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Jim Norgaard: Well, I'm wondering how you first got involved in smokejumping? What drew you to the program, you know. You're one of the creators of it, and what were you doing before that?

Virgil Derry: Driving a laundry truck. I made a few jumps before, I just loved to jump, when I thought there was a chance to get in some jumps and make some money too, well, there I went.

JN: So there, at the time you started, what did the jump outfit amount to, what was going on?

VD: Well, that was just experimental. There was just, they just started, and we made 60 experimental jumps in different types of terrain. Supposed to have been 15 jumps in, in high trees and low trees and brush and side hills and snags and that kind of stuff just to, to work out the equipment. That's what the main thing of it.

JN: How'd you hear about it?

VD: Well, my older brother Frank had a parachute business in Los Angeles, and he got in contact with the Eagle Parachute Company. They're the ones that furnished chutes and he had to contract to make the jumps. And the first two or three jumps they made he brought another fellow with him, Smitty. And they both got hurt the first couple three jumps. [laughs] So he had to rustle some more and he agreed to pay me $500 if I'd make the jump with him or for him. I liked the money, and I liked to jump so that's how I got in.

JN: Were you and Frank and Smitty trying to sell this project to the Forest Service?

VD: No, no. It was, as far as that part of it went, as far as I know, it was all done by the Eagle Parachute Company. They, they sold the idea to the Forest Service. I think that's how it started. They furnished the chutes, and they apparently had a contract with the government to, to make these 60 jumps and see whether it would work or not. The whole object of our business there was to invent the equipment to use. They made up, oh, I guess four or five different suits to wear and that's what it was all about.

JN: So you, they made up the suits and you tried them out.

VD: Tried them out, yes.
JN: Modified them to your needs.

VD: Yes, that's right.

JN: How'd Frank get hooked on to this, get wind of this?

VD: Well he, having a parachute business in Los Angeles he knew about Eagle parachutes. He was quite a promoter anyway and he's the one the got, got in on the contract for furnishing the jumper.

JN: Geez, pretty exciting compared to driving a laundry truck.

VD: Yeah, there's a difference. [laughs] Yeah, there was a difference.

JN: Were jobs hard to come by then?

VD: Well, it wasn't easy, no.

JN: So that $500 looked pretty good.

VD: That looked awful good, yep. Cause I was making, oh, anywhere from $150 to $200 a month driving a laundry truck and there wasn't any excitement in that anyway. [laughs]

JN: You said you had jumped before, how'd you manage to jump before?

VD: Well I just, I bought an old chute and I'd jump at county fairs and turkey shoots and things like that. Pass the hat, get up $5, 6, 7 a time, every once in awhile.

JN: Gee, big money?

VD: Big money, yeah. But I got to jump, and I got an airplane ride free and that was all the good stuff.

JN: Had your brother gotten you involved in jumping or was that just your own idea?

VD: Well, I guess, I guess he probably got me started at it when I went to L.A. one winter and learned to pack chutes, got my license for packing them. Then when I went back home to Wenatchee, why I was the only one around there that could pack chutes. So I set me up a little business to—packing chutes, and I'd jump once in awhile, whenever I got a chance.

JN: Now what year are we talking about, in Wenatchee there?

VD: Well, that must have been '35 or '36 along in there someplace.
JN: Why'd they need people to pack chutes, what were people jumping for in Wenatchee?

VD: Well, there wasn't, I didn't pack a chute a—I guess I didn't pack two chutes a year [laughs] at the airport. Doing certain kind of flying, there were supposed to wear chutes and a chute is supposed to be packed every 60 days. So they'd pack them about twice a year and cost them all of $2.50 to get one packed so they didn't pack them too often.

JN: It was a pretty new profession though back then, wasn't it?

VD: Yeah, yeah. Then I, later on I went to Spokane and worked in an airport there as a mechanic and set myself up a parachute business out there. I did pretty good on that. That was, it must have been in about 1942 or '43 along in there someplace.

JN: In that business you did more than pack chutes then?

VD: Well, I worked as a mechanic in the daytime and packed chutes at night. They had a training deal set up there with the government and they were training Army pilots and what have you. There was lots of chutes there and I packed up 10, 12 chutes a day there. So that kind of kept me into the parachute business until it petered out. After the war it all quit so, had to make a living so I quit it.

