**Oral History: Jim Willis**

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| Metadata Field | Description | Data Entry |
| Title | Title of Document |  Rebeca\_Salas\_With\_Jim\_Willis\_11-23-18 Complete  |
| Accession Number | Catalogue Number of the File | (Administrator Only) |
| Interviewee | Name of Interviewee (SURNAME, given name(s), middle initial) |  Jim Willis  |
| Interviewer  | Name of Interviewer (Surname, given name(s), middle initial) |  Rebeca Salas  |
| Interview Date  | YYYY/MM/DD |  2018/11/23  |
| Interview Date (non-preferred format) | E.g. November 13, 2014 or MM/DD/YY |  November 23, 2018  |
| Collection ID |  | (Administrator Only) |
| Collection |  | (Administrator Only) |
| Series ID |  | (Administrator Only) |
| Series |  | (Administrator Only) |
| Summary | Brief summary of the interview session (Copy and paste from Form 13 – Session Summary) |  Jim describes his childhood memories growing up in Jamestown, Scotland and his father’s enlistment during the Second World War. Jim speaks of his history with brass instruments and how he got involved as a musician playing for a number of award-winning brass bands. He then talks about his work in the airline/tourism/travel industry, which eventually leads to the creation of his own company, and how those experiences carried over into a new role with the provincial government in Canada. Part of his role as a public servant involved meeting with international governments to develop strategic tourism packages that would interest the locals of both countries. In these dealings, he met with British royalty and visited iconic locations like the Buckingham Palace.After describing his career, Jim reflects on life in Richmond, BC and recalls his childhood dreams. Additionally, he comments on his first impressions of Canada and Richmond. Jim then describes his prized toy soldier collection, and how he got started with this hobby. Toward the interview’s end, Jim describes his family and friends, who they were as individuals, and how they impacted his life’s trajectory. |
| Keywords | Keywords indicating interview subjects (Copy and Paste from “Keyword” section of Form 12 Interview Summary.) |  Scotland, Second World War, British Royalty, Childhood Memories, Travel, Tourism, Government, Childhood, Hopes and Dreams, Musician, Brass Band, Toy Soldier Collections, First Impressions. |
| Subject | Subject headings applicable to the Interview. The OHC uses Library of Congress Subject Headings. |  Scotland, Second World War, British Royalty, Childhood Memories, Travel, Tourism, Government, Childhood, Hopes and Dreams, Musician, Brass Band, Toy Soldier Collections, First Impressions.  |
| Duration | Length of Interview Session (if applicable) hh:mm:ss |  02:12:51  |
| Interview # |  Number of the interview (interviewees according to date) |  1  |
| Session # | Session # of the recording (X of all interviews in the session) |  1  |
| Location | Where the interview was conducted |  Richmond Museum and Cultural Center  |
| Media Type | Audio or Video |  Audio  |
| Restriction Type | Open (Open access)Restricted (Interview has some restrictions detailed below in “Restrictions”)Closed (Closed/No Access) |  Open [[1]](#footnote-1) |
| Restrictions | Details regarding any restrictions on the file’s use (as outlined in Form 6 –Consent) |  N/A  |
| Rights | Release Information regarding copyright and access through the repository (as outlined in the Release Agreement) |  All rights given to the interviewer (Rebeca Salas) and the Oral History Centre  |
| Funding | Information on how the project was funded. |  N/A  |
| Equipment | Equipment used to record the session. (Brand and model number of recorder.) |  H2N Zoom Recorder  |
| Media Format | Digital format. E.g.; .WAV, MP3, .doc, .pdf, .tiff, etc |  WAV  |
| Language | Language(s) of the Interview or Document |  English  |
| Type | Document Type. E.g.: Oral History Interview, Conference Proceedings, Presentation, Sharing Circle, etc.  |  Oral History Interview  |
| Repository | Location where the project/collection will be stored. |  The Oral History Centre  |

**Transcription Legend:**

. . . = Ellipses used to indicate where an interviewee does not complete a thought.

[?] = Used to indicate indecipherable words or unknown spelling of words.

START OF TAPE PART ONE OF ONE

[00:00:14]

REBECA

So, I’d like to turn it over to you and, I think as we discussed, it’s best to start with where you were born. So, take it away.

JIM

I was born in a little village called Jamestown, which was part of the Town of Alexandria. Most people would identify that on a map by being at the base of Loch Lomond, the famous Loch Lomond. I was born May 30, 1934. I had a happy childhood although it took place during the war. I was five when the Second World War broke out. One of the consequences of that was my father had immediately enlisted. My mother was not happy about that, but he did and he left home. However, my father had an occupation but he had a passion and that passion was he was a band master and his sons were definitely going to be brass players. My elder brother had been treated, maybe, a little more roughly than I was because I escaped since he had gone off to the air force, but he did leave me in the care of a very competent trumpet player called Tommy Dowd who worked in what they called a protected environment. He worked at the Royal Naval Torpedo Factory which meant he was more valuable there then he would have been in the army. So I started playing the cornet at age six. At age seven, I got my first band uniform for the Renton Brass Band and I was so proud of that, but, even if my father wasn’t there I practiced diligently. That led to me becoming, for my age, a relatively competent brass musician. I played in a local brass band and then I was approached by, and I couldn’t believe it, the top brass band in Scotland, Clydebank Burgh. They had been Scottish champions for years, but they had a habit, like soccer teams do today, of keeping their eye out for young players. They would get them involved in their junior band and then, eventually, into their full band. I was lucky enough to have passed that. I ended up playing in the real band and, for a relatively poor boy in a very non-descript location, I was starting to travel weekends during the summer to Edinburgh, to Crieff, to Saltcoats, all big destinations. Clydebank Burgh used to have a one-week engagement at Aberdeen. I thought I had gone to heaven without dying. From there, this band being the Scottish champions, contested in the national championships and we were eligible to perform at the Royal Albert Hall. Wow. Over 5500 people in attendance for two days and conducted by, they used to call him Flash Harry, Sir Malcolm Sargent. He loved brass players. So he was very good to us [laughs]. Our band became one of five which performed a gala concert before royalty on the Sunday evening. The downer was there was a huge newspaper strike at the time. There were no programs and nothing was ever committed to regular print except . . . I’ve got some stuff that we were given. Anyway, there we are. I immigrated to Canada in 1956, crossed Canada by CP Rail from Montreal to Calgary and then up to Edmonton. I ended up staying with a paternal uncle and my hero from the [Second] World War, my cousin Jimmy who was a flying officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force and he used to spend his leaves with us. It’s important I tell you about the immigration because I’m still into the band business. Even when I immigrated to Canada, I joined the local reserve squadron Air Force band in Edmonton and I enjoyed that for the five years I was in Edmonton. Then I transferred to Calgary with my job. There were no bands so I didn’t have exposure, and then I got lucky and I got transferred to Toronto. In Toronto, I started with a little Legion band there. Silverthorn Legion, we were the ones who used to lead the parade at the cenotaph every year and played the last post and what have you. From there, I went to the band with the Governor General’s Horse Guards, which was a delight.

[00:05:29]

Moving forward, I eventually was transferred from Toronto to Victoria, no bands there, to Los Angeles, no bands, no time there, back to London, no time, and then back to Vancouver and here was a band in Richmond, The Richmond Legion Band. I was in my element so I joined that. I used to love seeing my grandchildren when they would come and watch us in the parade for the Salmon Festival. They called me um-pa-pa-pa [laughs]. I know I digressed a long way from where I was born, in a relatively short time, but my banding experiences, I think, allowed me to grow up faster than I would have done just with a normal existence. Now, there’s another element to this and I have to go back to where I was born and a happy childhood. I was fortunate enough to have a Sunday school teacher when I was four. Her name was Agnes Shearer. Agnes Shearer was a noted school teacher in Bonhill Primary School. So when I was five I went to Bonhill Primary School and, in anticipation, I would finally get to be with Agnes Shearer, which I did when I was twelve. This again is very important. We were out for what we called ‘play time.’ Here, in elementary and high school, you call it recess. For us, it was play time. It was all boys in my class. We happened to come back from playtime in Agnes Shearer’s class one day and the blackboard was covered in brown paper. We were all looking at one another. “What is this?” Agnes pulled down the brown paper and here was the Scottish Daily Express, double truck, and this very complex technical drawing on it of an aeroplane that didn’t have propellers. Agnes Shearer announced to us that Frank Whittle, a brilliant English engineer, had invented an aircraft that could fly without propellers. At that point, she said, “You know, this is probably going to alter the life of some of you boys in this classroom. Who knows?” Anyway, later on in life, I was able to go back to her and tell her I was in the airline business and it certainly had altered my life. So Agnes Shearer retired, was given an OBE, the Order of the British Empire, which she definitely, definitely, justified. Had the Queen not given it to her, I would have made another medal and given it to her. She was a big influence in my life. I’m now telling you, earlier, that I immigrated to Canada in 1956. I sailed on the Empress of Scotland, then spent a few days with a school chum in Montreal, and then came west by rail. I spent five years in Edmonton and then transferred. By that time, I had gotten into the airline business with KLM and Royal Dutch [Airlines], and I spent three years there. Then they wanted to Anglify the Toronto district, so I was moved from Calgary to Toronto, which I disliked intensely at first. I was thinking, “Okay, I’m going back to Calgary.” Then I met my wife.

*[Recorder paused]*

REBECA
There you go. So you met your wife.

JIM

I met my wife, Catherine. She was Quebecois and had moved from Quebec to Toronto to learn English. She was acting as an au pair for a family in Toronto. At the time I met her, I spoke absolutely no French at all. We had a very interesting early relationship but it did prosper to the point we married, in Toronto. Later on, we had a daughter, Lisa. We spent, in total, seven years in Toronto. By this time, I was working for Pacific Western Airlines who weren’t a giant, at that time, but they were a little, dynamic Richmond-based company that flew in Western Canada. Primarily, their money was really being made in big aircrafts going to the High Arctic, supplying PanCanadian Petroleum drilling sites up there when Canada was merrily drilling for oil, which is there, much more oil there than the Americans have in their North Slope. We just can’t seem to bring it to market. If you remember, pipelines, there was a pre-Trans Mountain, it was called the Mackenzie Valley [Pipeline].

