

Jerry at the computer printer outside his office on the 37th Floor of the Terminal Tower, Cleveland, OH in 1980



Jerry practicing playing drums with a partial set



# JERRY WESS

A Wonderful Life



Barb and Jerry at 6 am in Grant Park before the start of the Chicago Marathon in 1998

Looking back, it is hard to believe that my transportation career began forty-seven years ago. I started as the youngest management person on the Chessie System staff, and retired as the oldest member of Exelon's trading floor group.

### Life on the Farm

I began life on the first day of spring, March 20, 1948 at University of Maryland hospital in downtown Baltimore. It seems that the railroad presence entered my life nearly at birth. My parents brought me home to Mt. Clare, the same section of town where Baltimore and Ohio's (B&O) shop facilities were located. Born Post World War II, I am a true "Baby Boomer." Before turning school age, we moved to Ellicott City, a suburb of Baltimore. Ellicott City was the first terminus of the B&O Railroad. I attended grade school at St. Paul's Catholic School in Ellicott City. Being the tallest kid in class, I always sat in the back of the classroom. It was my job to close the big windows in the spring and fall whenever a B&O steam powered train rumbled into town to take on coal and water. In fifth grade, I remember seeing the old steam

engines being pulled through Ellicott City on their way to obsolesce by the new shiny diesel electric locomotives. This saddened me and my friends, as we played marbles in the playground.

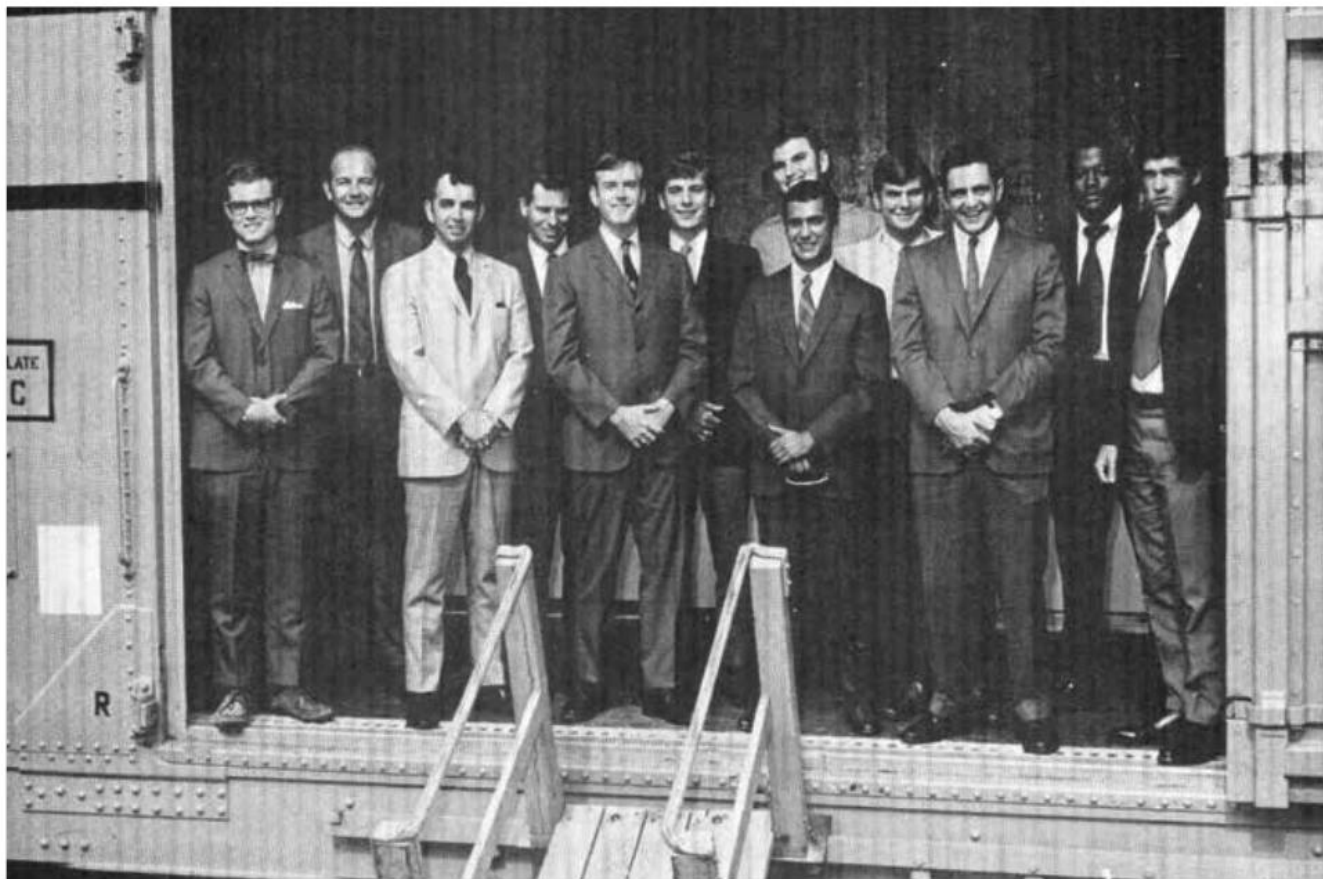
My sister Cheryl was born while we lived in Ellicott City. After her birth, we moved to a bigger house on a farm just outside Ellicott City. It was a nice place to grow up with room for a couple of kids to roam, especially since we each had our own horse. Cheryl and I spent a lot of time riding our horses. We both also played baseball, me hard ball and Cheryl softball. Mom and Dad raised a lot of vegetables. We also had over 1,000 egg laying chickens. My dad, Pete Wess, worked for Baltimore Gas and Electric in the Electrical Distribution Operations Group. He would take cases of eggs each morning before work to his restaurant clients all over Baltimore City. After graduating from Catholic grade school, we both attended public high school in Howard County. I went to Howard High, home of the Lions, and Cheryl attended Atholton High School. I tried (and injured) my hand at football while at Howard High, but my real passion was playing the drums for my eight-piece rock and roll band named the Vanguarders.