JN: Well maybe if we can, we can start out when you got that contract with Eagle and you started jumping. You guys made your first jumps, you made 60 jumps right, 60 experimental jumps?

VD: Mm hmm.

JN: What was your attitude, were you scared, were you excited about it?

VD: Yeah, oh yeah. I had that stuff up my neck several times. [laughs] But I still like to do it. The first few jumps wasn't all that bad. But one, about my third or fourth jump along in there someplace, the chutes opened up alongside my head and knocked the whole side of my head off. After that I was pretty nervous.

JN: Did it knock you unconscious at all or just whap you good?

VD: No, I don't think I ever passed out. But the, I was bleeding like a stuck hog when I, when I got to the ground. But from then on I—it kind of bothered me a little bit, quite a little bit.

JN: Sure. What kinds of different terrain did you end up jumping in?

VD: Well, most all of it—on side hills, landing on side hills and in trees and in snags—snag trees.
Those were the worst. I didn’t like those dudes at all. But landing in the trees was just as soft as landing, better than landing on the ground.

JN: Had anybody tried that before or was this totally new?

VD: No, that's what it was for, to find out if it would work or not.

JN: So you were the ones that first found out that snags were hazardous and that trees were like a cushion?

VD: Like a cushion, yeah. The thick trees where the, oh, the little old, little old pine trees, you just come into them like sitting down on a pillow, nothing to it. But the high trees, then the problem was getting down out of them, for me anyway. The first tree I landed in was about 100-foot fir. Come right down on the top of it and I stayed up there about two hours trying to get up nerve enough to come down.

JN: Did they, did they give you any kind of a line back then? Did they anticipate that?

VD: No, no, after that they did.

JN: How’d you get out?

VD: Slid down the trunk of the tree, that's what I didn't want to do. [laughs] It was about 100 foot from that last limb to the ground and the ground crews, they got there very shortly after I landed. They started in telling me how to come down, but I didn't believe them.

JN: What’d they tell you, what did they want you to do?

VD: They just, wrap my legs around the tree and slide down. That didn't make sense to me but I didn’t see any other way to get down. So eventually I tried it and there was no problem at all. Just slid right on down.

JN: You must have broke a few branches sliding down.

VD: Wasn't no branches to break.

JN: Really?

VD: There just wasn't any. Just as smooth as a wall except it was a pine tree or a fir. Must have been a pine because the bark was real rough. I didn't have any problem hanging on to it but it sure was hard to start.

JN: Hard to get started on that?
VD: Hard to get started, yeah.

JN: Did you, what you were wearing, was it adequate for sliding down there?

VD: Oh yeah. By that time, we'd...we made two...we made up two or three suits, different kind of suits. If I'd have landed in that tree with the first suit they built up, I don't know how I'd have got down.

JN: Describe that first suit if you would.

VD: Well, it was made out of real heavy canvas. Real, real thick canvas and lined with 1-inch sponge rubber with another lining inside of that. You couldn't move in it.

JN: Stiff.

VD: You couldn't even sit down. You couldn't get up. They had to...they had to put you in the plane. They had to push you out of the plane, you couldn't do any of it by yourself, so then they—

JN: How'd you pull your, how'd you pull your chute then in that kind of a suit?

VD: Well, you could, you could get to that all right, because your hand never was too far away from the D-strap, D-string on the Eagle. But the next suit was made of much lighter material and lined with about a half inch or so of felt. And, well it was a bit awkward, at least to move around with it. And after I got my face beat off, they started wearing football helmets with masks. What it was was a football helmet with a baseball catcher's mask fastened on the front of it.

JN: Before that when you, when you whapped your head good, what were you wearing on your head?

VD: Just oh, like a, like a pilot's deal, what do you call them?

JN: A little cap?

VD: Kind of a cap yeah. It was tied under your chin and these suits had a big, high leather collar up the back, up about as high as your head. That was supposed to shed the limbs from when you come down through the limbs. That's what that was for.

JN: Did it work?

VD: I guess it did, I still got my head on. But it really wasn't necessary. The face mask was a good
idea. I'd made quite a few jumps before and that's the first time anything like that had ever happened to me. And I never heard of it happening to anybody else. Just somehow or another the riser come up alongside of my head and some of the metal—peeled the hide off.