[00:10:51]

That was going to bring refined oil from Canada’s High Arctic to the United States. Anyway, that’s another story. On that basis, I think I could say that when we were transferred out of Toronto – with some regret because we had met, married, and had a child there – and Victoria of all places was where they were sending me because we had, just as PWA, got our first international route, Seattle to Victoria. So we had to open up an office there. PWA mistakenly thought the route was going to be exclusive to them – Seattle, Victoria, Vancouver – until Air Canada said “Victoria is the provincial capital. Air Canada will hold a presence there.” As it worked out, we had a very amicable relationship between PWA and Air Canada. I thoroughly enjoyed my experiences with Pacific Western Airlines, and that would take an entire interview on its own to determine, in detail, what was what. We should leave that for another day, I think, but PWA, most people would not understand this, promoted me to regional manager and, quite rightly, thought the regional manager should be based in Vancouver. I didn’t like that idea and decided to leave PWA, and then there was a job with what was then in Government. There was no Ministry of Tourism. It was the Ministry of the, not Auditor General . . . I’m losing it here. It was the Ministry of the Provincial Secretary, Recreation, Conservation, and Travel Industry. Travel industry in those days, as far as the politics goes in the Province of British Columbia, was a nothing. Agriculture was where it was all at. Well, I didn’t mind. I then found out I wasn’t going to stay in Victoria. I was going to Los Angeles of all places. It broke my children’s hearts. There was a second child whom we adopted, John, and they loved Victoria. They went to school there. Catherine liked Victoria. I wasn’t really all that happy about going to LA but, as things transpired, it was one of the best moves we ever, ever made. We lived in Los Angeles for four years, almost five. The ministry was then developed because Grace McCarthy was given the responsibility for tourism. Grace, being as energetic as she had always been in other ministries, decided “No, it’s not travel industry as part of something else. This must be a Ministry. This must be funded.” We all got happy and we all did weird and wonderful things like bringing the Royal Hudson down to Los Angeles and we had JR, if you remember, but it was before he was JR, Larry Hagman, was a fanatical steam engine enthusiast, and Carroll O’Connor of the other famous show [All in the Family]. They came and visited. So we got a lot of publicity out of that, but Grace really started getting the industry up and running through the Ministry. Then she asked me “I would like you to go to London, to British Columbia House, and apply the same tactics we’ve been doing here with travel agents and tour wholesales in London because all we’re getting right now are what we call VFR, visiting friends and relatives. They don’t make a big contribution, so we need people to come as tourists.” So that was my remit. I was being asked to do a four-year term, which was great, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I got into that like you couldn’t believe and, because I had an industry background, I could access a lot of major wholesalers. We started developing some real traffic out of the UK, Thomas Cook, Globe Tours, that sort of a thing. When my four years were about to come to an end, she asked “Will you take another four years, and will you now expand into Europe and look after Holland, and Germany, and Denmark, and all of that good stuff?” I was delighted to say “Yes” for a number of reasons. We had settled very well in the community. We had lots of friends.

[00:16:03]

I was very happy with my job. There was a tremendous amount of travel involved. That was the only downside. Catherine once put my photograph on the refrigerator with a note to the children, “If you come home and this man is in the house, don’t call the police. He’s your father.” So that’s still been a joke with our family [laughs]. I thoroughly enjoyed all the experiences I had in London, especially when we got Expo because then I travelled throughout Europe speaking to various Chambers of Commerce and to other public groups but particularly to the travel industry about the opportunities that would be provided for them, and it did so. I was very happy about that. Ministers changed and I eventually had another wonderful minister, Claude Richmond. Claude would come over and support me on some of the promotional work that we were doing for BC and for Canada and, as the upshot of that, as we got closer to Expo, late, mid-1985 I was asked to come back, this time, to Vancouver and become the Director of International Marketing and, in the initial stages, to really promote Expo but other types of traffic as well. That was, probably, one of the most exciting times of my life. We did things. We started to get very upmarket. We had Lorne Greene. Now, he was retired and not in the greatest of physical health. I often wondered why we did that but he was “Bonanza.” In Australia, Bonanza was the number one show. They were still getting shows that were five, ten years old – but, every time he got in front of a camera or a microphone, he was dressed as Bonanza and he became top again. It’s amazing, his talents as an actor. Just put his physical condition to the side. We did all sorts of weird and wonderful things like that. I had a marvellous time. I really did. After Expo was over, I was still very happy at Tourism BC but then Grace McCarthy came back and she was now in charge of the BC Pavilion Corporation whose major, major thing at the time was establishing the British Columbia Convention Centre, which was, of course, acting as the Canada Pavilion during Expo. It was ready-made as a convention centre and she asked me to come and join that organization and help do marketing, which I did for about a year. Then I got . . . Is the term antsy appropriate? I was missing being really out there and doing things, but I was still getting calls from tourism suppliers in British Columbia, and some in Alberta, and particularly from Europe, people I had dealt with in Europe. “Could you do this for me? Could you do that for me? I’m thinking of starting a bus route from Cranbrook to Banff and I’d like to go to the Japanese market.” Well, what I’d do for those people is say, “You have nothing to offer the Japanese market but, my god, just south of you in Montana and in Slocan, these are your people.” So I would end up developing programs for them. At that point, I left government and started my own little company. It was called Consensus Canada Tourism, Marketing, and Representation. I managed not only to survive but ended up with some very interesting clients. One of them being Tourism British Columbia, who actually paid me more for telling them what I would have told them when I worked for them [laughs]. I did work on the Alaska Highway for the Alaskan Government, Northwest Territories, Yukon. In the early days, I still remember that, it was the group that got together to decide we’re going to privatize Vancouver Airport. There were a lot of peaks and valleys, and warts and pimples in there. I was fortunate enough to be one who was invited and, because of my tourism background, you know, in the trenches. I’ll never forget that. And then I had a contract from what was known as the top ten in Vancouver, the top ten attractions. They were all doing reasonably well but they could do something better. So, I was asked in to evaluate was there something better I could identify. That’s when I decided they’ve got to amalgamate and get together and pool their resources and cooperate with one another because a stand-alone product is hard to sell, but if you can tie it in with other associated products, you’ve got a chance. So, I decided, what if we took two coaches and we operated them in contract directions, and people could stop on and hop on and hop off. I swear that’s true. That, finally, was taken and worked out in very, very detailed form and they all loved it. Two of them said, “Oops, we’re not-for-profit organizations, ergo, we cannot enter into a legal position where we would be vulnerable with other parties.” So, the whole thing fell apart but then a very enterprising young Belgian woman picked up the idea, ran with it, and the rest is history.

[00:22:41]

She made it successful and then she sold it, and it’s the Vancouver Trolley Company. You’ll find it all over the place. That was interesting. I enjoyed that. When I lived in London? I should get back there. There were all sorts of things that I loved. I got to do the Trooping of the Colour. It’s . . . An example of that is in the museum’s shelf, shelf two, by the way *[Obsessions: Every Collector Has a Story* exhibition, 2018-2019]. That was very special. I got that because I was a government, former government [representative] . . . BC had a very unique status with the Crown, and still does in the UK because British Columbia was the first provincial representation to open an office long before Ontario, or Quebec, or Alberta, or anybody else. So, we did have a bit of an edge. So, when there were goodies like Trooping of the Colour, not to say the others couldn’t get it, but when they were there we got them. Catherine and I were invited to Buckingham Palace for the garden party. That was a thrill. Again, when I reflect on where I came from that was never, ever, ever a possibility, but here I was, doing just that. Then we ended up having drinks with Prince Philip at British Columbia House because he came along to welcome the Victoria Cricket Club on a tour of the UK. They had met him when he was in Victoria one time and he said, “Anytime you’re in London, call me, we’ll have a party,” and we did. It was a very good party [laughs]. Now, I was fortunate when I was in London. Our Agent General, which is the title given to provincial officers who lead their delegations that occupy space in London, they are presented to the Queen just like ambassadors are. They don’t get official representation. I was extremely fortunate, because my boss was now Lawrie Wallace, and I had known Lawrie from my Victoria days when he was Provincial Secretary. He helped me a great deal and, I like to think, I helped him a great deal. There was one day he came to me. He said, “I have to make a trip to Wales, to Cardiff. I’d like you to come with me. I’d also like you to bring Catherine because I’m taking my wife as well. We’re going to meet Lord Parry, Gordon Parry. Lord Parry is the Chairman of the Welsh Tourist Board, and I’m sure you and he would have quite a bit to talk about. Oh, and by the way, he told me that just like BC has a Scotsman, a non-Canadian operating their tourism product here, he has an Irishman operating as well.” As it turned out, we got along like houses on fire. We eventually ended up finding out there were great similarities in the products we were offering. We with our ferries; they with their ferries. That’s how they got the Dutch and the French to come to Wales, and that’s how we got the Americans to come to BC, but anyway, that was wonderful. Lord Parry became a friend, a very close friend, and he invited us, Catherine and I, to the State Opening of Parliament. My god, was that something else. Following the official opening, there is along the River Thames, you may have seen the House of Lords and the House of Commons all together, there’s this beautiful esplanade. Well, that particular day, the House of Lords covered theirs in a huge marquee and they dined and wined friends who had been, like Catherine and I, invited. I’ll never forget that. It was like dreaming, but it worked out very well. Lord Parry, a delightful, delightful man, since deceased, no longer with us, but he used to invite me to the Peer’s Lounge for lunch, which was nice and I would hear all the business they had been arguing about that day. It was wonderful. It really, really was. One other very lucky contact I made, British Columbia House also promoted, as well as tourism, they very heavily promoted business. We would, occasionally, have delegations come from BC, the Minister of Business Development, and he would bring an entourage. We would invite our business staff and BC House would invite people that they thought would be of value to Canada and whom we might be able to do business with. At one of those, I was introduced to a gentleman who, charming, charming man but he was introduced with a rather strange title. It was Alderman Sheriff Colonel Greville Spratt, one of two sheriffs who are part of the Institution of the Lord Mayors Hierarchy. You become lord mayor after you have been a Sheriff. Greville and I had a nice personal relationship and lo and behold on my door, at BC House, my office, there was an invitation to dine. It was from the Lord Mayor, but to dine with the ten high court judges at the Old Bailey, the Central Criminal Court. I and two other laymen had lunch with these people. I sat next to a very charming, well, they were all charming but I sat next to a very charming judge who said, “Are you busy this afternoon?” I said, “No.” “I’m conducting a very interesting murder trial. I’m going back there. Would you like to come down? I’ll find you a seat.”

