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Interview with Kim Maynard by Susan Green on 31 October 1984 for Smoke Jumpers' Oral History Project. OH #133-70.

SG This is an interview with Kim Maynard who jumped in Missoula from 1982 to 1983... '84... three seasons. OK Kim, why don't you give a little bit of an autobiographical... just some information about what you did in the years before you became a jumper. Like, what kinds of work were you doing?

KM 1977 is when I started fire fighting and I was out of college, you know, for the summer, and I was looking for work. And it looked like... I was in Washington State... and it looked like there's two basic possibilities: that is, going east... eastern Washington, picking cherries; or sign up for the Forest Service. So, I applied for the Forest Service and then went East. [LAUGHTER] And just... to find out that cherry season... I was there too early and there wasn't really much going on, there's a lot of migrant workers who needed work a lot more than I did.

So, I went back, and just as I got back, Forest Service called--apparently it was a hot year, kind of in the middle of the year--and they said they were putting together a new crew, and; did I want to come out? And I said sure. So, I went out there and went through our one day of training; and boom! We were out on a fire. We went... and we were gone all summer long on fires. It was just a hot, hot year. I went to Idaho and thought that was a pretty good deal. That was the year, also, California and Alaska was burning. And I kept on thinking: "Oh! We'll go to Alaska; we'll go to..."

[INTERUPTION]

SG OK, so you were saying that year everything was boring and you were thinking you were going up to Alaska.

KM Yeah, but we didn't make it up that far. But we did go on quite a few fires. And that... I worked for a District in which they had a hundred year contract with a Simpson Logging Company and they did all the slashing... logging and like lots of slash, and we burned it, so we got a lot of overtime; and a lot of fire experience; and a lot of work with pumps and hoses, so, it was great. I was rehired the next year, 1978. Did the same thing only the fire season wasn't so good. But, we did do a lot of burning and got a lot of over time, which is what we wanted [LAUGH] and a lot of good fire experience.

The year after that, I got lucky and I got up to Alaska and I worked for BLM [Bureau of Land Management]. It was a crew, which was considered kind of an overhead team. It works as a group of people who [have] different experiences, and different kinds of training, hopefully as much as possible. And then when there's fires... basically they hire native crews to do the fire fighting and we go up there and are sector bosses, or heliport managers, or maps and records officers, or whatever. And so, I was on that crew for a while and it was pretty interesting because, at first all they'd ever hire me as is a timekeeper or a
dispatcher... radio operator. And at one point I got really mad and had it in with one of the... in fact, it was a smokejumper who was running the fire at the time. We just had a major argument and told him I... you know, I wasn't gonna stick around and do that. And we were way up above the Arctic Circle on this fire and I had been there two weeks and ended up staying there a month and a half on this huge fire. But, so finally he did end up giving me a chance and I became the heliport manager and moved up and did more things than just sit around the fire camp and do the traditional women's jobs. They never had a heliport... woman heliport managers or women, you know, anything before, really. So it was, kind of, breaking in.

SG Were you the only woman up there at the time?

KM On that fire? Yeah. Well, the overhead changed several times and at... and there were women at other times, but they came and left. And then at the end, I was the only one. I... it happens that I went up to the smokejumper and they were gonna... he was the Plans Chief and I was suppose to go... they're gonna get a new heliport manager to come in because they needed one, one of the heliport managers was leaving the fire. And I said... I went up to him and said: "Why don't you let me be heliport manager, and why don't you call in for a new radio operator?" And he said: "No way." He said; "You can't do that... you can't manage that." He said: "You have to be able to lift eighty pounds up to a helicopter," which is, you know, four feet off the ground, or something like that. "And you you have to be savvy about this and that. And I just know you can't do the job." And I said: "You don't even know me. How do you know I can't do the job? I mean, you got to at least give me a chance." We had a pretty heavy duty discussion for about a half an hour, and I said, "There's no way you can make those assumptions without giving me the chance." So, at the end of the whole thing, he said: "All right. You can try it and if doesn't work, you're going back to radio operator." So, he gave me the chance, and, you know, of course, there was no problem. And I ended up having a really good boss. And that's the trick. I think that's the whole trick for women getting in; is you have to have a few good men who will... who are willing to put some faith into you and are willing to try things out. And, you know, they are probably going to be in positions higher than you. And I had a good boss on that fire who was the air service officer and he you know, just kept moving me up the ladder, and thought I did a good job and, you know, when someone believes in you... you can do the job. And I had ended up having about six guys underneath me and it was great. You know, it was just a great opportunity. But, they'd never had that before and they just didn't believe a woman could do the job. So, that was '79.

