. There’s more than one means. I know why—in my program—why a lot of the farmers never got the grade they were supposed to, and we can get into that sometime. That’s a long conversation. I know why. And it doesn’t mean that the grain inspector was poor or half-blind or colour blind or whatever.

EE: Or cheating the farmer deliberately, speaking as a farmer’s son.

WT: I’ll show you the conditions which created it.

EE: But you weren’t asked to pursue rectifying them?

WT: No. And in the very end--.

EE: Did you speak to your superiors about that?

WT: In the very end, I was, to tell the truth, unwilling. They would not support my program. They would not give me any resources or whatever. And to tell you the honest truth, because of the interest from the industry, it became unmanageable for me to look after everybody’s needs in the country.

EE: Yes. Well, I daresay. It’s an enormous challenge.

WT: Yeah.

EE: It wouldn't be taken kindly if you were to try to approach the National Farmers Union or the Canadian Federation of Agriculture or whomever to suggest that it would be desirable to have some more people involved to their own benefit.

WT: Well, then the Commission would turn around and not take that kindly because now you're looking at outside interference and telling them how to run their shop.

EE: Yeah. And they would certainly not take kindly to your having created it.

[1:40:00]

WT: It's not that I don't know the director of the Canadian Transportation Authority and the head of the Farmers Union and all the rest of them. I do know them. But they take care of their own shops. I know the heads of the railway too. I just came back from Montreal meeting with [Regin Pochette], who occupies the top floor of the CN Building in Montreal. He has a huge staff there, and he's responsible for every claim for anything the railway gets from anybody. And we're on a first name working basis. We help each other.

EE: Yes. Yes. You help him in regard to grain.

WT: It's for the common good. Like he doesn't BS me. I don't BS him. We lay out all the facts on the table, and that's the way it turns out. And I do the same for CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway]. I don't want to leave them out either.

EE: No. What was wrong with that first car that created all of this activity ultimately? [Laughs] And--.

WT: Well, just like anything--.

EE: And did it pull open en route and spill grain along the track?

WT: If this is the bottom of the car, it has little slides on the bottom. Usually there's four. And they have these spindles or what they call capstans on them, and you have to take a big bar or hydraulic system to open them and close them. Now these cars, the majority of them, were made in 1971 and 1972 by Steel Corps Company. How many times have they opened and closed in 30 some-odd years?

EE: Yes.

WT: A lot. And with anything else, they wear out. And so--.

EE: And so it would vibrate open, really.

WT: A farmer with a steel bar doing it by hand—and I've done that before stupidly—thinks they have it all closed up and secure, and they put a little seal on it. I remember doing those too. I shouldn't say so, but a seal means nothing.

EE: Well, no. if it's thought to be closed and actually isn't and is sealed in the partly opened position. [Laughs]

WT: Yeah. There's ways it connects together and all looks secure but it's not. So the seal is only an identification of, "This person put that on on that date."

EE: Of the possession it was in.

WT: It doesn't protect anything.

EE: No. And so, the--.

WT: And I can prove it too.

EE: And so, it was, in fact, small losses of this sort that were happening time after time?

WT: And it just gets worse, and it gets worse. The other thing is--.

EE: Was the car retired? Because that would seem the simplest thing, just to scrap the car.

WT: You know, I had that question posed to me many times. And actually, I think, three times I actually phoned the railway and said, "I'm giving you an order to take that car out of the fleet."

EE: Out of service, eh?

WT: I don't have the authority to do that.

EE: You didn't or the person you were calling didn't?

WT: I didn't. But I said I did, and they complied.

EE: Oh, I see. [Laughs] I see.

WT: Because they knew what I had for evidence or the people I could tell to say, “You do this.” But you do it in a workmanship kind of way where you get along with people and you don’t demand this and that.

EE: Yeah. Well, for the effectiveness of the service and good relations and whatnot.

WT: Oh, sure. Absolutely. It’s in their best interest if they would perhaps remove this car from the fleet for now and make sure that certain repairs are done to these certain areas. The other--.

EE: Because, I guess, it could usually be repaired if they recognized the problem and set to it.

WT: They could with replacement parts. It is no different than the operation of any of the scales in any of these grain elevators. When you think the tops and bottoms are no different than the bottoms of those hopper cars—they open and close—we have found those leaking too, and had them stop, repair, and do whatever. That’s part of the job out there doing all this stuff. So that program is sitting there. I left it, and I had a fellow in Vancouver and a fellow in Montreal who reported to me, and they never replaced my position.

EE: When you retired here.

WT: Nope.

EE: So no one in Thunder Bay is supervising the system?

WT: You know, I walked out the door of that office on December the 22nd, and I never looked back at it. I walked out the door with my head up in the air--.

EE: Yeah. Well, you had reason.

WT: Knowing what I had done. I knew what was there, and I did the best damn job I could.

EE: Yeah. And up to this point, they haven’t called you back in to help out with anything that’s happened since then. But that’s only less than three months ago, so.

WT: No, they haven’t. It’s less than three months, and I already told many, many people up there that I will be sort of non-communicative for at least three months and let me settle down after 39 years with the Commission and take a little break. Take the wife on a little trip, stuff like that.

[1:45:25]

EE: The little trip's been had, I gather? I called you just after you got back, so.

WT: Well, we had a couple. We went to Alaska on a cruise, and then we just got back from Vegas, so.

EE: Yeah. That's a good beginning.

WT: Yes, it is. My wife thought so anyway. The house is full of stuff we don't know what to do with. Anyway. [Laughing]

EE: I can relate to both of those. I took my wife on a daytrip yesterday, and she's still talking gratefully this morning about it. So, I mean, I've got work to do here in retirement. [Laughs] What would you like people to know about the work you did and the place you worked? I don't know whether--. I suspect you've answered that question.