[00:29:19]

So, I got to sit in the Central Criminal Court, the Old Bailey, as an interested spectator and I saw the whole procedure with the wigs. It was marvellous. There were other things that really interested me. When I came back from London, as I said, I was the Director of International Marketing, we did a lot of marketing in Japan. I was there, probably in my first year, four, five, six times. We also did concerted product presentations which was a good idea, with the Canadian Government Office of Tourism. Canada was being presented as a destination and it was up to the provinces to see that our portion of that destination got predominance. It was a good idea. We did something similar in Europe as well. We put a group together called Canada West, which was primarily BC and Alberta, but we invited the Yukon and Northwest Territories. They didn’t have products that we had, but you have to sell Canada in bite-sized pieces. We decided to put everything we’ve got on the table. So, you had the Rocky Mountains in BC and in Alberta you had Banff, Lake Louise in Vancouver, Victoria, Butchart Gardens. They had the aurora borealis up in Yellowknife and Tuktoyaktuk and all of these places. There were all sorts of interesting things. So, that worked. We applied the same techniques for British Columbia for Expo. We would get the partners, the hotels, the transportation companies, the entertainment people. We’d get them all together and we would take them to the market, and we would show beautiful audiovisuals that were specially constructed for that. It pains me to say it, but I heard on the radio the other day that Canada is now number seventeen in the world table of tourism destinations. I say this in all modesty, when I left it was number seven. There are many reasons why we are number seventeen, but I sort of chuckled at that. I tell my grandchildren, “See, that’s what happened when they took me out of the market.” That’s neither here, nor there. My overall experience mainly focussed on tourism one way or another. There were incidental things. I was in Milan, this is when I had left government, I was in Milan and I was coming back to Toronto, and the CP flight came Rome, Milan, Toronto. I knew the station manager of CP and he had seen me waiting for the flight in Milan. He came up to me and said, “We’ve got a problem. There’s an oxygen bottle in the rear tourism section that is defective. We cannot carry anybody there. So, we’re denying boarding and having people to wait, but I know you have to get back to Toronto. I’ve talked to the captain, and I’ve talked to the authorities here. We have permission to put you in the jump seat.” Here I was, sitting behind the captain, in the jump seat of the DC-10, going down the taxiway in Milan, and I’m finding out at that time that the officer in the right-hand seat is on a check flight. He’s a captain who is being flown and he’s going to be asked some severe questions during this flight. The thing was, a DC-10 cockpit has the most beautiful picture windows. You’re looking down . . . We took off on this gorgeous day and going over the Italian Alps, the Swiss Alps, and the French Alps. I’ve never seen a sight like that in my life. The cabin crew were very kind. They set a little table right next to their galley, so I could have my meal there and not stuck in the seat. That was a wonderful thing. Yeah, I haven’t talked about my family that much, other than that I married Catherine. Lisa was born in Toronto, which she’s very proud of. Lisa is now married, operates a very successful sports-fishing lodge off the coast. I have three grandchildren that Lisa blessed us with. I’ve got another daughter who lives in Victoria and have two grandchildren there, and one great grandchild. So, from a family perspective, again, I’ve been extremely lucky in my life. I don’t really know how to express that type of gratitude beyond what I’ve already done. I’ve left the best for last. When I was thirteen, I could’ve been fourteen; I was in secondary school, high school, boys. Part and parcel of our weekly education was a forty-five minute period, what we called period. Science was two periods, technically. Math was two periods, but religious instruction was one period. We had a lovely, lovely woman, Miss Grearson, who taught us. My seatmate, because it was two desks for two, was Dick Holloway. Dick was a character, a madman. Tricky Dicky we called him, long before it was applied to Nixon, Tricky Dicky. Dick invented his own language, and he would have us rolling around and getting in trouble because he would whisper. You’d roar laughing and you’d be hit by the teacher, but he would say things like Teenties Toenails, Hogrophonographs, Replectrum gears, and then he would describe what they were.

[00:36:00]

And then, Tricky Dicky disappeared at age fifteen. We knew, and couldn’t understand it, but we knew that Tricky Dicky had been attending the High Anglican Church in our town, a Presbyterian come Catholic town, very strange, High Anglican, but Dick went there, and then Dick disappeared. I lost touch with him, except when I would go back on business trips I would always go and see my mother. She would tell me, “Oh, Dick came to see me. He’s a monk, you know? But he’s so kind, and he never misses visiting me.” So that’s how I got to know about Dick and she kept me informed about where he was going. Then, I began to pay attention to the news coming out of Scotland. There was this rabble-rousing Anglican priest in the darkest, dirtiest part of Glasgow, the Gorbals, and he was the people’s champion. He would take on the councils. Even the councils were slightly left-wing. Dick was way beyond that, but he accomplished things and the BBC started paying attention to him. He used to appear in discussions and so on and so forth, but Dick managed to work his way through the entire morass, became a bishop and then Dick, now Richard, I still call him Dick, became the Primus of the Episcopalian Church of Scotland. That’s like the Archbishop of Canterbury, on a smaller scale, in England, but he hadn’t changed. When the Anglican Church, we’re going back fifteen, twenty years now, suddenly had a real problem with diversified lifestyles, Dick was a champion of poor Christians. “Of course, they’re welcome in my church. More so, I’ll broadcast it to any others that want to come, and the church should be doing that.” Well, there were certain bishops in the church who didn’t take too kindly to that. They didn’t think the status quo should be interfered with at all, but Dick stuck with it, and Dick got them to change their mind. I remember when he also promoted women, he was very big on women in the church. They were dead set against it. I remember when we were given a little advice, “Are you going up into Yorkshire at all?” “Yes, Catherine and I are to be going.” “Well, you should go to York Minster this Sunday.” That was the first-ever sermon preached by a female priest in the Anglican Church. That was Dick’s handiwork. So, if you’re wondering what it all has to do with me, again, I’m so fortunate that I’ve had people like Dick, Tricky Dicky, so they’re in the lesson. Do you have any questions?

REBECA

I have a ton of questions [laughs].

JIM
Good.

REBECA
I think, maybe, the first one we can start with is thinking about that initial point of where you were born and if you were to transport someone that has no knowledge of Scotland, how would you describe the community that you were born into, your home life, maybe even what it looked like?

JIM
Okay. In a way, it was a pretty town, regardless of the dark satanic mills that have been talked about so often, because it existed on the textile business, cloth and silk. It was the UTR Company which I eventually worked at, the United Turkey Red. They manufactured cottons and cloths and their particular reason for being was very colourful, to make kangas, which is a name of a dress that African women wear. So that was their claim to fame. They weren’t polluting. There were no great smoke stacks, though, there were some but not going all the time. It was along the River Leven. That’s where they got the water to power some of the engines, and the British Silk Dying Company, they dyed silks for manufacturing, how would one say, high-end stuff. The town itself, when I was a boy, we weren’t too badly damaged, if at all, really, in a way, by the blitz which was right next door to us. It was, and I’m looking at it through a boy’s eyes at that time, it was a very nice place. We had some nice parks, Balloch Park, which Glaswegians used to come to in the weekend. They called it their Riviera. It was part and parcel overlooking Loch Lomond. We were in a valley, and Alexandria was known to also be the Vale of Leven. The River Leven flowed through there. The housing was mixed, but after the war there was a great deal of construction of new houses unlike anything that had existed before where people actually had indoor bathrooms. In my days, we did not have indoor bathrooms. On wet days, it was quite a problem. That’s neither here nor there, but the area itself was attractive in many, many ways. Churchgoing, very definitely so. I belonged to a church called Mount Zion who had, by the way, a German minister, Rudolph Elrich.

[00:42:35]

Anyway, lots of Protestant churches. Two main Catholic churches. It was a sort of divided community in that way, but it was always the religious antagonism that was part and parcel of the west of Scotland. Just like it is in the west of England. It doesn’t exist that way anymore, but the township itself was nice. We were very close to a bigger town called Dumbarton, which was famous for shipbuilding, Denny’s Shipyard, a lot of the ferries that you used to see here were built in Denny’s in Dumbarton. The other thing that we’re really famous for was Hiram Walker Whisky who, at one time, was the largest whisky manufacturer in the world because blended whisky is a combination of little small distillers giving a large distiller all of their product and they blend them, but Hiram Walker was the main employer. Just up the road in Clydebank was the Singer Sewing Machine Company, the largest sewing machine company in the world. They’re displayed in our exhibit today. That’s another chuckle I had when I was touring this, but coming back to the Vale of Leven, we had Christie Park, which was gorgeous. It was just outside our school, and at lunch time, or dinner time, we called it dinner time, lunch time. Tea time was dinner time, but when we would get out, they had a putting green there, this was even during the war, eighteen-hole putting green. So, if you had a penny, you could go and you could get a putter and a ball and putt your way around, and you could do that during lunch hour. The other big plus was the old gentleman in the little hut that supplied the balls and the putters. He had a gramophone, just a windup gramophone, but somehow, he had managed to amplify it with a speaker. He would play nothing but classical music, which we all became very fond of. The Enigma Variations, that was the first time I ever heard it, was when we were putting [laughs]. Yes, the Vale, that’s what we called it, the Vale, it’s totally different now than it was then, as is Richmond. When I came here in 1985, I was told there would never be a building in Richmond higher than the top of the hospital, don’t think so [laughs]. Anyway, one of the problems in my town, the textile industry died. That was one of the reasons I came to Canada. I knew I wasn’t going to have a job for much longer. The silk factory died. Singers died. Denny’s died. So, that’s unemployment. Now, other things happened. The Burroughs Company, they came into the local area. There was an optical company that came in and provided a lot of new jobs, but even that, they’ve gone. So, that area is, basically, they’re surviving on tourism but tourism can’t employ that many people. That, very briefly, would answer your question.

REBECA
Yes.

JIM
Was it so briefly?

REBECA
No, it was great. It was great. So, what kind of boy were you? I’ve got a good sense of your musical talents and interests, but if you could describe yourself in the way that you described Tricky Dicky, how would you say you were as a child?