### You light up my Life

It was the beginning of high school senior year that I met a girl named Barbara Jo Rost. She had moved, reluctantly, from Cleveland to Baltimore during the summer of 1965. Barb was little Miss Everything in the Avon Lake, Ohio high school that she attended. What a terrible thing to have to move to a new school in your senior year! But her dad, Richard, worked in the Chesapeake & Ohio (C&O) Purchasing Department and had been transferred to Baltimore as the result of the merger of the C&O and B&O Railroads into the Chessie System.



Barb and Jerry at Barb's parents' house when we were young and free



**A CARLOAD OF TALENT** – The 16th C&O and B&O management training group is shown at Camden Station in Baltimore, as they got a close look at new C&O/B&O freight cars, including this Hi-Cube car. The trainees (from left) are: Stephen Farrar III, Virginia Commonwealth University; Robert Bowling, East Tennessee State; Darryl Houseman, University of Maryland; Frank Fowler, Jr., Penn Morton College; Maurice Lazenby III, Gettysburg College; Jerome A. Wess, University of Maryland; Richard Huffman, University of Toledo; Joseph Audia, Jr., Youngstown State University; Thomas Heiber, University of Toledo; Stuart Stigall, Virginia Commonwealth University; Brett Tyler, Morgan State College and Emory Whittington, University of Maryland.

Barb and I dated throughout our senior year. Barb's "round town" car was a '65 Ford Mustang convertible; mine a '63 Corvair two door. After high school, we went off to college but kept seeing each other. I worked summers as a vacation relief clerk for the Chessie System. Barb's Dad helped me get the position. Mainly, I worked in the Central Mail Room. It was a fun job. I would unload "train" mail from passenger trains in both Camden Station in Baltimore, and from Union Station in Washington, DC. When not unloading mail from trains, I was sorting it in the mail room, and delivering to the various administrative departments scattered around Baltimore. Much to the dismay of our parents, at the

end of our junior year in college, Barb and I got married. We lived our senior year in married student housing at the University of Maryland in College Park.

### This is the Life

Barb received her Associate of Arts degree. Because we were so poor, Barb went to work full time while I finished up at U of M. Our apartment rent was \$90 a month! With Barb working full time and me part time, our weekly bring home pay was \$100. We lived life to its fullest without a worry in the world. For we all know that when you are 22, you are invincible! We spent every spare dollar that we had on concerts, movies, and pizza.