WT: Well, I'm not going to brag or anything. I'll give you a quote. One of the times when I was a weighman-in-charge, I mentioned before, I had to go and work when there were strikes and things. Oh, gee, 1980 something, I got called to go to Vancouver. We're in the '90s. I got called to go to Vancouver. Anyway, we were at a meeting before we were sent out to the elevators, and they had the elevator managers there. Now, two or three of them in Vancouver had come from Thunder Bay and moved out there. Anyway, so they went around and made introductions, and one of the fellows who was out there, his name is Dave Kushner. He was the manager of the old Alberta Pool Elevator. They call it Cascadia now. So anyway, I knew him, and I knew a couple of the others. So anyway, they're going around introducing them, and Dave Kusher's introducing, "This is Gordon. This is Wayne." And then he looks over at me, and he says, "I'd like you to meet Canada's best weighman."

EE: One savours those moments.

WT: And he meant it.

EE: Yes.

WT: And I jumped back actually, because I had never heard anything at all. I knew I worked with him at the elevator, and then he had moved to Vancouver, but--. And I thought, "Boy, oh, boy. That's pretty nice.

EE: It is, indeed. One can't bank those moments. One just sort of savours them longer than money lasts.

WT: Yeah. I'll give you the opposite side of the coin. When you reach your 25th anniversary on the job, the federal government supplies you with a plaque for 25 years of service. At the time when I got mine, Thunder Bay had a regional director, and I didn't report to him or anything. My office was just here. I didn't report to anyone in Thunder Bay, actually. I reported right to the chief in Winnipeg. I came into work one morning,

two of my fellow cohorts were in the office with me. In came the regional director with a plaque, and said, “Here. You’re the only guy I know that was away on holidays when you reached your 25th.” And he walked out the door.

EE: No dinner?

WT: That was the Commission.

EE: Yeah. [Laughs]

WT: Enough said. Anyway.

EE: Well, it’s the compliments from people you interact with rather than your superiors which often are the sweetest.

WT: Here’s a good one for the books. Saskatoon. There was a strike there. So anyway, I’m the only person for weighing. We’re taking in 100 trucks of canola a day. We’re loading out railcars on the other side of the elevator, and there’s all this certificate work, and all the rest of it going on. Well, into about the second week, the manager of the elevator happened to be in the office. His name was Jeff Robertson at the time. Anyway, I’m standing there, and I bit down on something, and my denture broke in half. I said, “Uh, oh. That’s it. Have you got a dentist in town?” He said, “Why?” The manager of the elevator said, “Why? Do you need to get it fixed?” I said, “I’ll put it this way: Either you shut down the elevator while I go, or you take them and get them fixed.” In two seconds, he had them in a plastic bag, and he was out the door going to get them. [Laughing]

[1:50:00]

EE: Yeah, that’s another compliment!

WT: It was so weird. It was hilarious.

EE: Recognition of the importance of service.

WT: Oh! [Laughing] And at the same strike we had, I would come to the elevator, and there would be a grain inspector, and we were the only two government people allowed in through the picket line. The government employees were on strike.

EE: Because you were management, of course.

WT: Yeah. So anyway, I knew them all. Anyway. I drive up to the picket line. And they go, “How’s it going? What’re you going to do today?” “Well, I don’t know what the heck they’re going to do in there. Whatever they say they’re going to do anyway.” They said, “Here, have a cup of

coffee. Take it with you.” So the next day, I brought them a cup of coffee. Things are going along fine. Well, it really got busy. So they sent in two management from Vancouver and said, “Now, Bill, you get those guys into that elevator tomorrow morning, there may be trouble at the picket line because now we’re bringing in other people.” So I met the two Vancouverites that night—and I knew both of them two—and they’d been sitting in the bar drinking beer.

So I got a hold of them, and they said, “Okay, what’s happening?” I said, “You guys, I don’t know what they told you, but I’m going to tell you what you’re going to see.” “What? What?” “That picket line, you’ve got to be extremely careful. Now, I’ve set it up so that I can get in, but they’ve already said that they’re prepared for a lot of violence and whatever if anybody else tries to even approach that picket line. And I’ve seen some of these guys, and they’re big bruisers, and they’ll take care of business.” “Well, what are we going to do? What are we going to do?” So I said, the next morning, I said, “Okay. You two guys have to get in the trunk of the car, and we’ll go.” And they did! And we drove up to the picket line, and I had a note and a piece of paper that says, “The two idiots are in the trunk,” and they all broke out laughing. They didn’t care! [Laughing]

EE: You drove through the picket line?

WT: But anyway, we got into the elevator, and I said, “Well, you made it. You’re here.” [Laughing] That was a lot of fun. Well, you’ve got to do little things like that to help--.

EE: And the next day and the next and the next?

WT: Oh, no. I told them later one. They pretty near killed me, but anyway.

EE: Oh, I can well imagine. What might interest or surprise people most about the work you did? That’s a good story.

WT: Surprise? That’s a good story, yeah. I guess the most surprising thing was that necessity is the mother of invention.

EE: Including big computer programs.

WT: Yes. Especially if you know that you’ve been declared surplus.

EE: [Laughs] That focuses the mind!

WT: There is a bit of an incentive there. But I had taken computer courses here at the university.

EE: You mentioned that.

WT: On my own. I didn't know a lot of the technical programming side, but I knew of the organization of the program, of what I wanted, where I wanted it to connect to and how.

EE: And you knew Rutledge, I gather.

WT: Oh, yeah.

EE: How did you discover him?

WT: I knew from working out at the elevator. When they first introduced computers at the elevator, most people backed away and ran away from them. They didn't know what they were. And he just sat down and went--. [Mimics typing sounds] Fortunate for me, that was one of my insights that helped me out. When I started high school, I started at Hillcrest High School.

EE: I was wondering when you said Hammarskjold earlier.

WT: Grade 9 and Grade 10, I took typing.

EE: And I suppose Rutledge had as well?

WT: I can--. He took it as well. I can do 120, 130, 140 words a minute.

EE: I mean, I've learned to word process after I came back from politics because I wanted to. A Mac and began doing it. But I'm not fast like that.

WT: But at the time when I was in high school, I thought, "This is the greatest class for meeting chicks." [Laughing]

EE: Well, yes of course. It was full of them. And you were the only guy in the room, I suppose, were you?

WT: I could step up to that computer and go. And once I learned the operating procedure, there's nothing to it.

EE: No, of course not. Even with DOS.

WT: My wife today figures that if you hit the enter button on a computer, it will blow up. That's the extent of her computer thing. And I say that--.