JN: So it was right after that, that gave the incentive for the mask and grid and then getting caught in the snag, set you up with lines after that.

VD: Yeah, that helped.

JN: That's learning the hard way.

VD: Yeah, but that's what it was all about.

JN: Can you think of any other modifications in those suits that, learn from experience?

VD: Oh, I'm sure they have. I haven't looked at the suits that they're wearing now, don't have any idea what they look like.

JN: But I mean back when you were trying them out, did you.

VD: No, those two, two suits is the only ones that I remember about them making. The old boy that was running the show, I forget his name now, Lieutenant Colonel, full Colonel and he took me to Seattle with him to, to model the new chutes since they were building. My head was swollen up so I couldn't get a helmet on, so I couldn't jump anymore that way for awhile. So I got a free trip to Seattle and my eats and all that good stuff. I thought that living high on the hog.

JN: Did you ever jump in water in any of those practice jumps?

VD: No.

JN: A suit like that would have weighed you right down I'm sure.

VD: Yeah it sure would. You never would do any swimming in one of those suits, in none of them.

JN: What kind of foot gear did you wear?

VD: Just boots, ordinary boots.

JN: They work on, like after you got stuck in snags and you had your lines, did you run into that situation where you had to work out a let-down procedure then?
VD: I never did, no.

JN: Never got stuck in another snag after that?

VD: But then they made the...they made the chutes with a...made the harnesses with snaps on each shoulder. And we had a pocket on our leg that we kept—had 50 feet of quarter-inch line in it. We worked out a deal where you put this line through the snaps and get down under your foot and pick your weight up off of the snaps so you could unhook from the canopy and let yourself down with a line. We practiced it a lot of times, but I never did have to use it.

JN: How about on Smitty or your brother, did either one of them have any bad run-ins or close calls?

VD: Well, Smitty, he opened his chute with his feet up in the air and the shroud line took a half hitch around one leg and pulled his knee out. That's what laid him up, he couldn't jump anymore. I don't remember what happened to Frank, he got—I think he hurt his back or something. Those Eagle chutes that they had then was 30-foot and they opened so fast that they just about snap your shoes off when they opened. And if you weren't tensed up and gripped up tight, you sure hurt your back cause. They just, they just snapped the socks off of you, I never did use them much.

JN: You didn't?

VD: I don't think the Forest Service ever did use Eagles. They might have. I never, I never thought about it.

JN: Your brother made some changes in that chute, didn't he?

VD: Oh, yeah, well, yeah. We dumped out lots of cargo chutes and the cargo chutes were—were all old Army chutes. And a lot of them was rotten, and then they'd split, split wide open. And we discovered by that, those chutes that split open was the last one to hit the ground. They come down slower than the ones that weren't split.

JN: That must have been a surprise.

VD: It was a surprise. That's what brought up the, got the idea of the, of the slots. The reason for it is very simple, you can see that the, the ones with the splits in them, they didn’t oscillate. The ones without the splits, they were swinging all the time. They'd swing way out and they'd lose the air, swing out the other side and lose the air. So that's what brought on the slots.

JN: Did those slots serve any other purpose like in terms of directing where the chute would go?

VD: Yeah, they did. You could steer yourself some with them, about the same as a Eagle. A
Eagle was a steerable chute too. Whichever way you was headed, you'd grab about maybe 5 miles an hour or something like that, just—would help you and that's about what the slot did. But the slot see, was a whole lot cheaper chute to build than the Eagle.

JN: Because it had less material?

VD: A little, but the way the Eagle was made it required quite a lot more work. The slot was, was put into the, just a normal oval chute where the Eagle is, oh, it had a couple of ears out on the back of it, that's what made it steerable. But it cost, it would cost considerably more to make them. I don't believe the Forest Service ever used the Eagle. They might have.

JN: Did you or, or the other two fellows make any other changes in the chutes you used or was that the main one?

VD: Well, I was only with them one year. I was in the experimental work and then the next year, the next summer—I was in Winthrop and they didn't have, they didn't have anything over there to do anything with. If there'd been any call for jumpers, they'd have got a plane out of Missoula. We just as well gone fishing that summer, there wasn't no fires.

JN: Those first 60 jumps, none of them were on fires. They were all just jumps.