I received a BS in Transportation Economics in June of 1970. After graduation, Barb and I were anxious to get out in the working world, and start making a better income. Richard Nixon was President, and while the Vietnam War was starting to wind down, many of my college classmates were entering the military because of their birthday draft "number" in the first ever lottery. I was thrilled to be selected to join the one-year Management Training Program at Chessie System Railroads. Along with eleven other recent college graduates from across the US, I started my career on July 1, 1970.

Our Management Training Group was headquartered in Baltimore, but we

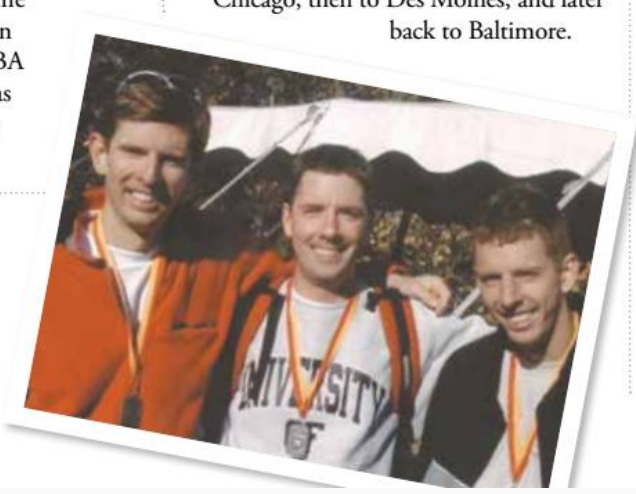


From left: Pete and Dorothy Wess, Chris, Ryan, Barb, Claire and Dick Rost (Barb's parents), Tom, and the family Lab, Molly

were constantly traveling the twenty-two state Chessie network mostly by train. The group spent time in each department; some being at headquarters, but a lot of time was spent with the Transportation, Mechanical, and Engineering groups out on the operating divisions. Many of us were newlyweds, but we were never at home. So, we reacted by acting on the road like a bunch of crazy college boys. What a year it was!!! We had some good times and fortunately none of us got fired. What about our 1970 salary you ask? It was a whopping \$685 a month. The dress code included wearing a coat and a tie every day. I had one blue blazer, and one suit that saw a lot of use that first year. At the end of the Training Program I selected a position in the Finance Group as a Cost Analyst in the Cost Research Department. We received a thirty-two percent pay raise, but still made less than a chief clerk.

For the next twenty-two years, my career trajectory was continuously upward. I spent time in departments ranging from Accounting to Freight Damage Prevention to Merchandise Sales and Marketing, Coal, and Operations. One of my favorite jobs came in 1980 after my graduation from Baldwin Wallace's MBA Program in Cleveland. I was named a manager that year -Manager of Coal, Coke,

Chris, Tom, and Ryan after finishing the Marine Corp. Marathon in Washington, DC in the Fall of 2001



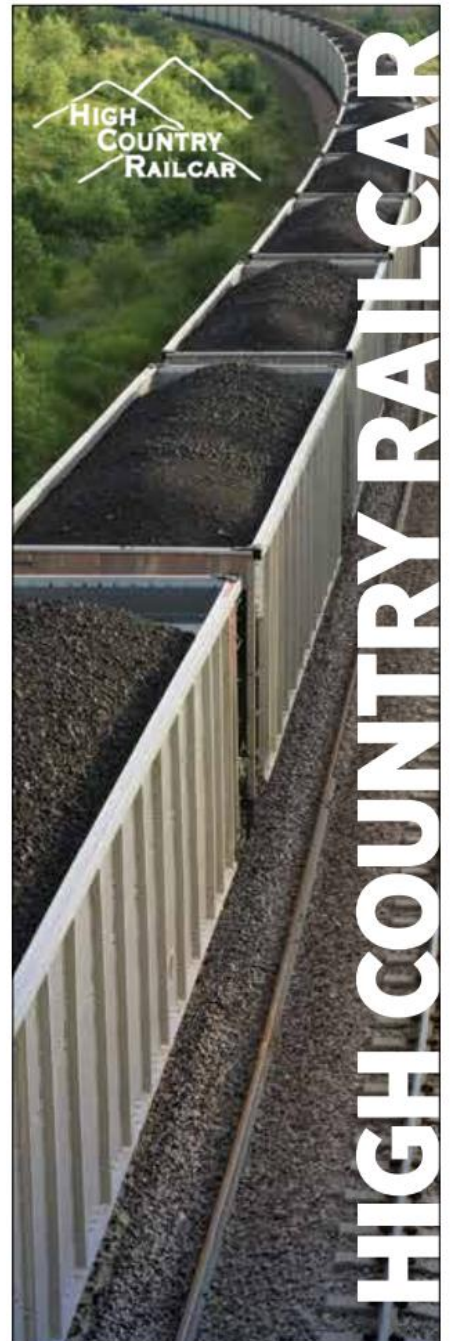
and Iron Ore Forecasting - a real swami of the carload forecasting models.