JIM

Well, in a way, I could have been a bit of a pain to some of my pals because when they wanted to play football, if it was Sunday afternoon I had to go to Tommy Dowd’s, if it was Wednesday night I had to go to Tommy Dowd’s, who was teaching me the cornet. Oh, you, you’re no fun type of thing. Other than that, I had a great childhood. I used to love climbing, getting into all sorts of games. During the war, we had a tree that four or five of us, one could be the tail-gunner and the bomber, the other at the front was a pilot and another co-pilot, and then there was somebody else who was a machine-gunner. Your imagination ran with you. Of course, we were in shelters quite a lot during those times. Surprisingly, families held together very, very well. It was a close community. It really was. People looked after one another. As a boy, yeah. When I went to what you would call high school, I developed a little bit. I became, it would be a stretch to call a little more academic, but I became more interested in what I was learning in school. Now, one of the reasons, again, was the music master, Jack Lockhart. The very first time he had our class for music lessons, he asked the question, “Anybody here know what triple tonguing is?” Nobody answered. “Well, triple tonguing is a form of tonguing on a trumpet or a cornet.” He did that for a reason, he wanted somebody in that class who knew anything about music because, every now and again, he had to get somebody to go up to Glasgow to get something, and it was usually me, which I loved. Anyway, that I liked. Academically, I started to get very interested in English. I liked the teacher, and I got very interested in geography and history. I liked the teachers there as well. I liked playing football. I wasn’t any good at it, but I was always with an instrument in my hand. I belonged to an organization that was called the Boy’s Brigade. It is a . . . It’s like the Scouts but it’s a little more militaristic.

[00:49:14]

It’s a Church of Scotland invention way back in the late 1800s, and you wear forage caps, belts, and you parade, and you march, and they had a bugle band. Guess who was in the bugle band? Loved it. I enjoyed that part, I really did enjoy that part. Maybe it’s a surprise to anybody that knows me and ever hears this, I was very religious. With the Boy’s Brigade, I had Bible class Thursday night, Bible class Saturday morning, Bible class Sunday morning before church, church service which was two hours immediately following, and then Bible class Sunday night. I didn’t resent it. I became involved. When I was at church . . . Oh, oh, dear, I almost forgot. When I was eleven, I was Isaiah in the Christmas pageant, complete with one of my mother’s towels that had a wee bit of colour in it, and a sister’s coat worn backwards. I must’ve looked spectacular. I was so happy.

REBECA
Proud. Okay, and what about your parents? If you could briefly describe their personalities.

JIM
Okay. My father, I didn’t know him that well because, as I said, I was five when he left. He came out of the air force . . . He would come home on leave, and I was always able to play on a tune. He liked that, so I was a bit of a favourite, but when he came out of the army, he came out one year before the war ended because he was demobbed for medical reasons. When he worked in the textile factory, he worked in the colouring shop. Well, in those days, it was all powder, Geigi powder from Switzerland. It came out, then had to be mixed with certain liquids, and all that. So, he’s ingesting this all the time. On top of that, a heavy smoker. So that just destroyed his lungs. That’s why he was invalided out of the air force. When he came back, he got his little brass band going again, very quickly. We used to play football matches and everything else and, yeah, self-serving. He was very happy with me because I could take parts and roles within the band that were above expectations for my age. So, that sort of helped. He was a wonderful guy and I was very close to him. He died in 1950, age fifty. That was a sad loss. My mother . . . I have a sense of humour and that’s my mother’s sense of humour. My mother was never stuck for one liners, but she had a very tough go of it during the war, and she had to go to work, too. She worked at the Admiralty stores, where they had all of the stuff for the sailors who were on the North Sea: the heavy helmets, and the heavy boots, and all of that sort of thing. It’s like a huge quartermaster store. She had . . . Well, my brother, Danny, by this time, he was in India in the army. There was my elder sister Betty, myself, and my younger sister Rena, Catherine Rena. Mother kept us together. I was able to contribute some money to the family because the farmers were . . . We had double summertime, so the farmers could grow longer and more crops. In October, September-October, that’s when they would do the potato harvesting. So, we would all leave school, it was required, and we would follow the tractor that was spewing out the potatoes, picking out the potatoes, and that was a tough job. It was clammy and whatever. We got six shillings for that. That was a tiny contribution, but my mother did a marvellous job with moulding us together, and she did an even better job when my father died because it was her against the world type of thing. In the meantime, she also brought up my sister’s children, and then my younger sister’s children. So, yeah, she did a good job.

REBECA

Did you have, I feel like this came out in some of your stories anyway, but did you have any particular hopes and dreams as a young man or older child?

JIM

I was desperate to become a professional musician. I learned later from an uncle, Uncle Sammy, who was a professional musician, that you will, eventually, if you’re a brass player you will, eventually, end up playing in pit orchestras, and even sometimes not very good pit orchestras, which means not very much in the way of money, but I played in a lot of dance bands when I was fourteen until I was eighteen, and I had money coming out of my ears. There was one thing I didn’t mention. At age sixteen, I answered an advertisement in the Melody Maker which was the musician’s paper. It was from the Royal Marine’s Chatham Division. They were looking for boy musicians and would be holding auditions in Glasgow. I made an application and I attended the audition and nothing happened for weeks, and weeks, and weeks. I thought, that was it, because they hadn’t told me anything.

[00:55:55]

Then this brown envelope arrived. ‘Her Majesty,’ ‘His Majesty,’ it said. I opened it up and I had been accepted as a boy soldier in the Royal Marine’s Chatham Division. However, I had to sign a contract. That contract committed me to seven years active, and five years reserve, and I’m sixteen. I’m thinking, “Hell, I’ll be an old man before I get out.” So, I declined, but it had been a dream of mine. However, having said that, in all honesty, I was above average but I’ll emphasize average. I ran into people in my banding experience, the same age as me, they were superior, they were good. So, I knew, eventually, there’s too many of them for you to actually make this a career. That was my dream, at the time. Failing that, I was very interested in what I did. When I started work, I was what they called a sketch maker in the textile factory, drawing designs for clothing, and so on and so forth. Not cutting it up and that, but patterns. If things had stayed okay, I guess I would have lived the rest of my life doing that, I think so, I don’t know. I’m sure I wouldn’t have. Then, I thought, I knew the textile industry was going, and I thought of Canada. I had a natural inclination to Edmonton because my uncle had since retired from farming to live there. My cousin Jimmy, I heard was there [and] his brother, George, whom I’d also met during the war, he came over on a Canadian Frigate. So, I immigrated to Edmonton and that’s where I was going to start a new life. There was one little hitch. I worked, as I’ve said, for the UTR (United Turkey Red Company), but they, in turn, were a subsidiary of ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries), the giants, mega, almost as big as GM. Well, my uncle told me CIL has a huge plant in Edmonton and they’re only working at about fifty percent capacity because of a lack of qualified staff. Well, CIL was a division of ICI and I worked for the division. So, I said, “two and two make four.” Even there, the Canadian Consulate and Charing Cross in Glasgow didn’t do me any favours because when I went on to make an application to become an immigrant to come to Canada, they loved me immediately when I said I wanted to go to Edmonton because everybody else wanted to go either to Montreal, to Toronto, or to Vancouver. The rest of the country didn’t exist. Here’s this guy, we’ve got a qualified guy, he’s going to Edmonton. They said, “What do you do for a living?” I told them, “Oh, Edmonton has this plant. My uncle told me that.” “Yes, yeah.” They didn’t know that CIL were in petrol chemical extrusion, not remotely connected to that stuff. I knew as much about celestial navigation as I did about petrochemicals [laughs]. So, I was dead in the water – but that was another story.

REBECA

So what was your first impression of Canada when you first came?

JIM

I’m not joking with you. I sailed from Liverpool on the Empress of Scotland on the thirteenth of April. It was a Friday. People denied sailors counsel, we didn’t. It was a very rough crossing, but interesting, then got to Edmonton. My first impression of Canada, we were allowed off for five hours in Quebec because the ship couldn’t navigate between Quebec and Montreal at the time we arrived. So, three other people and I managed to find a taxi driver who was a wonderful guy. He gave us a beautiful tour. We went up Saint Jean’s and all of that. I thought, “I’d like to come back here someday.” Little did I know [laughs]. Yeah, that was my first impression. Then my friend Jimmy, Jim Jack, Jim was attached to the Sûreté [du Québec] by that time and he was having a great time in Montreal, loved it. When I got to Edmonton, it was by that time eight days later, and I stepped off the train at Jasper Station and I breathed in, and I choked. It was twenty-three degrees below zero and I never experienced anything like that. I thought, “What have I done?” [laughs]. That was my first experience. I enjoyed it. I remember the first tune there that I ever heard, “Standing in the corner, watching all the girls go by.” It was the 1950s Hit Parade and it went on for months, but you eventually ended up finding out and, for all our Edmontonian and Albertan listeners, Edmonton is a very cold city, socially and climactically. Now, it may have changed since I lived there, socially and climactically. The big thrill every year was the Edmonton Eskimos. You didn’t go wondering if they’d win the game, you would bet by how many points, but you would sit out there in sub-zero weather in an outdoor stadium. We had to be out of our minds. The other big thrill was forecasting and betting on when’s the North Saskatchewan River going to break out [laughs]. Edmonton was not my happiest experience. When I went to Calgary, it was like going to another country. You could look above the rooftops and you could see just a hint of the Rockies, or the foothills of the Rockies. In the wintertime, some mornings you would have woken up and there was this great big blue halo over the Rockies, and you knew that would mean by lunchtime your temperature would be over freezing, loved that. I also learned in Calgary, you don’t park a car, you abandon it. Never talk about Richmond drivers. Go to Calgary, that’s something else, but I quite enjoyed Calgary, as a matter of fact, and my experiences there, but, yeah.

[01:03:17]

REBECA

So moving to the point when you met your wife – how did you bridge that language gap? How did that work?