EE: And of course, the employees, they didn't know if they hit the enter button what was happening. [Laughs]

WT: Right. Well, they figured all the grain would go out into the ocean and in the water and then they'd all be fired and all the rest of it.

EE: So you set out to be “dundant”, to play games with a word here, when you were--.

[1:55:03]

WT: Yes, I did.

EE: Quite deliberately.

WT: Yes.

EE: And so the country is the beneficiary of this particular declaration of your status.

WT: I hope so. And I also went up to Winnipeg many times and filled in for the chief of weighing and the head of audits and scales, and I did that for years and years. And I took the opportunity to go. And I made it one on one with every grain company and went over and said--.

EE: Who's the person I should talk to, eh?

WT: Yeah. And “My time is yours. What would you like to talk about? Would you like me to talk to your statistics department to say this is the information, where it comes from. What can you do with it? The people that look after all your shipments from the primary elevators, what can they do?” And right from then, *boom!* Same thing at the Wheat Board. I used to go and put on session at the Canadian International Grains Institute [CIGI] and do things like that.

EE: Well, I'm guessing that your program may not be matched on the continent.

WT: It's not. I know it.

EE: I don't suppose the ICC [Interstate Commerce Commission] has anything like that, or does it?

WT: Because I knew the head of the United States Department of Agriculture.

EE: Yeah. And the Interstate Commerce Commission or whomever, they haven't had reason to construct it. Now, yours handles just grain moving cars, I guess. I mean, it would handle all cars.

WT: Yes, it would.

EE: And does it contain all cars, or the others are dropped out? You're interested only in those that have grain in them.

WT: It contains—I will guarantee—it contains any car that carries grain and unloads at a terminal elevator at any time whenever.

EE: Yes. Yeah.

WT: The other ones, you'd have to interconnect with the--.

EE: Yeah, it would have to be--.

WT: That's easy.

EE: But of course, since it's based in part on the cars rolling through every one of these weigh stations, it would be simple enough to have all of the information come in, but most of it would be garbage for the Grain Commission.

WT: I know lots more it could get.

EE: Yes, I daresay.

WT: I had huge plans for that thing. Big. I have a lot of them at home.

EE: Yes. [Laughs] You just have to buy a server.

WT: Well, unfortunately, they weren't able to be implemented yet. The next steps were on the way, but I've saved the steps.

EE: You're in good health, and are you thinking about contracting services?

WT: I just found out yesterday I was in good health. I went and had MRIs done, all kinds of stuff. Medical check-ups. My wife says I'm good to go on any housework job that--. [Laughing]

EE: Yes, I have the same orders laying in my in-basket. I have to admit it, I'm not complaining. What are you most proud of in the work you've done over the years? One comes just under the pride that you take in this particular program.

WT: I think--.

EE: Because I imagine that's top of the--.

WT: I think having a good understanding and working relationship with everybody in the industry no matter what you did.

EE: Yeah, the more people you're on a first name basis with people you respect and trust--.

WT: Absolutely. Absolutely.

EE: The richer life becomes. I can understand that.

WT: For sure. And I would make sure that whomever I was talking to, I'd try and bring it down to a little personal thing. When you get on the phone with somebody in Grand Prairie, Alberta, and ask them how the weather is, how they're doing, they get a--.

EE: That's a good Canadian start.

WT: And you get them relaxed and comfortable, and you keep it that way, even when you come to the business of, "Did you load this car number last week?" And *la-da-da*. There are ways of speaking to people to get business done. Some people I have watched come through the system who get in there and figure they have a position and not a job, and they sort of demand from people they're not authorized to demand from. And you know the result they get? Nothing.

EE: Yes. Right. Well, you're interested in serving, anyway.

WT: Oh, absolutely.

EE: And you're interested in the facts rather than speculation about it.

WT: And you know what? I never learned half of it.

EE: Yeah. No, I daresay. There's always more to learn.

WT: There wasn't a day that goes by that I didn't learn new things.

EE: Yeah. That's one of my attitudes in life too. Learning something new everyday.

WT: I wish I could've shared more of it with more people.

EE: Yes. But there aren't that many people around who have that same attitude to life, regrettably.

WT: I loved it. I had to love it. If I make it--. [Laughing]

EE: How are we doing in terms of the time really available here?

OM: About 45 minutes.

EE: 45 minutes. That's time to--.

OM: We're at two hours now.

[2:00:00]

EE: Okay.

WT: Are we?

OM: Yeah.

EE: That's what I thought.

WT: I do talk a lot, Owen. [Laughing]

EE: I don't think that I need to ask you whether your work contributed to Canada's success as an international grain trader. I mean, it's palpable obvious that it did in these fundamental ways of--. Or did you want to comment on that?

WT: I think that over the past ten years—not just because of, say the program I put in--.

EE: No, of course not, no. The work you did before that and so on.

WT: But because of the level of training and the level of technological change that has been implemented, that I think overall, it has been keeping Canada at pace with its great reputation as a grain provider.

EE: Yes. Yes.

WT: Most definitely.

EE: I'm sure it has.

WT: Snooze, you lose.

EE: Yeah, indeed.

WT: And it's very, very true in not only the grain trade, but everywhere else too. You can't--. And I knew people at work who relied on, "Well, this is what was in place when I got the job, so I'm just leaving it." And you know what happens? They get left behind.

EE: Yes. It just grinds down. And there clearly were connections with the work you did and the work of farmers growing the grain.

WT: First name basis.

EE: Obvious again. How often does a farmer load a car? Sort of not just his own understanding, but in sort of legal fact? Because I'm familiar with farmers bringing the grain into the elevator, and then it really becomes the--.

WT: Oh, to the primary and selling it right there. You get a cash purchase ticket.

EE: Well, not necessarily selling, but having a sense of he's loaded a car with 90 tonnes or whatever. Is there a lot of that on the Prairies?

WT: Yes.

EE: So that they're really by-passing the line elevator and the agent there, are they?

WT: Yes. Matter of fact. There's an outfit called West Central Road and Rail. It's actually run by a fellow from Florida. But anyway, he's moved to Canada and set up this producer organization. They now have three or four loading facilities on the Prairies that are strictly producer, and they are big, and they are powerful.