Now the Chessie System was evolving, like many competing railroads, into a much more complex and larger operating company. The management structures were

constantly questioned, and with this, came changes in corporate headquarters. Also, Chessie merged with the Seaboard Coast Line and a new corporate name "CSX" was originated. All this change was somewhat unsettling, but we continued to tolerate the changes in structure and location of our jobs. I was named a "Corporate Master" by CSX, and taught (as an extra job) the quality improvement process to departments throughout the Company. But the announcement to move to Jacksonville was the one that just about ruined my marriage.

### Family is the Spice of Life

Being the parents of three growing boys Barb and I decided that after twenty-two years of railroading it was time to change careers and settle down. We had no idea just how adaptable and flexible we were after making that decision. The step away from CSX came with a new lofty title of Vice President. The demands were great as I then held this title with International Trading Company, GE Railcar, and Mitsui Capital over the next twelve years of my career. And despite our desire to stay put in one place, we were constantly on the move. We moved from Baltimore to Chicago, then to Des Moines, and later back to Baltimore.



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Kendall, Georgia, Kelsey, Danny, and Ellie behind a “gator” at Valley View Farms near their grandparents Monkton home



These moves came after we had also moved to Cleveland, and then back to Baltimore during the Chessie System years. After leaving the railroad I was fortunate to always stay close to the industry. All my post CSX positions were linked to railroad activity. I was involved mostly with leasing various types of railcars to businesses that haul a variety of commodities by rail. Because of all the change that comes with moving, our three boys grew up very aware of the need to adapt to new environments. Chris, 45; Tom, 43; and Ryan, 38; are very successful in their respective careers, and good dads to our four granddaughters and one grandson. Ellie is our oldest at 15, and is entering 10th grade in the Princeton high school system. She excels at volleyball, and plays the clarinet in the Greater Princeton Youth Orchestra. Her sister, Georgia is 12, and has interests that range from shot put, horseback riding, dance, and baking. Both girls are trying many new things as they get older. In Hershey, our middle son Tom is raising Kendall, 10; Danny, 8; and Kelsey, 6. His kids are involved in many sports activities, and we are back, again, sitting and cheering in the bleachers. They spend a good portion of their summers on the beach in Cape May, New Jersey. Ryan, who graduated from The University of Wyoming, lives in Denver. He is the cross-country coach for Englewood

High School and an ultra-marathoner in his spare time. Last month he qualified for the 2018 100-mile ultra-marathon in Leadville, Colorado. It takes over 24 hours of continuous running to complete!

### Life as a Fuel Buyer

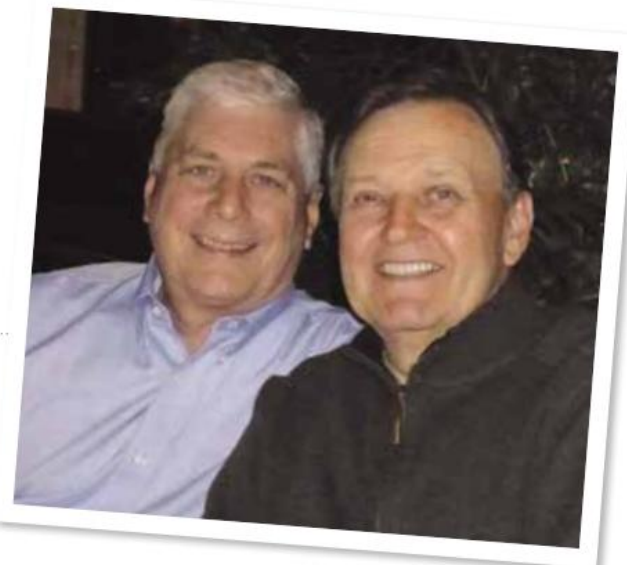
Barb and I returned to Baltimore in 2004. I became the Chief Transportation Officer for the Exelon fossil fueled power plants in the Midwest. My initial responsibility was the fuel supply for two baseload power plants; Kincaid Station in Pawnee, IL, and State Line near Chicago. Later, I would also ultimately have responsibility for three Constellation plants in the Baltimore area. Annual coal shipments from eastern and western coal mines approached 10 million tons. It was a fun job! This is where I spent the final twelve years of my career.