VD: No, they was all in the fall, late in the fall.

JN: Did you each make 60 jumps?

VD: No, no and I don't believe there was ever 60 jumps made. There might have been, but probably up pretty close to it. But the weather got bad and two people got hurt. Dick Tuttle, he was practicing letting himself down with a rope and the rope broke and he fell about 60 feet down the side of a cliff. I don't know why it didn't kill him, missed an awful good chance. The mortality rate kind of, got up kind of high and they called it to a halt. [laughs]

JN: Really? How many people were doing those practice jumps then before they called it to a halt and how many were hurt?

VD: Oh, let's see, I guess there was George Honey and Francis Lufkin and Smith and my older brother Frank. They're just, they were the ones that, they were the ones that made the jumps. Well George Honey's younger brother made a couple jumps and I think that was all.

JN: That's six of you there then?

VD: Yeah.

JN: And your brother had a back injury, you got whapped on the side of the head pretty bad
and the other fellow fell on that cliff. But were any of them put out of commission for good?

VD: Well, yeah, they were definitely out for good. They didn't make anymore jumps. I was able to make some more jumps after my head was on, went down enough so I could get a helmet on.

JN: So out of those six, who continued jumping after that?

VD: Well, that would have been Francis Honey or Francis Lufkin and George Honey and myself. I guess that's all I can remember.

JN: Was it the Forest Service then that called a halt to it when had, had these problems?

VD: I don't know, probably this old boy that was running the show.
JN: That Lieutenant Colonel?

VD: That Colonel, yeah, I have an idea it was him.

JN: Was that hushed up or something or because obviously, eventually they started jumping again and everything.

VD: I really…I really don’t know. Well, the weather got bad for one thing. It was raining and nasty and cold and miserable, I think that old colonel just had enough of it. That's probably what brought it to a halt more than anything else.

JN: Then they did go ahead and start it the next year though?

VD: Yeah.

JN: Was the same colonel in charge of it again?

VD: I don't know whether he was or not, because everything was moved to, over here to Missoula and I never did, I never did come to Missoula. It was all handled from over here, they didn't, they didn't do anything in Winthrop.

JN: Did you do any training of any jumpers after that point?

VD: Not me, no.

JN: Frank and Smitty did though, right?

VD: They that did over, over here at Missoula, I think.
JN: So you did do some jumping though over there in Winthrop?

VD: I actually never jumped on a fire. That first summer, there wasn't any fires. I walked a couple, three. My old buddy Lufkin like to have walked my legs off. [laughs] He was born and raised there in the mountains, and I wasn't. [laughs]

JN: You were still working for the Forest Service then?

VD: That one summer, yeah.

JN: That one summer.

VD: They only paid 50 bucks a month extra for jumping, and that was $150 a month and that was only for three months and I had to make a living. I had a family to support, I couldn't—

JN: There weren't any fires anyway.

VD: No fires anyway. I went back on the laundry wagon.

JN: Did you ever go back to jumping?

VD: No, they didn't pay enough money. I couldn't make a living on a 3-months job.

JN: Your brother was able to come over here and do pretty well though?

VD: Yeah, yeah. He stayed with them, oh, he stayed with them for 6, 7 years, I guess.

JN: Did you ever get a hankering to go back?

VD: Oh, I'd have loved to, I'd have loved to, yeah. But just couldn't hack it, that short of period and have to, have to quit whatever I was doing and my wife kind of frowned on my jumping anyway. If I wanted to keep peace in the family, why I just couldn't.

JN: Did you ever get away with making any jumps on your own. I mean not for the Forest Service but making any jumps after that just for—

VD: Yeah, yeah, I made several jumps a year.

JN: What were those for?

VD: Just for...just for fun mostly.

JN: Passing the hat, is that when you passed the hat?
VD: Passed the hat, yeah. Did that for five or six bucks and an airplane ride.

JN: Were those all right there in Winthrop or would you go over to Seattle?

VD: No, around different, different places, different towns where they have Thanksgiving and turkey chutes and things like that.

JN: Would that draw quite a crowd?

VD: Well I, I guess it probably helped a little bit. It didn't cost them anything to put it, put it on, so whatever little good it did do, why, they got it for free.

JN: Did they even think about at that time what they call freefalling or sky diving when you jumped?