JIM

My wife will kill me because I do tell this story. When I was transferred, as I told you earlier, from Calgary to Toronto, it was because they were Anglifying the district. I arrived on Thursday and I wasn’t supposed to be there until Monday, but the two managers who were French Canadians were delighted to see me because they had been there for weeks, and weeks, and weeks, and now that I had arrived they could go home. So, they said to me, “Tomorrow night, we’re going to take you for a treat. We’ll take you to the French club and we’re not joking. You don’t speak. We will pay your admission. If you want a drink, you whisper it to us. We’ll get you the drink, and it worked.” Only French Canadians, or Quebecois, were in there. So, I’m watching people dancing and I see this very attractive girl and these two idiots, one on either side, notice me looking at this very attractive girl. I’m slow the first time, but Jacques Lasseur, who was one of them, got up and went and asked Catherine to dance. During the process, I would see them talking and then they’d both turn, and look at me, and chuckle. Then Paul Laframboise eventually got Catherine up and asked her that same thing, and chuckled. I decided, I’m not going to pay attention; I’m going to go and ask this girl to dance. I know you’ve told me I can’t do that, so I did it, and I went and I asked Catherine to dance. She stood up and started to dance, and I started to speak English, and she started to laugh. Those two had told her, “You see that guy over there, he’s been watching you all night. Now he’s a poser. He pretends he can’t speak English, doesn’t speak French. You know and I know, you have to be French to be [here]. So, I was dead in the water, I thought, except there was an eminence grise with us, Marcel Cassir, Egyptian-French, worked for the company. So, he went and danced with Catherine and he said “They shouldn’t have done that. He’s a very nice young man and, by the way, where do you live? Is somebody taking you home because we will take you home tonight.” That’s how it started. Catherine was at night school taking English lessons and so on, and so forth. It just developed and we would go skiing. Well, we didn’t go skiing. We went to Collingwood. God, 500 feet, I’d gone through the roof [laughs]. That’s how I met Catherine, and she was a much better linguistic scholar than I was and her English improved rapidly. Yeah, there we were.

REBECA

Okay. So, at what point did collecting become a part of your life?

JIM
Well, that has only come up recently, again, and I was reminded of how it happened. Why? I don’t know, but when I was packing my suitcases to come to Canada, I put my hand in a drawer of mine and I lifted up two handfuls of toy soldiers. There were more, but those were just childhood playthings that I just kept, but I lifted, I don’t know why I did that, I lifted these up. Maybe that was an umbilical cord, still, but I had two handfuls, I think I was eight or nine. When I, eventually, got to the first place I lived in in Canada, I put them in another drawer, and when I moved I put them in another drawer. Now, finally, I’m living in Victoria. I’m forty, about that, and we had adopted our son, John. He’s four. John had had a rather rough time even getting to four. A bit on the sultry side he looked at life. Anyway, one night, he came to me with two handfuls of soldiers. Catherine had been in that drawer looking for something and he saw the soldiers and he came out and his eyes were out like organ stops. So I put them up on the mantel piece. I think I’ve got a photograph of that somewhere. That started it, because I’m in Victoria, and Victoria is a wonderful place for people, or was a wonderful place for people to collect toy soldiers because the male of the family usually goes first; a lot of Anglos who had toy soldier collections. The wife doesn’t know what the hell to do with them, and either just leaves them where they are because their kids don’t want them, or she takes them and downsizes, and when she’s doing the furniture she’s got a box full of toy soldiers. Then, I met a trust officer who became a very good friend in one of the banks, and he was an aficionado of soldiers. So, he got first grabs at a lot of these things and what he didn’t want, I could buy. Then, I started getting interested because he was the one who taught me how to strip. I can even remember what we stripped with. It was Empress Paint Remover. Empress had a factory in Victoria. You stripped it right to the barebones and you painted the soldier in matte, but then you put all the buttons on, then you put all of the elements. You colour everything. If you look at the band, you can see there was never a band made like that unless it was by special order. But we were destroying the value of the soldier, to a degree, by stripping the original outfit. I stopped doing that, eventually.

REBECA
Okay, so I have a question. You were talking about collecting and saying how you don’t really remember why, other than what happened, when you initially picked them up from the drawer.

JIM
Yes.

REBECA
Do you remember having those toys as a child?

JIM
Oh, yes.

REBECA

Do you remember how you got them?

JIM
Oh, yeah.

REBECA

Okay, I’d love to hear it.

[01:10:35]

JIM

Oh, good. You’d be surprised how good my memory is in this. Again, I’m going back to wartime. There’s no adult males around, but the Britain’s Company had been making these soldiers for a long, long time. Even poor families would go out of their way to ensure that the male children of a certain age will get at least one at Christmas, if you’re really lucky, two. Unlike the massive displays, you’re talking about little shop windows and Seven’s was the name of her shop, Mrs. Sevens. She sold bric-à-brac and she sold stationery and she sold this and that, but she also sold toy soldiers. There’d be a box of eight. Well, that was completely out of your league, but you’ll be just looking at it. The banner would be this little one with a funny red helmet type of thing. There’d be that one, there’d be that one, but there were mainly, in those days, there were not the line machine gunners and I remember that distinctly. There were always marching type of things and, occasionally, there would be a mounted figure but she didn’t carry too many of those because she wasn’t going to sell too many of those but, that, you did everything you could. Now, you could acquire them later on by swapping things. Well, what would you swap? I’ll give you these two pieces of shrapnel for that soldier because we had shrapnel collections. The exploded shells, the exploded bombs that we’d pick up, not realizing had it hit us it would have taken our head off. Or somebody had broken into an ammunition down for the soldiers nearby and took 303 bullets. Five 303 bullets would get you, at least, two soldiers. That sort of thing, or, you would trade something that was of value to you. I did trade quite a bit. I once had an incendiary fin from and incendiary bomb. I could have asked anything I wanted for that. They were coming to me [laughs], but following that, we played with them and we played with them very roughly. If somebody had a cannon, and you had matchsticks, well, you would line up, three, four, or five of you, you would line up your soldiers and you would each get a turn at shooting. If you didn’t have matches, and that was quite common, matches were rare in those days, rocks, well, rocks would. I swear, you see that photograph of me in the band uniform? If I were to take you up there today and we just did an archaeological dig, they might be gone by now but, I’m sure we would find the remnants of soldiers that just were left there. We used to do things. We would build our own tanks with corrugated paper, and they would go up and down here and the soldiers would be waiting for all of these wonderful games, but, it wasn’t collecting per say. It was playthings. It’s only when you get to be an adult and something just triggers. I hadn’t even thought of these soldiers for a while, twenty-odd years, because I was twenty-one, almost twenty-two when I came to Canada. As I said to you, I think I was forty when John came.

REBECA

Right. Do you think, as an adult, that it has been – collecting – has been beneficial to your life?

JIM
Oh, for sure, because you meet so many interesting people and, of course, being in the airline business and going back frequently, I would visit pawnshops. In those days, I’m talking the ‘60s, early ‘70s, but in the ‘60s and early ‘70s, visiting pawnshops, even later than the ‘70s when I’m thinking about it, you would find them there. I used to find loads of them. Then, you would talk to friends. “Oh, I’ve got a bunch of those. Do you want them?” type of thing. On occasion, surprisingly, well, not surprisingly in Victoria, do you know . . . Have you been on the island? If you’re driving north, you will pass a place called Ripple Tree Junction. It’s a wee buy junk and sell antiques, little bunch of stores. They used to have loads of them and I got some very good ones there. Mainly, I would get them in the UK or out of estates sales here.

[01:16:05]

REBECA

So, anybody who’s been to the exhibit, *Obsessions: Every Collector Has a Story*. You can see that there are many different types, or categories, of toy soldiers. Has it been educational for you in terms of learning about where each group of soldier may have been from or what they had been . . .

JIM

Well, I knew all of that in advance. What, and I’ll repeat it again, what fascinated me was when we started putting those together. Well, Catherine and I spent an entire day because moving them from our place in Moffat to here was a military exercise. The plan went well by Sheila [Hill, Curator of Exhibitions, Richmond Museum], Camille [Owens, Assistant Curator, Richmond Museum], and I. It all worked, but you’ve seen the trains, big cover trains that vegetables come in, well I had scouted out nine Safeways during the time of day they were starting to throw these away. I managed to collect, well in advance, because that’s the way I was going to deliver them here. I was going to deliver them by the shelf-full, but then Catherine said “We’ll get towels, and we’ll put the towels down, and then towels on top of them so that even in the car they won’t be shaking around.” So, that’s what we did. We spent a day and a half putting them there. Catherine would say “What about that one? Had I seen that one before?” We would talk about the soldiers. So, yes.

REBECA

Do you have a favourite? I know, so anyone who’s seen the exhibit, *Obsessions*, there are many different kinds including, I believe, Sikh soldiers?

JIM
Sikhs? Oh, yes.

REBECA

Yes, yeah. So there are many different kinds.

JIM

Well, the Skinner’s Horse, that was interesting you bring that up because . . . Do you know how Sheila and Camille got to know about my soldier collection?

REBECA

No.

JIM

Well, this will be lovely. I’ve got the family Bible which goes back to, oh, about 1876. A bit of our family history is on the frontispiece. That was started by my great grandparents, but then somebody decided they were going to put their information, that somebody being my father, decided he was going to put his information there. On a piece of paper, he wrote down as things developed. He covered what was underneath, and I wondered, was that intentional or not? So, I was looking for a paper conservator. I wanted to see, could that be lifted? So, I came here to the museum and I asked the question. “Is there anybody here who can help me?” Sheila came out, and she said, “As a matter of fact, my sister is a paper conservator. The unfortunate part is she’s in Kingston, but yes, I think that’s possible. I can give you the name of a company that will do that.” I had commented on the existing exhibit, which I had visited a few times because I thought that last one, or the one before ours, was wonderful. I said that to her and she said, “Well, you’ll probably like the next one because what we’re doing is people are bringing their really wonderful collections.” As an aside she said, “Do you collect anything?” I said, “Funny you should say that. I collect toy soldiers.” She said, “What’s that? Can you bring them over?” I said, “Well, hardly, but I’ll tell you what, if you want to see them, by all means, come over.” She and Camille came over a couple days later, and when she was looking in my cabinet, the Sikhs and the Madras were fairly prominent. I almost fell over when the first thing she said, she pointed at the Madras and said “Are those Madras infantry?” I said, “Yes, they are. How would you know?” She said, “I worked at the Imperial War Museum.” Then, I said, “Have you seen the Skinner’s Horse?” “Oh, now you know we’re a very diversified city, multicultural. Do you have anything else? East African Rifles?” That’s where it all came into fruition, but there is an interesting aside. You may or may not have heard it. We wanted to do something in the way of diversity. So, I thought, well, I’m not going to do, oh, these are Sikh, these are Empire folks, no, no, no. How about foreign and commonwealth? And I had a reason. There was method to my madness. The four Henry Guards from Kingston, Ontario are commonwealth. My Australian Lancer is from New South Wales, a commonwealth. My Royal Canadian Regiment is commonwealth. My Canadian Princess Patricia’s Light Infantry are commonwealth. That’s the beginning. That’s the biggest display that’s in there. It’s even bigger, figure-wise than the Trooping of the Colour, which is a big one. It worked like a charm. The night that this was open, I had to be there, of course, and I happened to be on the side of the former commonwealth. If anybody was, sort of, edging up to get a better look [he stood near us?]. And then they’d go and bring another, [he stood near us?]. Look at this, and then we would get talking and, yeah.