EE: Where are they?

WT: In Eston, Saskatchewan.

EE: All of them? Or is that just one of the points?

WT: That's one of them.

EE: That's one of them. Where is the--.

WT: His name is Rob Lobdell. Nice fella.

EE: Eston, is that on the Trans-Canada?

WT: No.

EE: On the Yellowhead Highway?

WT: I forget which one. No, it's down in southern Saskatchewan.

EE: Or even further south?

WT: Yeah.

EE: Okay. Because I haven't driven the highways in--.

WT: Down towards--. Oh. Now the name escapes me. With the W.

EE: Wadena?

WT: No.

EE: Wayburn?

WT: Yes. Wayburn.

EE: Okay. That's in the south.

WT: Yeah. I should remember that. I worked there too. I did a grain volume schematic analysis for them.

EE: I see.

WT: For the railway.

EE: For the railway.

WT: Because the number of railcars you get to load from the railway is dependent on the volume that your grain elevator has. Did you know that?

EE: Yeah. Well, the--.

WT: That's how they calculate it.

EE: The size of what the elevator can load is--.

WT: Not if you've got 1,000 farmers delivering grain. It's on how big the bins are.

EE: Yeah, of course. Because that's the grain there, and they don't want cars to sit at the elevator for very long. They want to get the grain into the cars and on the way.

WT: Yeah.

EE: Okay, so that--. This probably moves us to what major changes did you see in your job and the trade over the years?

WT: Major changes?

EE: This would be the next hour and a half, of course, but--.

WT: I saw from fellow employees to sons of the employees to grandsons of the employees. [Laughing]

EE: Well, that's one succession.

WT: I saw three generations. I saw the decrease in the numbers of the terminals. I saw the decrease in the numbers of lake boats. I saw the implementation of the new fleet of grain boats that there are with the self-unloader types, the big carriers that hold over 28,000 metric tonnes on them.

EE: We talked about salties.

WT: Yeah. I saw the introduction of computers into the elevator. I saw the introduction of computers into the mainstream of the Grain Commission. I saw the entire set up of their Human Resource—the way they hire, fire, and do things—change.

EE: Pollution control?

WT: Pollution control was another big thing. That all changed.

EE: Would you want to expand a little bit on that? Because I think each of these changes that you've mentioned is an interesting one, but pollution control is of interest to the community, I think, in ways some of those others aren't.

[2:05:02]

WT: It is. I'll put it this way. Working in Quebec City one day at Bunge Elevator, I went out with the manager of the elevator into the elevator up to where the scales were operating, and they were loading a vessel. We walked down around one of the scales, and there was dust coming down. And his statement was, "If there's dust, there's something wrong with the pollution system." And I thought to myself, "My God, we've got a problem at every elevator then."

EE: Because this was the standard of cleanliness that he wanted to maintain?

WT: That was his standard.

EE: Yes. An American company, right?

WT: So they had integrated the pollution system to a degree where there shouldn't be dust in the air at that level. So he knew there was something not right. Now, there are different types of pollution systems and the way they operate. Each one of them require its own set up, its own engineers on how things are done. So a lot of work there. One of them, for example, here in Thunder Bay, the big pollution bags were called socks, and they were like the filter inside of a vacuum cleaner. Well, as you used this system like a vacuum cleaner, what happens? It eventually starts to fill up.

EE: Of course, it does.

WT: And so, inside the elevator it gets dustier and dustier. So what do you do? You turn the dial to increase the suction. Well, after a while it won't turn anymore, and so to the impact on grain, you have all the millwrights come in, and they take all the socks out and change them and put brand new ones in. Eh? Lock them all in position. The vessel arrives at the dock, put the spouts on, start weighing grain to the vessel, and turn on the pollution system. You know what happened? Half of the grain never went to the boat.

EE: Because it was still--.

WT: It all went up in the pollution system because they still had it cranked wide open! [Laughing] I was there for that too.

EE: You watched it happen, eh?

WT: So the effect on pollution systems? There you are. They're very, very powerful, but they have changed the way--. I can remember shovelling boxcars back in the '60s where you could hold your hand out in front of you and you couldn't see it.

EE: That bad, eh? My!

WT: That bad. Or they would have you get inside of a boxcar that was almost full of what they called refuse screenings—light powder dust—and they'd put a spout in there, and the guy would shoot a tonne of that crap into the car, and you're back there with a shovel trying to get more into the car. And you couldn't see anything. Like talk about silliness!

EE: Yeah. And your mouth was open, nose open, and so on. No protection.

WT: I had a bandana on my face. That's terrible!

EE: When you first started work, were some guys using bandanas already, or did they begin to use them? Was there a growing sensitivity to what--.

WT: The bandana was the first thing I saw, like a handkerchief. Your own.

EE: Yes. And you would do that because it was just so bad you had to do it?

WT: That's all there was. They didn't have anything. And then they came in with these little masks. They were about this size and they had little metal clips on them, and it would fit here. And they were very thin. Well, they'd keep out meatballs and stuff, but not much. They were a slight improvement.

EE: You can still buy that kind of stuff. Well, it's fitted to the face and clipped on the nose.

WT: Oh, that's different. These weren't like that.

EE: It's an improvement. No.

WT: These were just like taking a piece of gauze and putting it here with a metal clip on the side. That was it. Plastered to your face. They were micro thin. Today's masks—I know what you mean—have the nose piece for them, and they stick out a bit. The other ones didn't.

EE: They weren't that quality. And of course, the ultimate achievement—what was required really—was to get the stuff out of the air as per the elevator in Quebec City so that you didn't need a mask.

WT: Well, sure. That's right. Because you can remember if you looked down from Hillcrest Park in the '60s and beginning of the '70s, if you looked down at Intercity on a hot summer day, there'd just be a massive--. It looked like it was covered in smog.

EE: Yes. In the morning when the sun shone through it, eh?

WT: And that was dust. It was dust in the air.

[2:10:03]

EE: Yes. And settling on cars all around.