VD: Yeah. I made a few freefalls, I never did do any sky diving. That was, that all come on after my time I guess, I never heard of anybody doing it before anyway. That freefalling—that’s what’s fun.

JN: Is it?

VD: That's really fun.

JN: What it like?

VD: Oh, it's hard to explain. I just...I guess everything is just deathly quiet. You can't see much of anything.

JN: How come you can't see?

VD: Well, you're too high. You can see the ground all right, but you can't see it corning up at you until you get way down pretty close. By the time you can see it corning up, it's time to quit going down.

JN: Time to pull the chute?

VD: Yeah, time to pull it, yeah.

JN: It's deathly quiet then?

VD: Not, not a sound and airplanes make a lot of noise. When you leave of course the instant you leave, why it's dead calm. It's fun. It's just fun, that's all.
JN: Did you have to hold your arms out any certain way or, when you were free falling?

VD: Well, if, to control your, you can control your body by holding your arms out and holding your legs out. You can pull in one arm and go this way, pull in the other arm and go ahead down and you keep your feet straightened out, you go right straight down, head down. You pull your legs in and put your arms out why, you put your head up, point your head up. That's the way you're supposed to get your body in the best position when you open the chute and it, it works pretty good.

JN: Was that something that you had to figure out for yourself or did somebody train you?

VD: No, you just had, well at that time I guess I had to figure it out for myself because I never talked to anybody that, that had free-fallen. It just...it just kind of come, come naturally to do it that way.

JN: That must have been something the first time you tried that.

VD: Yeah, it was. It was.

JN: Did you have any second thoughts about it when you were up there waiting for the pass?

VD: Yeah, yeah I had second thoughts, third too. [laughs]

JN: Were there people down on the ground waiting to see this?

VD: Yeah, they was waiting to see it so you couldn't do anything but do it, yeah that happened.

JN: But that first time, did you, did you enjoy it or just too scared to enjoy that first free fall?

VD: No, I really enjoyed it. Particularly after it was over.

JN: Then it didn’t look so bad? About how many freefalls did you end up doing?

VD: Oh, I guess about 10 or 12 probably, something like that.

JN: Gee, that's quite a few. Did your wife approve?

VD: No, she sure didn't [laughs]—not even any. No that caused a many a knock down and drag out.

JN: What about, what about friends in the neighborhood and stuff, were they, they sort of look at you as an odd ball for doing that?
VD: Yeah, still do.

JN: Really? How'd you look at yourself, did you think of yourself as being sort of a daredevil or foolhardy or what? How'd you view it?

VD: No, I haven't, don't I think I ever gave it any thought really. I was just doing something that was fun, just like going swimming, eating watermelon, if it's fun, well do it. I've been into hang gliding over in Hawaii the last couple of years and that's really fun. That's a whole lot like free falling.

JN: Is it?

VD: Dead calm, quiet and you just glide around to your hearts content. That beats parachuting.

JN: That can be a little risky too, can't it?

VD: I suppose it could, yeah.

JN: What else, what else do you really like to do that gives you that good experience or that you really enjoy doing?

VD: I don't know of anything else. I used to like to fish; I don't even like to fish anymore.

JN: Really? But you still go up hang gliding?

VD: Yeah, yeah.

JN: Sounds you really got hooked on that.

VD: Oh I got hooked on that, that's the stuff, absolutely.

JN: Do you suspect that that's part of smokejumping. Why people speak so highly of it that have been in the service and stuff?

VD: Probably, probably.

JN: Does your wife approve of you hang gliding or does she look—

VD: Oh, she told me it was a good idea if I wanted to do it. She, this is a different wife, I had a couple since then. [laughs] No, she, this wife she says whatever I want to do, do it. I'm going to do it anyway so she might as well, might as well go along with it.
JN: Has she ever been inclined to try it?

VD: She's not inclined to try the hang gliding although I did get her up in one of those parachute deals where they tow them up with a boat. She just loved that, she got a big bang out of that. But I can't get her in a hang glider.

JN: Do you have any children?

VD: My wife's got four.

JN: Any of them that you, give them an itch for it?

VD: No, they don't, well they're all too old for that monkey business anyway. They're scattered all over the United States, they never did get in on any of that stuff.

JN: Were you ever then curious about the smokejumpers at all? Have you ever gone down to talk to any of them?