[01:22:10]

REBECA
I have to say, it’s been very exciting for people to come to the exhibit and connect with something. Sometimes, you see a collection, it’s something you’ve never seen before and you learn something new, but that personal connection because of the demographics in Richmond is wonderful. It’s very wonderful.

JIM
Absolutely. Well, I’ve had lots of them say to me, “Oh, I’ve had those before.” I said, “What did you do with them?” [laughs]. Again, they are personal little things. One of my deepest friends and, unfortunately, I only had him for two years, one of my golfing companions, one day, at the club said, “You collect toy soldiers?” I said, “Yeah.” “Well, one of the guys in the condo, he’s got a fantastic display. He did an outdoor display for one afternoon, the Queen’s, whatever. Have you ever met John?” I said, “No.” “Well, I’ll find John.” The very day he told me about John, I met John. John and I were very plausible types. We found that our backgrounds were very similar. Although, he was a Londoner. He was evacuated during the war. We’re both the same age. To cut this long story short, John invited my wife and I at a latter Sunday to come for dinner. When I saw his collection – wowie! Now, his collection is of much more modern figures than mine. He’s got some that are what I call the real Britain’s. The New Britain’s, I love. Anyway, John died. His collection was dispersed amongst his sons and daughters, and what have you but, his wife has become a very close friend of ours and she lives in Chemainus. She moved from [indecipherable] to Chemainus. When she heard about what I was doing she said, “Do you have the Bahamas Bugle Band?” I said, “No, I wish I had it.” She said, “You now have it.” She said, “I’ve just remembered, I’ve kept some of John’s soldiers.” She shipped over a box full of Bahamas Band, which I’ve got a couple in there with the King’s Own Scottish Barbers which are in there, and a whole bunch of others that I wasn’t going to put in there because we had already decided what was what. So, there was another, later in life, again, the soldier collection was the connection. I was very flattered and he had a very big attendance at his celebration. I hate that, celebration of life, term, but he did and I was honoured when Ryan asked me would I do the eulogy and it was a pleasure. I portrayed him as I thought I had portrayed him, the way I knew him, an extremely well-educated engineer. He worked in Vienna. That’s where he got his bloody disease. Oh, what is it? That horrible, horrible stuff that’s in asbestos, asbestosis. Anyway, while he was there, he was a bit of a jack of the lad. He started dealing diamonds [laughs]. I remember, in the eulogy I think I called him a multifaceted man, quite a bit of Sean Connery, quite a bit of David Nevins, but I had a lot of Spike Milligan [laughs]. Yeah, but, again, you’ve asked a question. Yes, you’re right. I have, since John showed up with these, yes. Most people who we have met, especially the new people who came into our condo when we moved, they had never seen these. So that was always a focal point and got things going as a good icebreaker.

REBECA

Right, yeah.

JIM
I do go on, don’t I?

REBECA

In a great way, in a great way [laughs]. One thing I’m curious about which, ironically, doing an oral history for a Richmondite, is when you arrived in Richmond and what that was like for you. So, if you had your own impressions of Richmond and also what life was like starting up in this community.

JIM

I swear to god this is true. I go back years to when I was in Victoria. I told you about Stan Mooney, I told you that the Air Canada manager and I had an amicable relationship. Well, CP Air had an office there and there was a guy called Jimmy Mutch and we got along even better. Jimmy got transferred to Hawaii, tough position, and then Jimmy got transferred to Los Angeles when CP, and it wasn’t that long ago, were going to operate out of there. That’s when I got the government job and I was going to Los Angeles. We got a call at three in the morning in Victoria. I picked it up, and a voice said “Willis, Los Angeles isn’t big enough for the two of us.” Click. I knew who it was and I went “You bastard.” [laughs]. It was Sir James. Anyway, that relationship really, really prospered in that regard. Where were we going with that again?

[01:28:19]

REBECA
When you came to Richmond.

JIM
Yes, thank you because I really ranted too much. I’m in London, Jimmy has come back to Vancouver. Now, I’m being transferred to Vancouver for Expo. I had always told Jimmy I could never live in Richmond. It was as if god took a bunch of dominos and through them down, and it’s just a bunch of scattered buildings and sloughs. Never Richmond. So, when we came back we started looking at homes. We went to Kerrisdale, realized very quickly, no, hadn’t won the lotto. We went to Burnaby, we went to North Vancouver, we went to Surrey, we didn’t go to White Rock. Anyway, Jimmy phones me, “Let’s have lunch. Bring Cathy.” So we went to the hotel, you know, on the side of the water? He said, “You looking for a house?” “Yeah.” “Anywhere but Richmond, Jim?” I said, “Yeah.” Well, he said, “You know, I felt the very same way. When we’re finished, follow me.” In those days the Arthur Laing didn’t exist yet. You had to come over, uh, what’s its name, Oak Street. Even there, you had to go up almost to about Templeton and then cut back down, and then it took us to where he lived. I thought we were back in California. We had never looked at Richmond. The next day, we phoned a real estate agent and said start looking for stuff in Richmond for us and that’s how it all came about. Richmond, I fell in love with Richmond when we saw Jimmy’s house. We’ve always felt as if we’re still living in California here, only, it’s even better. Our children in California used to think I was nuts. We had a swimming pool and when it was raining, I would go out and sit at the swimming pool and read the newspaper [laughs]. I got bored from the constant sunshine in Los Angeles. I really did.

REBECA

In terms of the community, what was your impression?

JIM
Well, the community, you see, I was so involved with my work, we landed in a perfect community, white Anglo-Saxon, Protestant. As far as we were concerned, we didn’t even think of the Chinese influence here because it wasn’t that large. Hong Kong hadn’t been given away then. The smart Chinese, Cantonese, they could see the right way. They were the originals who came here. Not the original, but after the ‘60s. We felt they were part of the community but it was basically an Anglo and, to some degree, Filipino community. There’s a lot of Filipinos in British Columbia.

REBECA

So whereabouts, exactly, was your first home?

JIM

Our first home, if you go, do you know where Grauer Elementary School is on Blundell, between Richmond, uh, between Railway and Number One?

REBECA
Yes.

JIM
If you pass Grauer Elementary, immediately passed it hang a left and there’s a T-intersection coming up, that’s Claybrook. You go down Claybrook and, in those days, Claybrook was a group of individually built North American houses, a little larger than normal, fairly recently built, and then you would get into Colchester and Coventry, which was like a great big racetrack. You came in off Claybrook, you could go all the way around, and out, and, uh, wonderful neighbours, most of them arriving just about the time we did, including one of my European colleagues who showed up, John Smerdon who was CP general manager of the Benlux House – right opposite of it. I loved it and, uh, Lisa growing up, John growing up. They had a big garden, nice house, good friends, but, as I say, once again, I was in perpetual motion for the first four years.

[01:33:10]

REBECA
Right. Other than, perhaps, the development and height of the buildings, as you mentioned earlier . . .

JIM
We’re very much a part of the community. Some of our friends looked at us sideways when we sold our house. Well, we surely weren’t going outside this area. No way. We liked Richmond. As a matter of fact, the place we found is even better than the house we had. Not if you’re comparing accommodation size, but we can walk to the library, we can walk to the Oval where we always did our exercises, there’s that beautiful park behind that. Now they’re building this other place. We’ve got swimming pools, libraries. We’re very much a part of it. We would never leave Richmond.

REBECA
Right.

JIM
And, we had a lot of acquaintances. We had no close, close friends who were Chinese but we had some good acquaintances that were Chinese, Japanese. Our building is very interesting. I have . . . I don’t like him. He’s too much of an Omar Sharif, and Catherine adores him. He’s six foot two. Sam, Sam Somasunder. We’re currently bringing Sam’s mail in for him because he’s down in Tallahassee with his daughter who just built a new house, but then we have Sam who is Hindi. His wife, daughter of a Congress Party Minister, he gave me the Pandit Nehru, book, that he himself hasn’t read. I have. If you think you’ve got questions, I’ve got a zillion questions and he’s terrified now to come back [laughs]. Not very pro-British, and he’s educated enough to write off everything, that I know he will, and is entitled to do so. I have a wee bit of an edge because my brother spent several years in India and adored it. Now, Sam, at that building that we’re in, by the way, now you’ve really got my motor running, do you know that that was built by a Jewish consortium? And do you know in those days, why they built it?

REBECA
No.

JIM
Because they had difficulties, as individuals, getting apartments and moving into certain condos. Just like the golf course. They built Richmond Golf Course because they weren’t allowed to go into the white man’s golf course, the gentiles’. We still have some of the originals there. So, we have . . . We bought [a previous tenant’s place who] heavily drank, like a fish, and we know [they] smoked like a chimney because we had the place completely renovated. When you opened all the windows, the inside of the windows were brown [laughs]. We have, I would say, fifty-one units, probably a third of them are still occupied by people of the Jewish faith. We have Chinese, Japanese. The Japanese like me because I can speak to them a bit, greet them in the morning, uh, Taiwanese, the regular mainland China, Cantonese, oh, we have some Bermudians, a family, a mother, and husband, and wife from Bermuda, some Germans. I thought they were Dutch, but they were Germans.

REBECA
Right. Wonderful slice of Richmond’s diversity.

JIM

Oh, my god. If you want to see what Richmond’s like, try the Empress Condo. We’ve got everything there, and we get along very, very well. No, we like Richmond. Catherine has been a volunteer at the Gateway for twenty-seven years, yeah. There’s less and less opportunities now because the aging Anglo population who normally go to the theatre don’t exist anymore. The Chinese, they book the theatre for their own affairs and have a wonderful time, which keeps the theatre going, but there is no interaction there. You see very few Chinese people at Anglo plays or Anglo musicals or presentations, I guess because they’ve got their own entertainment, but that doesn’t upset me.