WT: So the rules of the game started to change, and the government intervened on rules and regulations—I imagine the city got into it too—and things started to move. Speaking of the city and whatever—getting back to the number of elevators in this town—having spoken with some people at some pretty high levels out there on the Prairies, I have more than once had it spoken to me that the main reason they shut down here: city taxes.

EE: Yeah, municipal taxes. Well, they have to realize the terminal elevators will be an expense. [Laughs] But they're essential to their work. The question is, of course, how many they need as the quantities of grain moving decline.

WT: I know that because I've worked at all of them, and I know all the managers and the people and the way the elevator operates, and I know how many tonnes they can put out that door per minute, per hour, how many they can bring in over the same thing, I know what they can do if they're provided the service from the railway and from the vessel company. And with today's working market that they have, they could probably operate with less than what they have now.

EE: And, actually, still have an operation. Yes, I daresay if everything were as efficient as it could be.

WT: That is correct.

EE: That's the challenge.

WT: But then you're going to run into a problem because now, like the Commission, you may be putting all your eggs in one basket. If something goes wrong, you're dead.

EE: We know from this interview that redundancies can be a good thing within limits. [Laughs]

WT: Possible.

EE: And having an extra elevator still in operation can be a good thing.

WT: Yes.

EE: What impact did these changes have on your job and industry? You've listed a whole bunch of them, so.

WT: For me, because of the fact--.

EE: Did you want to single out one or two perhaps?

WT: For the department I worked in, who had the responsibility for ensuring that all the grain that came out of the railcars reached the scales and was weighed accurately, and all of the electronics and the systems and the weighing transaction systems and all of the computerization and stuff, you had to know it for every elevator. Because it's just like car companies. You can't have the same one. You can't have a Dodge and a Ford and a Chevy. Oh, no, no, no, no. We have to have Suzuki over here and Honda over there.

EE: It's the joy of the capitalist system that you have to have choice.

WT: Absolutely.

EE: And so, I suppose--.

WT: And that's a big thing. So when you go out--. If you're going to be a grain inspector, you know what [No.] 1 Red looks like. You can establish the protein, the moisture on it—and it's the same in Halifax and Vancouver, by the way. But if you work for weighing, it's not, because every elevator is different. So when you go to Goderich, and when you go to Windsor, and when you go to Vancouver and Churchill and Parrish & Heimbecker, every system is different. So when you see all these documents and stuff--.

EE: Let me be clear about this. You're saying that the grade of grain is the same everywhere, but--. Or are you saying--.

WT: So it's easier to train a grain inspector. Once you learn it once, okay, the way you grade it and come up with [No.] 1 Red is the same in Halifax and Vancouver and everything.

EE: Yes. But you're--.

WT: For a weighman, every system is different in every elevator.

EE: Yeah. But you're not saying that No. 1 Red or No. 1 Northern or whatever would be different in different elevators?

WT: No.

EE: You're saying that the systems that they're operating are different?

WT: It's easier to be the person saying, "It's [No.] 1 Red."

EE: Yes. Yes, quite.

WT: Much easier.

EE: And I suppose here in the city that means, too, that every elevator will have a distinctive system of operations.

WT: Oh, yes.

EE: It'll have maybe a different pollution control system from another.

WT: Yes.

EE: It'll have a different computer.

WT: A different computer. A different server. A different router. A different everything at every elevator.

EE: Yeah.

WT: Right down to manual too.

EE: Which?

WT: Manual weighing systems. They still have it here.

EE: Who does that?

WT: Western Grain. We used to send employees there so they could learn all about weighing because that's where it came from. So you learn--.

EE: Like the people who learned to fly on an old biplane or something.

WT: All about balances and hand weights and all those sorts of things.

EE: Yeah. Learn the nuts and bolts, the elementary, and then you can work with--.

WT: Absolutely.

EE: Fly a little monoplane, and then we'll give you a jet someday, eh, or something like that?

[2:15:03]

WT: If you're good. [Laughing]

EE: Yes, if you're good. Besides dealing with change, what other challenges did you face on the job?

WT: I think challenges come from all different types of sources. I think one of the challenges I mentioned before was dealing with having to do my job, but also trying to incorporate it into my home life. As I mentioned before, there was a series of years there where I was barely at home. Well, my two children were young, and they never saw their father a lot of times.

EE: How much of the year at that time was this true of? Were you away from--.

WT: April to December.

EE: So it was eight months of the year then.

WT: They were susceptible to that--.

EE: Through the summer. Yeah. In danger of that, eh?

WT: More so. And there would be little lulls in there, don't get me wrong. It wasn't that sort of thing. But when you combine it with having to go out of town and travel and all these other things, it adds up. I would say over the years, I watched many an employee's family disintegrate.

EE: I was going to ask that. So it did lead to marriage breakdown?

WT: It was big. Big.

EE: Really?

WT: Yeah.

EE: Well, that's a social impact we hadn't talked about before, I don't think.

WT: It's rather large.

EE: One thinks of public life involving that. Many a politician--.

WT: Yeah. So that was one of the challenges. The other challenge was dealing with the ever-changing management or hierarchy in the head office in Winnipeg. As each new politically appointed commissioner came in, the whole focus of everything would change all the time.

EE: Because each has his own idea, I suppose.

WT: Oh, and I don't blame them for having their own ideas.

EE: Yeah. But they had to make their mark on the Commission, I suppose.

WT: But who are the people that have to do the work? So where am I? Am I doing this? Am I going that way? Am I doing this? Well, now your funding's cut off over there. Well, not anymore. Well, you're going--. And there was no sense of continuity kind of thing.

EE: How long did commissioners last? Was there any kind of--. Four years, eight years.

WT: Yeah, about four. Three to four.

EE: So it was almost per every election, you'd expect to see a new commissioner.

WT: Oh, and if there's an election tomorrow, this one will be *pssht!* Gone.

EE: Even if the party--.

WT: Just like that because--.

EE: Even if the party were re-elected?

WT: It depends. If the Liberals got in tomorrow or the NDP--.

EE: Well, I can understand that.

WT: This commissioner would be gone because he's a Conservative supporter.

EE: Right. I can understand that, but, say, through the Trudeau years, was there similar sort of rollover every four years or whatever? Because they--.