VD: Well, I've only been over here, it's only the second time and—I get around there and I like to go in and look their equipment over. They got chutes there now that I never saw before until was up at that show in Winthrop.

JN: Do you think that's still a good way to put out a fire, smoke jumping?

VD: Well, I guess it is, they keep doing it. It looks to me like a pretty expensive way to put them out. But then as long as Uncle is paying the bill why you don't care what it costs. I can't help but think that it's just an expensive way to put out fire.

JN: You weren't into for putting out fires so much, originally.

VD: I went into it for the fun of jumping.

JN: Whatever happened to Smitty?

VD: I never heard from him since then. I was just talking to Francis Lufkin today, and he said he's still alive. He had a heart attack, and he is in very poor health and I think he lives down in Arizona some place. I never run into any of them, had anything to do with any of them until that deal over in Winthrop a couple years ago. A lot of water under the bridge since then, 40 years or so.

JN: It was that long before you were in touch with any of the other original experimental jumpers? What was that like seeing them again?
VD: It was quite a shock, quite a shock.

JN: How so?

VD: Well, the only ones, only ones that I knew was Francis and George Honey. The rest of them are all dead. I guess, come to think of it, Harry Tuttle made a couple, three jumps too. That was Dick's dad and Harry is long since dead and I think Dick is dead now. As a matter of fact, I'm sure he is.

JN: It was a shock to run into those two fellows over there?

VD: It sure was, I didn't know them from Adam. I don't think they would have known me either if somebody hadn't pointed me out to them. Forty years is a long time. I knew Francis' voice, the minute he opened his mouth I knew his voice but I, I sure wouldn't have known him.

JN: Did you end up talking quite a bit there?

VD: Oh yeah.

JN: Are those fellows you expect to see out here for this reunion?

VD: I have seen Francis, I haven't seen George yet.

JN: Are you looking forward to this get together at all?

VD: Oh yeah, actually this is my wife's idea to come up here. I never would have...I never would have come. It kind of embarrasses me. I don't know why it should, but I don't know most of them and I'd rather drop the whole thing myself.

JN: Yeah, I can understand that feeling. I'm sure a lot of other people here would be interested in meeting you. You've been, you were right there at the ground level, starting the whole thing. What kind of a plane did you jump out of when you jumped?

VD: I don't remember the name of it, it was a bi-plane, I can't think of the name of it.

JN: I know they used Fokkers for a while and the Trimotor but later.

VD: That was later, yeah, I think most all the jumps were made out of the Trimotor as far as, on fires was concerned.

JN: You were in a bi-plane?

VD: Yeah.
JN: How many could that seat?

VD: Oh, two.

JN: The pilot and the jumper?

VD: No, the pilot and two jumpers.

JN: I see.

VD: The nice part about those old Fords, I never did jump from one, but they'd slow right down. You could slow them down to about 60 miles an hour.

JN: What would the bi-plane you jumped out of—

VD: The bi-plane—that was about 125 or 30 miles plane.

JN: That fast when you jumped out?

VD: And that’s not good. [laughs]

JN: What would happen to you?

VD: Well, it just—you’d get a lot more opening shock out of the plane. We did, in that first year and all the work was free falls. An the very next year I think they started on the static line. So there was no question about if you was going to be in the right position when it opened, you didn’t have to open your own chute or none of that stuff. I really think what brought that up is—George’s younger brother, you were supposed to get out, get out on the step and jump free of the plane and then pull the chute. This little bugger got excited, he got, stood there on the step, pulled his chute right there on the step and it went out and hung up on the tail assembly for an instant or two.

JN: While he was still there on the step?

VD: Yeah, no, oh yeah that’s what...that’s what pulled him off. The chute pulled him off, he never did jump. [laughs] I think that’s probably one of things that brought on the static line.

JN: Now is the static line something, at that time, did anybody use it anywhere else or was this something that you guys came up with?

VD: I don't recall about that. But like I say that all took place over here in Missoula and I wasn't here.
JN: With the bi-plane you had to actually step out of the, your seat then right and step over the edge?

VD: You had to step out and step down on the step. There was about...there was two steps and you sit right in the doorway and put your feet on those steps, stand up and jump off.

JN: Were you actually, were those steps behind the wings?

VD: Yeah.