REBECA

So how would you say, thinking about change, you mentioned that, of course, we’ve had high rises over the years in Richmond . . .

JIM
That aspect of it has to come to an end. We are choking ourselves to death with traffic. We’re also going to choke ourselves to death with, people didn’t think about these things, sewage. I mean, we occasionally have problems with our outflow out of there. We just keep putting five hundred unit towers up here. On average, there’s two cars in every one of those units. Where are they going to go? We’re going to get like Tokyo where people buy cars and do nothing but wash them on Sundays.

[01:38:47]

REBECA
Would you say that you’ve seen any social change over the years since you arrived in Richmond?

JIM

Oh, definitely so, especially when the – and this isn’t zeroing in on one race – it’s when the mainland Chinese people started coming here. They’re less educated but they’re moneyed because they owned a piece of property, or their family did, the size of that desk. In Shanghai, that’s worth five, six, seven million dollars. They tend to ghettoize themselves, you just have to look out at a park or a place and all of that area there, and the Council are very reluctant to really, really do anything about it. I don’t mind Chinese language signs, but I also think the people who used to criticize the Quebecois for their language laws, hello? At least in Quebec you get to put English on the signs. That is a change. The biggest change, and the biggest problem I see is our ability to look after the aging Chinese, most of whom do not speak English, and do not have any reason to. Completely understandable, they don’t need to because they’re in a family unit. I can see the Chinese influence in Richmond becoming almost like the Taiwanese. When I first visited Taiwan, and I did over a couple of years a lot, when I first visited I came back and said to Catherine, “My god, I had no idea Taipei, Taiwan was like that.” I’ve met Chinese Californians. They’re outgoing, educated, they’re interesting people. They work like devils but they come from a very open society. Now, their contributions are very much welcomed in Canada, as far as I’m concerned, but my biggest problem is lack of hospitalization and, you may have noticed, that seniors are really up in arms. Anybody with cataract problems now has to go to St. Joseph’s in East Vancouver. I think that was almost inevitable because of the aging population. Look at me, for god’s sake, I’m eighty-four. I never thought I’d be anywhere near this age. My big birthday was fifty-five. I’d lived five years longer than my father. I say that in all honesty, but the pluses I see for Richmond are the young people. I really see it in them. The second-generation teenagers, right at the moment, I wouldn’t like to take them on intellectually. I think they’re learning and I think they’re appreciative of the opportunities they’ve got. They’ll do things. They’ll be in banking, in a big way. They’ll certainly be in the tech industries in a big way, they’ll be in the auto business in a big way. You know, people want to get a big car, you know, it was the same bloody thing in Britain. It’s still the same thing in America. So, it’s whose ox is being gored that you’ve got to consider [laughs]. You’ll be sorry you ever met me [laughs].

REBECA

So, it’s interesting now to get a better idea of your experiences settling in Richmond and your perspectives about Richmond. Is there anything that you miss about Scotland, in particular?

JIM
Only in a very emotive way, because there are parts of Scotland that are just drop dead gorgeous, on the right sort of days. Now, Catherine, I don’t know what the magic is, she’s been back in Scotland a lot but it rains a lot in Scotland. My family used to encourage me to bring Catherine up all the time. When we lived in London, “Send Catherine up here, it’s raining.” She was never there when it rained. I swear to god that’s true. I couldn’t believe it. It’s a beautiful country. One thing I miss is what I called the Glasgow swagger. Glaswegians have a very special way of communicating with each other. They’re very self-deprecating. They’re always poking fun at each other, without it being offensive, and without anybody taking any umbrage at it. They call it the Glasgow swagger, and that’s exactly what it is. Did you ever hear the wee joke, they still do it I think, but in Britain you didn’t have holidays, you went during the fair, F-A-I-R. Now the Glasgow fair lasted a week and the Edinburgh fair lasted a week, but they’re at different times. So, the little guy from Glasgow, he’s always wanted to go to Edinburgh during his fair holidays. So, he goes but he has one particular interest. He’s heard that they have the most magnificent zoo there. So, he goes to the zoo and, my god, it is this wonder. They’ve got elephants, they’ve got monkeys, they’ve got lions, and tigers, and camels, giraffes. Oh, and he’s just wandering around and the place is quite busy and then there’s screaming and people running every different direction shouting, “There’s a lion loose. There’s a lion!” So, the wee guy turns the corner and here’s the lion just about to jump on this little old lady. Well, the little Glaswegian rushes up and he jumps on the lion and, for an hour, they wrestle, and fight, and they scratch, but he finally manages to throttle the lion, kills it. The next morning, the daily newspaper in Glasgow, “Glasgow Man Hero in Near Disaster in Edinburgh Zoo.” The Edinburgh masthead reads, “Glasgow hooligan kills defenseless lion.” [laughs]. That’s Glaswegian humour.

REBECA

I like it [laughing]. Before I do forget, I want to invite you to talk about your honeymoon because you mentioned that you had an interesting story about that.

[01:46:02]

JIM

I’m not nearly as smart as I pretend to be. We were married and I told Catherine – and it was going to be a very small registry wedding – “We’re not getting married on Saturday.” [She said] “Why not?” I said, “Because we’re going to Yugoslavia for our honeymoon.” In those days, I could get the tickets myself and so on, although I had saved up. In those days you had to prepay, like Intourist, they had their own thing called Atlas Tours Booking. We prepaid our holiday and we were going to go to Dubrovnik, where I had been before and it’s wonderful, and then we’re going to another place called Sveti Stefan, that’s out of this world. That’s what we’re going to do, but we’re going to have to go on a Friday because we won’t, and we’re going on Swiss Air out of what was then JFK, that’s how long ago that was, we won’t get out on Saturday. We’ve got to go on a Friday. Okay we did it, and we flew to JFK on Friday afternoon and we eventually showed up at the Swiss Air counter at JFK, and because you’re travelling, what we called plus, non-revenue, you hand them your documentation and they thank you for it and ask you to sit over there. I’m having a look. It says DC-8, maximum 178 seats, and they’ve got first class. It might be even less. This is a very, very busy holding room. This is long before the security business, but this was a very busy holding room. Sure enough, everybody has disappeared, had gone down the ramp, onto the aircraft, and the agent comes over and says, “I’m terribly sorry. The flight is full, but you can try again tomorrow night.” Well, we weren’t intending on staying in New York that night. I got the impression from his voice, Saturday night wouldn’t be a good idea. That’s what I thought. Anyway, as luck would have it, we go through the same exercise and, my god, the place is packed, again, and everybody’s gone. And then, it’s the supervisor, I can see him to this day, comes walking over, his hands are behind his back, “I’ve got you some seats.” Two red boarding passes, first class, and those were the days, first class, and Swiss Air invented it. There were, what, eighteen of us, nine, nine. It was the most marvellous experience, except, this was the first time Catherine had actually flown. She flew in the aircraft from Toronto, but now she’s going across the Atlantic. We have had everything on the menu, including the vodka and the caviar. Vodka-caviar, those were the starters, and choice of main course, and so on, and so forth. So we’re about two hours into the flight, and the chef-de-cabin, female, whispers in my ear, “I think Mrs. Willis might need a little distraction. I’ll go and find out if a captain will host you.” She came back, she said, “Captain MacDonald will be very pleased to see you.” So we go up and I get to sit in the jump seat, and Catherine’s standing there, the pilot’s turned around talking away to her, and the first officer is talking to her, too. There was an engineer there and he’s involved. Catherine’s fascinated. She said, “What’s that little red flashing light there?” The captain looks, “Willy, what’s that little red flashing light?” Catherine’s face dropped. They were having a joke. Anyway, we finally go back and Catherine falls asleep, as do I, and we’re awakened by Captain MacDonald. “Good morning ladies and gentleman. We’ve started our let down to Zurich International Airport and, Mrs. Willis, I really did know what that little red light was about.” Then, we got excited. We’re going to stay for three days at the Hotel Dum Storchen, Zurich. Gorgeous place. The weather was lovely and we’d go walking all over the place. Then we’re going to fly with Swiss Air to Belgrade, take it back to Belgrade to the Central Hotel to spend the night before flying the next morning to Dubrovnik, and starting our stay in Dubrovnik.

[01:51:47]

So, we arrive at the Hotel Central in Belgrade and they’re all very official. I present my documentation and my coupons. The guy goes through a big ledger, no computers, big ledger. “We don’t have a reservation for you and the hotel’s full. I’m sorry. You’ve got to make another arrangement.” “Wait a minute. We’ve got a booking here. No, no, no, no.” Now, this is the bit that you’re going to question but, I swear, ask Catherine the same thing. Suddenly, a door opens behind the fellow that’s checking us in and I look and he looks, and he says, “James! I didn’t think I would see you here so soon.” Now, this is a guy I was with at KLM from the familiarization tour the year before. That’s why I picked Dubrovnik and Sveti Stefan. This fellow was pretending to be a Yugoslav but a student from England, and he was just sort of in the same area as we were. Well, he was our minder and we found out, somebody found him in his room going through his possessions, but, anyway, Michael, what’s the problem. So, I explained everything to him. He says, “We don’t always get things right, but, go down here into the lounge, order anything you like to drink and tell them that I will be taking care of that.” So, about half an hour later he comes back and he said, “I don’t know how to tell you this, but I’m doing you a favour. Dubrovnik is so badly overbooked that they’re actually throwing East Germans out of the hotels to let the Swedes in because the Swedes are a higher currency. Jim, there’s no way you can go there. Now, you’ll get your money back eventually, but after you get back to Canada. I have arranged a complimentary hotel for you tonight, and I have arranged a complimentary dinner for you tonight. I have arranged a flight back to Zurich for you tomorrow morning.” That’s . . . All of a sudden our honeymoon had blown up. We fly back to Zurich. What the hell are we going to do because all I’ve got in the way of money is what was going to be our disposable. Our hotels were all paid for, our meals, everything. Then I had a brain wave, the KLM ticket office on the main street in Zurich. We took a tram car from the airport, which you can do in Zurich. As luck would have it, a guy I went on a course with in Amsterdam, when I was with KLM, he was there. We explained the story to him. He said, “Have you ever been in Lugano?” “Never heard of it.” He said, “It’s the Italian part of Switzerland. It’s beautiful. I have an aunt there who operates a pensioné. Now, I don’t know if she’s open but let me find out.” So, he goes away and he comes back and he said, “My aunt would be very willing to welcome you at a small charge.” Then he gave us directions to get on the train, told us how long the train journey would be, and this is the bit I still love, he told us when we came off the train, “There’s an elevated station, when you come off the train, you go down the steps, and there’s a square. Look across the square. You will see a man in a red sweater standing beside a green Austin.” It was something out of James Bond. Sure enough, there he was and he was waiting for us. We went way up the side of Monte Bre, one of these mountains, and we got this pensione which was unbelievable. It wasn’t costing us much, and they didn’t do meals but next door was the Ristorante Panorama, owned by a big German Zizerdeuch. There was a balcony there and we sat down that evening, and we ordered spaghetti because that was the cheap thing to do. So, we got spaghetti. They asked if we want meat and we said, yes, thinking meat sauce. A huge bowl of spaghetti and a steak as big as an anvil. They didn’t charge us for it when they realized we had misunderstood. That was the beginning of a very, very pleasurable honeymoon. The weather in Lugano was gorgeous. We even took . . . We had enough money left to take a train down to Milan for a day and, God, we enjoyed that. That was really, really nice. So that was the honeymoon.