I tried to get back there, but I screwed-up my application and ended up not having a job. So, I hurriedly put in an application for the Forest Service. And I had heard about the Bitterroot IR [Inter-regional] crew, in Darby. And you only have one application you can put in for the Forest Service, so I put that in. And three days later, Buck Latapie, from the Bitterroot
IR crew calls me up, and I was living in Washington, D.C. at the
time, and he said, "Do you want a job?" And I said; "Sure." And
he said; "Be out here in three days." So, I said; "All right."
[LAUGH] So, I packed up and went out to Montana, which I... it
was a great... I mean, I flew from Washington, D.C. into
Missoula, Montana. It was a real culture shock. The next day I
started work with the IR crew and it was a great summer. It was
just... good people. This was the second year that they had
women, and the first year they weren't quite as successful with
them. But, Rhonda Lane and I were the next two women to be...
come on, and we worked out pretty well, and we had a great time.
Rhonda Lane was a character in herself. She was the only woman I
know who chews tobacco and bubble gum at the same time.
[LAUGHTER]
And then... so, that was '80. And then the next year I was
doing an internship in Switzerland, at the United Nations, so, I
didn't fight fires. And then, the next year, I applied to a lot
of different things: I applied to a lot of BLM, I applied to the
Park Service, and I applied to the Forest Service. And one of
the things I applied to was smokejumping. I didn't really know
that much about it. I heard that there was a woman... one
woman smokejumper, but I really didn't know whether it was...
people had tried or people hadn't tried or... you know, it was
just kind of a progression, I'd move up the ladder, and that was
kind of the next step. So, I applied and I got a lot of offers,
and I... as they came in, I just took the best one. And the best
one was smokejumping. So, I said OK. And if I... the thing is,
if you don't make training, then you don't have a job. So, it's
a little bit tricky, because things are getting tight, and it was
hard to find jobs, and that kind of thing. So, I was in school
and it's kind of hard to work to workout... I ran a lot, but I
didn't do much lifting weight, and I didn't do much... I did do
it regularly, but, you know, with my own... I made some weights
out of coffee cans and cement. That kind of thing. But... and
then I flew from New York City and just tons and tons of people
and straight into Missoula. And that was another culture shock.
It's real nice to be back here. Then the next day I started
training.

SG The next day?

KM The next day. I ended school the 12th... or, I was in New
York City on the 12th. It was the largest disarmament rally in
history. In New York City there were a million people on the
streets. So, I was amongst a million people one day, the next
day I flew to Missoula, and the next day I started jumping
training. It was pretty intense.

SG That's about it. When you came into Missoula did you stay
on the Base, at first? That first time?

KM Yeah. Yeah, I stayed... I just moved out. Wendy Kamm and
I were roommates.

SG So, how many women were there in that first year? This is
1982?

KM '82, yeah. There were seven women who tried out, and three of us made it.

SG What about among the men? How many men tried out that first year?

KM Mmmm. Geez, I think... there's something around thirty five that started out and, I think, maybe there was nine people who washed-out all together. Something like that, anyway.

SG Is that a pretty low wash-out rate?

KM That's about average. Actually, we had a really good crew... a really good class. A lot of people are sticking with it and some really good, you know, just people who are real enthusiastic and like to work. But, you know, it's kind of average. You always expect a few people not to make it.