JN: Was that sometimes a problem, like stepping out there with that going that fast.

VD: It was a bit of a problem, you had to hang on.

JN: Get yourself in the right position?

VD: Yeah.

JN: I know later things some of these folks had complained about was the ride along inside and getting all the exhaust and being in that closed space and fumes. I don't imagine you had any problem with that.

VD: No, plenty of fresh air there because it didn’t have any door on it. I never did get airsick anyhow.

JN: You didn't?

VD: No.

JN: Never did?

VD: Never got airsick or seasick.

JN: Now at that time were, were people doing stuff like wing walking and stuff like that?

VD: Yeah, at county fairs and that sort of thing.

JN: Is that something—

VD: It never interested me.

JN: It didn't?
VD: No, that didn't.

JN: How come?

VD: Well, it just didn't look a good idea to me.

JN: Looked a little risky?

VD: Yeah.

JN: None of them wore chute did they or did they?

VD: Oh, I think they did.

[Break in audio]

VD: I never saw too many of them. That's just not a very good idea.

JN: You end being in the newspapers and getting your picture taken or any of that?

VD: No, oh, I had my picture taken a few times, but a microphone scares the socks off me. I'd rather make 1,000 parachute jumps than one trip in front of a microphone.

JN: Well I, I know you're getting a little tired here and I do want to ask you just a couple more questions and then we'll call it quits here. The other side I started out by asking you if you'd ever given any advice to any younger jumpers at all. If any, anybody had come asking you suggestions or advice on jumping?

VD: Not that I recall, no.

JN: You didn't actually do any training?

VD: No.

JN: Years after that you mainly packed chutes and did your jumping?

VD: That's right. Oh, I sold a few jumps to first timers.

JN: Just by telling them?

VD: Just by telling them what to do and getting $15 out of them for renting a chute. But I didn't train anybody. I just spent maybe 15 minutes with them, telling them what to do and what not
to do.

JN: Well, you know they hang glide right off the top of this hill here, called Mt. Sentinel quite a bit.

VD: They do?

JN: Yeah.

VD: How about that.

JN: Did you bring your hang glider with?

VD: No, no. I don’t own one. But in Hawaii they jump off an 1,100-foot cliff it’s right over the ocean. You jump right out over the ocean, and when you bail off there, you go right straight up.

JN: You do?

VD: You go up about oh, 500 or 600 feet from your takeoff point and you go out over the ocean and when you get down too low you come back in by that cliff and you get right on back up there. You can stay up there just as long as you want.

JN: Really?

VD: Yeah.

JN: How many times have you done that over there?

VD: Five times.

JN: Does anybody ever take a dip in the ocean?

VD: Not that I know of. There are quite a few killed off of there but just sheer stupidity. They closed it all down for awhile until they set up some rules and regulations on it and opened it back up again. You can see them in the air over there practically every day—every day the wind was right. There was a bunch of them off there. I never went off the cliff by myself. I went with an instructor and took some lessons down on the beach. We’d jump off a, oh about a 20-foot hunk of sand, fly around there a little bit, come down, then walk back up the hill. I quit that, that was too much work.

JN: Do you expect to do anymore hang gliding?

VD: Oh when I get, we’re going back to Hawaii this winter and I’ll do some more this winter,
that's fun.

JN: Do you ever think you'll quit wanting to go up in the air?

VD: I probably will one of these days, when I get 6 foot under. It's kind of hard to hang glide from there.

JN: Do you ever dream about, in your dreams, dream about jumping or flying?

VD: I have some of the silliest dreams where I'll—I dream about jumping down a hill, both my arms out, just jump, sail awhile and come down and hit the ground and jump and sail awhile. I have dreams like that every once in awhile.

JN: Really? Sound like good dreams.

VD: Oh yeah, they're good dreams. Hard to tell what makes you dream stuff.

JN: I'll bet you your dreams are a little different than the average dream.

VD: Might be.

JN: Well, thanks very much for your time. Hope you have a good time at this convention even if you don't know that many people.

VD: Don't know anybody, but I'm having a good time.

JN: Well, good. There will be a barbecue tonight and—

VD: Oh yeah, I'm going for that.

JN: Some beer, good on a hot day. Thanks very much.

VD: Okay, you're welcome.

[End of Interview]