It was during this time that I joined the NCTA Board and later became Treasurer and eventually President. My time working directly with Tom (aka Coal Tar the Magnificent) Canter, Pat Scherzinger, Melinda Canter, and fellow Board

Jerry and Tom enjoying an evening at a restaurant in Washington, DC during an annual NCTA Board visit

members was very rewarding, and I miss being affiliated with NCTA.

On March 31, 2016, I retired from Exelon Generation. I was the last Fuels Department employee still standing. The Washington led EPA assault on coal combined with cheap and now overly abundant natural gas, and subsidized renewable energy made it an easy economic decision for Exelon to exit the fossil generated electric business. I never thought that I would end my career by being declared a person with an obsolete skill set. But it happened! It is fortunate for me that coal based employment provided a great income for basically my entire working career. As I look back, if I had to choose again, I would again select a transportation career. It is still one where people solve challenges by working with each other.



## No Grinches in this family - Christmas 2015

### The Gift of Life

The last fourteen months since I retired have been anything but typical. On April 26, 2016, twenty-six days into retirement, I entered Johns Hopkins Hospital and became a Living Organ Donor. Barb had a genetic kidney disease, and her kidneys were ready to fail. Her only choice was dialysis, or finding a new compatible kidney. I went through very involved testing, and despite not being a “perfect” match, the team at Hopkins said that they had the expertise to make an incompatible transplant work for us. Hopkins is only one of three hospitals in the US that can perform this procedure. Was it just luck, or a miracle that we had returned to the Baltimore area twelve years ago? We are both recovered now, after a year filled with many post-transplant challenges.

For me being a living organ donor has been more fulfilling than anything that I accomplished during a forty-six-year professional career. As part of my effort to pay it forward, I recently was named to the Board of Directors for Transplant Recipients International Organization (TRIO) Maryland. You can learn more and register today to be an organ, eye, and tissue donor at [RegisterMe.org](http://RegisterMe.org)

I will end my story by telling you that we are now starting fourteen months post retirement to do the things that most retirees start doing on day one. Such pleasures as traveling with no vacation restrictions, seeing the grand kids on a week day, or going to the beach anytime we feel like it are in our sights. Trips to Maine and Williamsburg are on the top of our fall list. Next winter we plan to spend time in Naples, FL. And next summer... who knows??? We do not want to ever take for granted the extended life that organ transplantation has given to us as a couple. Quite simply we are excited to see what tomorrow brings. Best wishes for continued success to each of you. ▲

Take care,  
Jerry



## DONATE LIFE AMERICA

Donate Life America is a not-for-profit alliance of national organizations and the Donate Life State Teams all across the United States. It is committed to increasing the number of donated organs, eyes and tissue available to save and heal lives, while continuing to develop a culture where donation is embraced as a fundamental human responsibility. Donate Life America manages and promotes the national brand for donation, Donate Life<sup>SM</sup>, and operates the National Donate Life Registry ([RegisterMe.org](http://RegisterMe.org)). It also assists Donate Life State Teams in facilitating high performing donor registries; developing and executing effective multi-media donor education programs; and inspiring the American public to register now as organ, eye, and tissue donors.

What you can do:

- Register to be a Donor
- Consider Being a Living Donor
- Financially Support the Donate Life Effort
- Share Your Decision to Register with Others
- Educate Others
- Protect Your Health

95% of Americans are in favor of being a donor  
but only 54% are registered.