SG Have there been any women in Missoula before 1982?

KM No. We were the first ones.

SG You were the first ones?

KM Yeah. So it was a new thing. I don't know, really, the process behind it. I don't know whether they decide, "OK, well this year we're going to have women." I guess... so, a lot of us applied and they were kind of, near, the top of the roster. I'm not sure all of us we, because I knew some people who didn't have fire experience... some of the women didn't have much fire experience, but they got on. And those are, pretty much, the ones who washed-out. But, I don't know... I don't know why they hired us, but I didn't question it. [LAUGHTER]

SG Did you hear about the fact that you were the first women to be hired before... When you were originally applying, you said that you were applying to several different positions, and you took the best one, which was jumping. Did you know you would be among the first women that would try out for smokejumping?

KM I knew that there weren't many, you know. I knew that there had been one, and I just wasn't all that familiar with the situation. I didn't know she was in McCall. I didn't know that I would be the first one in Missoula. I'm not really sure, it's all so vague, you know. I wish I did remember that part better.

SG OK. So, who were those first... the first women, you, and you mentioned Wendy Kamm?

KM Wendy Kamm. Marty Billingsly were the first three that made it. And we... all three were very different. It was a lot of fun. Wendy, in fact, was on my squad, like, my rookie... during training. So, it was pretty funny, because when we dropped out of
the tower you yell out your last name so people on the ground can mark down how you do. And the same thing when you're going around the O-course [obstacle course] and, you know, it would be going: [In a deep voice.] "Smith!" "Jones!" And then: [In a high voice.] "Kamm!" "Maynard!" [LAUGHTER] And then: [In a deep voice.] "Johnson!" It was pretty funny. [LAUGHTER]

SG So, it sounds like you had a good time during training.

KM Yeah.

SG What do you remember about training? What kinds of things did you have to do?

KM Well, there's the usual, you know go through the units. And we did one unit a day. And one series of units a day, which is: jumping out of the tower; climbing up the poles; doing the let-downs; doing the landing simulator in the O-course; and then there's the mock-up where you talk about how to get out of the plane, emergency jumps. And what do you do when you get on the ground, or what do you do in the plane, and that kind of stuff. We did one of those a day, and then one day we did two of them.

And we were graded, and if you flunked two days in a row, you were out, if you flunked one station two days in a row. So you had to... you could flunk it once, but the next day you had to improve. You could ask some of the older jumpers... some of the trainers to go out with you after hours and help you out on them. Whether it's the tower or whatever else, if you were having problems they'll go out and help you on their own time. They're great. They were kind of being hard-core, you know, they'd harass you and everything, but then, at the same time, they really did want you to make it, and they'd encourage you. And, it was good. And the thing that impressed me a lot is that people... they really encouraged everybody in the squads to help each other out. Like, if we... in between each station we'd have to un-suit, and put your suit back on again. And if there was someone slow, you would help them them out. I thought that was kind of neat. Rather than competition against each other, you had to do well yourself, but you also had to help your buddies out. So, I kind of liked that. And that's true. I mean, in jumping you do it with partners and that is really strong that you have to help each other out. I think in Missoula particularly, is good for that.

SG The spirit of co-operation.

KM Yeah. And that's held, I think, the jumpers together, in a lot of ways. You know, whether you're in a bar fighting, or whatever, you know, you're always helping each other out.

SG Was that spirit of co-operation, or that togetherness, did you feel that on the crews that you worked on before? I mean, the IR crew or in the first... like the first crews you worked on back in '77?
KM: No. Not nearly as much. The IR crew, yeah. I mean, there's definitely a spirit and a comradery, but it's not nearly so much one of really sticking by your partners and looking out for each other. It's more just, you know, friendship and a sense of togetherness, a group. But jumpers, if they... well, it partly because it's real necessary, it's real serious. I mean, you have to... when you jump with your jump partner, you're responsible for his or her safety in getting to the ground. If they're treed-up, you're the one that helps them down. If their letdown rope is too short, you're the one that climbs up, and gives him your's. I mean, it's real important. But, it extends beyond the jump itself and the... that, kind of... live or die aspect of it, too. You help each other put on your parachutes, hook up your PG bags on the planes, all that kind of stuff, where as... it wasn't as necessary, but it also just wasn't there as much on a fire crew.