WT: Not quite as much. But there was rollover, and I would imagine that people, like, looking at careers and whatever, would take on the Commission as chief commissioner and then aspire to something else.

EE: What did they go on to?

WT: Go to work for the federal government in Ottawa for whatever department.

EE: Rather than working in Winnipeg.

WT: Oh, yeah.

EE: Where did they come from? What kind of experience did they bring to the--?

WT: Farmers.

EE: Oh, they were farmers, were they? [Laughs]

WT: Some, yeah. Some were--. One worked in a science lab.

EE: So that's--.

WT: Agriculture.

EE: That's limited appreciation of what the Commission--. May have broad understanding, but limited appreciation of what the Commission actually has to do.

WT: Oh, yeah. And there's a whole--. It's huge what they have to do. Yeah. It is huge. Dealing with the way they set up the operations, and the way they kept changing it, sometimes that was hard to deal with too because not just me, but the whole staff had problems with, "Well, who in the heck's in charge here?"

EE: Well, I was going to say that the chief commissioner is influencing the Commission some considerable distance down.

WT: Sure.

EE: He isn't a minister with a deputy who actually runs the place, who is a career civil servant, which would be more true in Ottawa.

WT: Right.

EE: But he was like a minister who could actually yank the place around.

WT: What we call the Mushroom Building in Winnipeg there. *Pssht!* He would call in the heads of the departments, operations, finance, and all that, "Starting tomorrow, this is what we're doing." And that was it. There was no, "Make me a memo. Do this. Do that. Do that," and six months later you might see something. It was immediate. That sort of thing, so--.

[2:20:07]

EE: Well, that's a challenge.

WT: It's a big challenge if you're one of the people sitting there listening to it and you have to implement it because that's your job.

EE: Yes.

WT: So it's hard that way, but as you went down the line, as you know, with every message, it becomes diluted.

EE: Well, at some point, his will run up against what has to be done in the way of emptying grain cars and moving grain and so on and so forth.

WT: Yes. Oh, you can't stop the trade.

EE: That would be an interesting point of tension, I would imagine, when the--.

WT: And the elevators will keep going. And the last couple of strikes—I'll give you an example—the Commission deferred the Canada Grain Act. In other words, they can continue to take in railcars and load boats.

EE: Without inspection?

WT: Yeah.

EE: [Laughs] How long did they do that?

WT: I don't care.

EE: I mean for how long a period did that prevail?

WT: Well, for however long the strike lasted.

EE: For the period of the strike?

WT: Yeah. Three weeks might--.

EE: What by ordered council in Ottawa or did it by Commission will?

WT: Oh, yeah.

EE: I asked a question. [Laughs]

WT: Yes. From the chief commissioner, because the chief commissioner has the right in the back of the Canada Grain Act regulations to defer on any one of the items in the act.

EE: I'll be damned.

WT: Oh, yeah. Now, that didn't mean that the terminals and everybody was totally off the hook. There was still communication going on. It just meant that the actual people wouldn't be there. It didn't mean they couldn't talk electronically.

EE: Of course, this was not some kind of ultimate power. It sort of stood beside and between the farmers, the Wheat Board, and the buyers abroad. They had responsibilities.

WT: Oh, they were--.

EE: So just because there was a strike on didn't mean that you could forget about all of that either.

WT: The chief commissioner would tell you emphatically that he was out there protecting the interests of the producers by keeping the grain moving.

EE: Yeah. And by limiting the cost, I suppose, in the Grain Commission.

WT: No disruption.

EE: Yeah.

WT: Well.

EE: Well, those are interesting--.

WT: And that's his decision that he had to make at the time.

EE: That would be a challenging time all right.

WT: And did it.

EE: Yes.

WT: They've done it more than once. So with that hanging over peoples' heads, are you going to vote for conciliation, strike, or arbitration?
[Laughing]

EE: Now, conciliation is always a marvellous thing.

WT: Yes.

EE: If it can succeed. Did you have a sense of the relationship between the Commission and the Canadian Wheat Board [CWB], which plays a certain central role for the farmers, for producers, selling grain abroad and so on and so forth?

WT: Insofar as the connection with the Wheat Board, there's a connection there with respect to training. Like the Wheat Board supplies money to run the Canada Grains Institute, and the Commission does too. And the Commission supplies people to come and be speakers and put on things and *la-di-da-di-da-di-da*. I know. I was there doing it. But anyway, and the Wheat Board does too. They contribute to bringing in people from foreign countries to show them, and that's where we give away all our technology and all that stuff.

EE: Share it with the world.

WT: No. We give it away.

EE: Share it with the world.

WT: We give it. Free. Just like, you know, when there's a famine somewhere, you give away boatloads of grain and stuff?

EE: Okay. Well, sharing you mean--. Sharing is at cost, and this is charity.

WT: Yeah. It's a term. It's a term. So there's all that training stuff that goes on between the two. With respect to communications, it's mainly around inspection and the Wheat Board because that's where they get their most complaints.

EE: Yes. I can well imagine.

WT: Why?

EE: And you're the people who are supposed to--.

WT: "Why?" would be the question.

EE: Why they get those complaints?

WT: Yes.

EE: Okay.

WT: So if somebody wants to dig in there and find out, that's fine. That's all I'll say about that. But anyway, that's a big part of the communications between the two.

EE: Sure. Well, I'm assuming that farmers complain because they think that they should get a better grade than they've been given. Is that the main--?

WT: And were complaining whether it's right or not. [Laughing]

EE: Well, yes. Of course!

WT: But they do. There are some farmers who will go after you for one pound. The next farmer won't say boo unless it's more than five tonnes.

EE: And that's reflective of the scale of operation. Probably a boatload of them.

WT: It very well could be. So it's all a matter of personal choice. With respect to weighing and the Canadian Wheat Board, they want to know for sure that the devices that are being used to create these certificates of weight for shipments going not only internally in Canada, but anywhere in the world are absolutely accurate. They rely very heavily upon the weighing department.

EE: Yes.

WT: Who tests these systems very regularly and put them through--. Like if you go to a gas pump, you'll see a little dial on there with a stamp on it—Weights and Measures and all that stuff. We have the same thing at all the elevators. We have all their computer control locks sealed off so they can't go in and reconfigure them to cheat the system.