[01:57:53]

REBECA

I must say, you’ve had many serendipitous adventures.

JIM
Really?

REBECA
Yes.

JIM
We didn’t even talk about the pyramids. I’ve climbed inside the Cheops pyramid.

REBECA
Really?

JIM
I scaled them. As I say, tell anybody that. I don’t tell people. They think you’re bullshitting. Now, from a personal point of view, again, I don’t . . . you’re too young to remember it. It’s, again, when Grace McCarthy was the minister and I was in Los Angeles. It was decided that British Columbia might be interested in becoming part of the international commemoration of Captain Cook. We still have a statue of Cook outside the Empress. I was very much involved with that. The gentleman I met, at the time, again, became a friend, and he could tell you, even, what clothes size Cook had. He was an expert on Cook and he was the one who told me that Cook was the first navigator, ever, to know exactly where he was at any given time, in any given ocean. He was also the one, long before it became popular, to say that in Cook’s logs, he encountered weather that we are now calling the most severe climate change. I’m currently reading a book which happened in 1708 through 1718, ten years that Europe was decimated by extreme temperatures, fires, floods. I think we’re in a cycle. Coming back to the business of Cook, this man was a delight. Then I got to meet the most right-wing Republican senator, ever. Senator Barry Goldwater from Arizona. Now, I met him after he retired and I had been visiting the newspaper people in Phoenix, who happened to be friends with him, and because they knew we had our children with us, we got to see Barry Goldwater’s Hopi Doll collection. The Hopi Doll is almost a religious figurine. Well, we got to go to meet Senator Goldwater at his house, he’s a charming man but very right-wing, slightly to the right of Atilla the Hun. I mean, he was really right in there, yeah. So, yes, there’s been personal things.

REBECA

Well, the last question I’ll ask you is, if I haven’t given you the opportunity, or guidance, to tell any stories that you would like to share and have on record, please do.

JIM

There’s one that is a Richmond story because it was with PWA, and I will tell anybody who’s willing to listen, that was a little Richmond company that became a giant. They eventually bought Wardair, which was a mistake. Then, they bought CP Air. They had a run at CP Air, even when I was working for them. You’ll find out in here just what PWA meant to me. There was one element that I’ll never, ever, forget. I was in Toronto. I’ve never been west with PWA, but they said, you know, “You’re a manager in Toronto and you’ve got to know about the whole operation. We’re the biggest suppliers of aircraft to Canada’s North in the Northwest Territories, long before then, Northwest Territories and Yukon.” Particularly in the High Arctic, where we are supplying everything: personnel, accommodations, helicopter parts, cabbages, milk. We supplied that by air, a six hour journey out of Calgary on the DC-6. I was nominated to go in one of those and there were eighteen seats strapped in the back because the rest was all cargo covered in netting in case we hit turbulence, which we did. The navigator, they had two navigators, along with two pilots, because of the long journey. One of the little English guys told me, “When it gets too rough just lie on the nets and hold on tight.” He says, “You’ll not get flung around.” Oh, yeah. But what was the big thing? It’s August, so it’s dusk for about half an hour. We refueled in Yellowknife, and all of the guys refueling all have big bee helmets because the mosquitos would eat them alive. Even if people tell you they don’t like odor from the aviation fuel, it doesn’t bother the mosquitos. If there’s a human body, they will come. So, I’m watching them fill it up, and then we fly. And the farther north you go, the more like the surface of the moon it becomes. We’re going to a place called Malloch Dome which was at the drilling site on Ellef Ringnes Island. At Malloch Dome, I think they were about sixty to sixty-eight miles from the North Pole, but it is brown with huge rocks and gravel. The landing strip is marked by oil barrels all the way down. When we landed, as soon as we had to turn around to come back. He revs the engines again because you’re sinking into this, and he has to keep it up. That, I couldn’t believe. That, I just could not believe. I’ve never seen anything like that, nor will I ever see. Even the pingos off Tuktoyaktuk, which were like little ice volcanoes coming out. The Canadian side was going to be huge, if they had ever figured out how to get that pipeline built but the political pressures were dead against it. There were Phillips Petroleum, I would say if you look at the Empress Hotel, downtown, which is another hotel in Vancouver, oh, that, no, the Empress is in Victoria, the Hotel Vancouver which is now the Fairmont, they had buildings that size there for their staff. Philips were not alone. Exxon was up there as well. Shell was up there. The machinery, the largest crane in the world was lying in the harbour, and they stayed there for years thinking they were eventually going to solve the problem of getting oil out. That was an experience I will never, ever, forget, and that was with PWA.

[02:05:16]

REBECA

There you go.

JIM

So there we are.

REBECA

Yeah, these extensions of these endeavours that you don’t really think of.

JIM
Yeah.

REBECA

The last thing that I would invite you to do is talk about your photos, if you feel like we have any we haven’t touched upon in those stories.

JIM
Sure. If you would like to join me here. We’ll just flip through them.

REBECA

Sure.

JIM
Of course, I want you to see that terribly handsome young man. It’s all about me [laughs]. How would you like to sit here? It’s easier.

REBECA
Sure.

JIM

That one you’ve seen.

REBECA

Yes.

JIM

That one you’ve seen. This is one of those trips to Aberdeen I was telling you about. We were up at Aberdeen and that’s me and the bear, and this was one of the brilliant ones I told you about, same age as me, Jimmy McCowan. He ended up in the band with the Grenadier Guards, and then when he came out of active, he’s a peripatetic teacher. This we had just been broadcasting. We’d come from the BBC. You should read that.

REBECA
*[Reads the photo caption]* “Unfortunately, this photograph is not in colour. Had it been, the tie being worn over the spearpoint collar, it would melt your eyeballs. It contains several shades of brown over a yellow background.” So that’s Aberdeen, Scotland as well?

JIM

That’s Aberdeen. So is this, at Hazel Head Park, beautiful park. The nonchalant swagger is the result of having been paid on our previous leave. There’s the Albert Hall, the annual national theatre. I think it’s about 5,300. These were our registration cards and these were all of the bands that contested. There’s my dance band base, that’s where I made a lot of money. I was sixteen then, Jimmy Canon’s Dance Band. There was a bass player, but he’s not in the photograph because he was taking these photographs [laughs]. Trixie, she wasn’t a very good singer but she was the owner’s, of the Grey Garden Ball Room, girlfriend, so. I’m the youngster among all of these old men who were at least twenty. This was another band in Toronto. We were the Canadian national champions and there’s that very handsome fellow right there.

REBECA

*[Reads the photo caption] “*The National Exhibition Grounds, September 1969.”

JIM
There I am in the Regimental Band of the Governor General’s Horse Guards. This was the airport manager at Victoria when I was with the government in California. We went out to meet him. This is my brother who had come over from Scotland. That wouldn’t have done very well in these days.

REBECA

No.

JIM

But, yeah, I’m Spike Milligan. We actually went and met him because he thought we were mad. This was the president with General Ford, Queen’s birthday. This is the invitation to the garden party. This is the invitation to meet Philip. This is Canada Club, Lord Hailsham. Paul Martin was a lovely guy. He gave Catherine, the day of the Queen’s Garden Party, he gave Catherine an escorted tour of one of the main galleries in Buckingham Palace. He was telling her that’s the Queen’s favourite because it’s all her antecedents and he had remembered everything she had told him. All the papers, what they were talking about in the House of Lords. There’s Gordon, Lord Parry. This is Peer’s Guest, in the House of Lords, where I’d go for lunch and, below, the bar when I’m actually sitting in there, there he is. That was the State Opening of Parliament, and that’s what it looks like, and the speech. Everybody was there. There was one of these. This was something I felt very honoured to attend. There were only two Canadians and Catherine and I . . . There were four Canadians: Catherine and I, and two others. This was the special celebration in Westminster Abbey for William Wilberforce. That was the Prince of Wales but Margaret Thatcher and her husband were just sitting across the opposite side from Catherine and I, and I could see her nudging him and saying, “Who the hell is that? I seem to recognize him” [laughs]. The Order of Service, this is it.

REBECA
Oh, I see, criminal court.

JIM

And who the sheriffs are and what they do. It’s the oldest in the city, and there was the table. This one kept an alarm clock that was wound up and had a very strident alarm because they were very punctilious. The lunch started dead on when it was supposed to and, because they were all in sessions, had to stop when it did and, where was I? It was Justice Judge Owen who invited me down. These were the three laymen: Mr. Farquhar, Timothy Dodwell, and myself. Greville, he became Lord Mayor. Alan Traill was first, and then him. And that’s just the history of the old days. So, there you are, that was the regiment my uncle was in. I use these for collecting purposes.

REBECA

Well, you’re a collector of personal items as well, too, so.

JIM

Well, yes. Now, which is which. Is yours the open one or?

REBECA

Oh, I moved them to the side now. Now, I’m not sure. I’ll turn the recorder off now, though, and I want to thank you, very much, for all of the information, all the experiences and, also, being candid in sharing your personal perspectives with us as well. We really appreciate it. It makes it, um . . .

JIM

A little more human.

REBECA
Yeah, and engaging. It’s engaging, right? So, thank you so much.

JIM

You’re more than welcome, Rebeca.

REBECA
It was a joy.

END OF TAPE PART ONE OF ONE

[02:12:51]

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)