[2:25:36]

EE: And is that—this Weights and Measures standard—that's provided by the Grain Commission?

WT: Yes.

EE: I see.

WT: It's actually controlled, if you look up the Act—the Weights and Measures Act—it's theirs. They gave it to the Grain Commission to look after the scales that do the weighing of grain. And so we take that on. I've tested hundreds of them all over the country myself.

EE: Yeah. I won't take the time at this point to ask what's involved with that.

WT: Lots.

EE: I can well imagine there might be. [Laughs] Different kinds of bins, different kinds of scales, and so on.

WT: Yeah, there's lots.

EE: Yeah. How were these challenges met? Successfully every time.

WT: Let's just say the challenges are ongoing and ever-changing.

EE: [Laughs]

WT: They are.

EE: Yes, I'm sure.

WT: Yeah. As, you know, the recession had a huge impact on everybody and everything in the entire world, you know, that includes the Grain Commission and me--.

EE: Which recession?

WT: Hm?

EE: Which recession? The last 18 months?

WT: Yeah. That one—huge impact on everybody and everything. Everybody became budget conscious. “Where'd the money go? Why is going?” The Treasury Board for sure has closed its books up to say, “Okay, we're going to watch here. What're we doing? There's no more of this handout stuff,” and all that. There's a lot, a lot of impacts on things that have changed. And it's not going to stop. Tomorrow somebody's going to come up with a new way to do business, a new piece of electronics, a new hydraulic system.

EE: And it will be an improvement?

WT: Yes, it will. That's right. And they'll make changes that will make people not happy, but for the good of the industry, it will be a better thing.

EE: Yes. Improvement down the line.

WT: Sure.

EE: What are your most vivid memories of the job at the end of it all?

WT: Vivid? Like yesterday, I go back to when I shovelled grain out of boxcars. I can remember my second summer there. A new fellow came along, and I had to show him how to shovel grain out of boxcar. And a little while later, I showed him how to operate and weigh grain on a scale and how he could steal grain if he wanted to and all this sort of stuff. And he ended up being the manager of operations in Churchill. And I thought, "My gosh. All the way back." We were good friends way back then too. That was a dandy. But I remember all the trips and the years going to Winnipeg and working in that head office. I don't know what it was, but I was able to look around and see the state of the union address, per se, of how things looked and where they were going.

I'll give you an example with respect to computers. I went up to the head office, and they have secretaries and all this stuff, and you have your desk and stuff. And I said, "Wow. My computer isn't set up yet. Can I use this one at the front?" "Well, you'll have to ask her because she's in control of that computer." I said, "Okay. Do you mind if I get on here for a minute or do whatever at that one?" "Well, you can't because you need to know the password." "Well, okay. What's the password?" She said, "Don't tell anybody." I said, "Okay. What's the password?" She says, "Hello." [Laughing] Yeah. So then I saw how vividly the Commission started to become compartmentalized specialty operations—min included. I wasn't in Winnipeg, I was here. But my theory is if I have all of this computerization and electronics--. I set up a toll-free telephone number for farmers too. It's still operational. Then why do I need to be there?

[2:30:18]

EE: You could be anywhere as long as you had a computer in front of you or what have you.

WT: But anyway, I think that was one of the things that sort of turned Winnipeg away a bit because I wasn't part of the standard old-type group. "We have our Monday morning meeting," you know? Well, we've got video conference equipment in the next room. Like, hello? So anyway, there were a lot of ways that they were trying to move ahead, but other ways they weren't, and I remember that time to sit down and wait.

EE: So among the vivid memories you have is of opportunities lost.

WT: There are opportunities that are lost, but with respect to being able to get that Doug Rutledge fellow and get going and create the programs and stuff--. And do you know what happened with him? I had him up there, and we started working on reams of binders of programs and stuff. Within a year and a half, because of his capabilities up there, if I wanted to see him, I had to make an appointment. That's how good he was. Everybody started to figure out that this chap could do anything for anybody.

EE: If it involved a computer, he could solve the problem, eh?

WT: Yeah. And create whatever you wanted.

EE: And at some point, he began to realize the value this could be for himself, I suppose?

WT: Yes. Very much so.

EE: And went into business then himself?

WT: Yes, he did.

EE: Where is he doing that now?

WT: He is in New Brunswick.

EE: Where he enjoys living, I presume.

WT: Where his mother is.

EE: Where his mother is.

WT: Yeah.

EE: And his computer, and the internet is there, and--.

WT: Oh, it certainly is. Good fella.

EE: Does he have a company that he operates?

WT: No. He's working for another company.

EE: I see.

WT: Doing quite comfortably.

EE: Oh, yes. I'm sure.

WT: And he does lots of things on the computer on his own that he does. They're money-making ventures and things too.

EE: I have a sister--.

WT: He does quite well. But when I look back at the most vivid memories, have got to be meeting the people in the industry. Live.

EE: Well, the dealings you have across the continent, that's bound to be profoundly satisfying.

WT: Oh, it sure is.

EE: That's an ego-builder, to put it in those terms.

WT: A week before I left, I figured out, "How am I going to tell all these people that I'm not going to be here, and you've got to contact this new number in Vancouver if you want to get any kind of help at all?" So I sent a generic message out to my 900+ contact things.

EE: One email?

WT: Yeah. To all of them.

EE: And the computer system handled it.

WT: I got over 600 responses back, and they flooded the Grain Commission's system.

EE: [Laughs]

WT: So they tried to give me heck for that.

EE: Yeah. I imagine they would.

WT: Anyway, I thought, "Boy, oh, boy." I said, "There's the only thanks I need right there."

EE: Have you got them all, printed them off or whatever? Or you've got them on a disk, a hard drive somewhere?

WT: How shall I put this? If I need to, I can get in contact with any one of them.

EE: Of course. But I'm thinking it would be--. Your children might enjoy rifling through those pages of the notes of appreciation.

WT: Oh, if they can find them, they can. [Laughing] Not that they're interested or anything, but no.

EE: Well, at some point.

WT: Oh.

EE: Boy. In your mind, what were the most important events that happened in the workplace during your career? I don't know that we want to pursue that question. [Laughing]

WT: We already did.

EE: We have, really. Do you think it's important to preserve and share the history of the grain trade through Thunder Bay?

WT: I think so. Actually, very much so. It's what Thunder Bay is made of.

EE: It's been a fundamental part of the--.

WT: Yes.

EE: Economic life here.

WT: Just like the papermills are. It's part of the fundamental make-up. Just like the railways are. Part of the fundamental make-up.

EE: Well, the railways and the grain trade, and then there are the papermills.

WT: Yes.

[2:35:01]

EE: And then we have education and hospitals and so on.

WT: And healthcare.

EE: And healthcare, yeah.

WT: And don't forget basket weaving. Cottage industry.

EE: Yes. There are lots of other things, but if you think of the bulk of employment and income and--.

WT: And the best auditorium in North America.

EE: Yes.

WT: I've heard that from a few of the people who have performed here.

EE: I'm not sure it's to the credit of the grain trade that we have that, or is it?

WT: No. And Paul Shaffer didn't buy it either.

EE: No.

WT: When I played in a band, we played—I told you before—we played at the Royal Edward Hotel in what they called the Dominion Room or the D Room. That was '67, '68, '69. While I was working at the Psychiatric Hospital, I was playing six nights a week over here. When we finished at 1:00 in the morning every night, we used to go to the Blue Parrot. And a lady by the name--.

EE: The good old Blue Parrot, eh?

WT: Yeah. Name of Marge Harrison owned it. And we used to go in and sit in the back with this group of fellows called Donnie B and the Bonneville's. And the organ player in there's name was Paul Shaffer. And we used to meet with a couple other bands that used to play at the Jolly Roger and whatever, and we'd sit there until about 3:00 in the morning every night yakking away drinking coffee and stuff.

EE: And then you were at the Psychiatric--.

WT: I stay up until 3:00 now, I'm gone for two days, eh? [Laughing]

EE: And then you were at the Psychiatric Hospital at 8:00 in the morning?

WT: 7:00.

EE: [Laughs] One of the few lines I remember Igor Gouzenko's *The Fall of a Titan* has to do with that kind of life.

WT: It's a killer.

EE: Except that the young can do it! [Laughs]

WT: Yeah. They call it the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, but I'm not Italian. [Laughing]

EE: Are there any--. Owen, you have a question or two that you'd like to put to our worthy guest here, Bill Tebenham.

OM: Well, thank you, Ernie. Nice to meet you again, Bill.

WT: Yes. [Laughing]

OM: Just something that if we move onto the rest of the Tebenham clan that worked in the elevators. You mentioned something to me a couple months—oh, maybe a year ago now—about, was it, your dad or your grandfather who was involved in the grain elevator explosion which--.

WT: Oh.

OM: Maybe you could just relate that anecdote for posterity here.

WT: My father. That would've been the 1951 blast at Saskatchewan Wheat Pool 4. He was the inspector-in-charge for the Commission at that elevator. He went into work that morning and got a phone call from the head office, from Chapple's Building. "We need you over at Pool 6." He left, and an hour later--. [Snaps] *Boom!* Just like that. Lucky, lucky, lucky. I have a photograph or two of the explosion before that where Sask Pool 4A—where the workhouse is where they load the vessels—where you can see the big hole in the side of the elevator where it blew. That was in 1945.

EE: That's the '45 explosion. August '45?

WT: Yeah.

EE: The day before--.

WT: Yeah.

EE: The day before the Hiroshima bomb.

WT: There was another one in 19--. The one my--. You know what was funny? And this is a true story. In 1951, when the other blast took place, I was 5 years old. I was sitting in the kitchen at my grandfather's house on Lawrence Avenue—which is almost down behind the Psychiatric Hospital by Conmee Street—and all of a sudden, *boom!* And the window shook in the house. And that was that explosion. It was shook, his house. That was two miles away. It was unbelievable.

EE: Wow.

WT: I remember working with the guy who was the car shed foreman there. His name was Frank Catroni. And he had his ears blown off and half of his face was burned up. He was operating the levers for the cables to move the cars when the place went. He disappeared down into the basement somewhere. He was lucky to be alive.

EE: Some number of men were killed in that blast in '51?

WT: Oh, yeah. They were actually jumping off the roof because of the fire. And there was no water at 4B on that side. It's all ground. It was unreal. And I remember as a real young kid going with my father down to McCabe's elevator where my grandfather on my mother's side worked for the elevator. And he worked on the cleaner deck. And at that time, they had on the cleaner deck floor, they had open holes under the bins in the workhouse, and they used to have a slide set up on the floor over in the corner, and they'd open that thing, and the grain would be flying free through the cleaner deck over to these holes in the ground so they could move the grain around. I thought, "My God! You can't even see in here with that stuff running open."

[2:40:54]

EE: Yeah. That's a childhood memory. [Laughs]

WT: The best part of the whole story was when I went with my father, we went down there, it was after supper, and it was dark. I remember it was raining, and my father had a Model A car. And it started raining, and he said, "Here's your job." And I reached up above the window, and there was a little stem sticking out, and I had to go like this to operate the windshield wiper. [Laughing]

EE: Not moving grain now, but that's a good memory!

WT: Oh, yeah. I remember the grain pickers. The guys stealing grain. I've helped the RCMP catch theft out in British Columbia.

EE: Have you?

WT: I could take it right to the siding and tell you when they did it. That's how good that program is.

EE: Oh, yeah.

WT: But I can phone those guys, and they can help themselves now. [Laughing]

EE: Are there any questions I might have asked that you'd be happy to answer at the end of our interview? Any question I should have asked?

WT: Should have asked? If you haven't worked in the elevator, there's probably 10,000 questions that you could've asked.

EE: Good ones.

WT: And the stories that could go on and on and on, and there are loads of stories. And all the people that you interview, whether they know it or not, all have a lot of stories to tell. Some funny, some not, some happy, some sad, but they all have stories.

EE: Yeah. Thank you very, very much, Bill, for giving us a terrific interview. The quality of your mind is clear to me as I listen and as I ask questions and so on. And out of that comes a much deeper understanding of the industry.

End of interview.