SG: Those first days, when you were in training, did you have that sense of togetherness very much? Or was that... what was it like those first couple of days here, you were the first women?

KM: Well, I'll tell you, for about a month, nobody'd talk to us. They had had a big... mostly some of the older men and the returning people... they... what they call "old men." Of course, there weren't any "old women," then. They had a big gathering of everybody... what they call family meeting, and they had a sexual harassment class. And they had a film, and they discussed: "Well, fellas, things are changing. Now when you have to take a pee, you have to go behind the bushes. And now, this and that. And you have to watch out for sexual harassment, because you could easily get sued and you don't know what's gonna happen, and the things are changing." And people were just scared of us. Nobody would talk to us. It was like, you know, people were not sure what we were going to do. They thought that, any second, that we were going to sue them. It was just amazing.

Some of the people in our class talked to us, somewhat. But, of course, being rookies, people aren't going to talk to you that much anyway. And also being rookies you're kind of... I mean, the rookies together are real... concentrating on what they are doing and you don't have that much time for... or you're not that relaxed, just to talk, but it was really funny, you know. People just... they would just avoid you. And the women, we got together and we said, "God! I can't understand this, nobody'd talk to us." Well, it eventually came out about a month later that, "Well, we were scared that you were gonna sue us. We were afraid that, you know, you're not gonna..." it said "Well, if I tell you this, you're not gonna sue me, are you?" And it eventually came out that everybody was kind of thinking about, you just have to watch out for these women. It's best just to avoid them, and then you don't get into hassles. When they found out we weren't gonna sue them; and were were OK; and we could take the harassment and we could, you know, give it back that they, you know, than they layed off it.

SG: God! Did the rookies go to that class, too?
KM Yeah, we all had that.

SG How did the rookies feel about that? When you're going through training, you're building that bonding... that spirit of co-operation. Did that affect the way they related to you in training, like your work in the units, and things?

KM Well, the rookies didn't have that until after training. We had... we had it during training, but I think it was after we were along a ways, if I can remember right. They... you know, partly it's that nobody knows each other, and being a rookie everybody... you're looked at real closely and you want to make a good impression.

[INTERUPTION Interview continued a week later.]

SG OK, Kim. We just talked about what you did during your training as a jumper in 1982. '82? OK, why don't... do you remember your first practice jump?

KM Well, my very first jump was not in the jumpers. My very first jump was in February of that same year. I was in New York and I'd gone with a bunch of people from Brattleboro, Vermont and we all went out to the local skydiving place, it was about four hours away. We paid fifty bucks, and we all got trained that day and then we made our first jump. Which is a lot different than the kind of jumping you do jumping... smoke jumping. Different exit and that kind of thing. But, anyway, that was my very first jump.

In both that one and my first practice jump, I just... and ever since then, I've never really felt scared. For one thing, during my first few jumps, I've just had to concentrate so hard on what I was doing. You know, everyone's looking at you and making, you know, checking you out. And also rating you and giving you a grade. And if you foul-up, it could be that you wash out; if you foul-up too much. So, I was just really concentrating on what I was doing and thinking what's the next step and have lots of vigor on my jump, and reach out to the wing and, you know. And then how to steer. I mean, there's just so many things you have to think about all the time that you really don't have to get scared--at least I don't. I've heard other people say... otherwise I wouldn't say that, "If you're not scared, you know... anyone who says their not scared, that's bullshit!" Well, I don't believe it. I don't, I mean... it doesn't... it's not something that crosses my mind. But... so, my first jump was not that significant.

My first fire jump was a little bit different. It wasn't the jump itself, except that I landed in a big tree. [LAUGH] And it was... I landed about forty feet up, and it was a big, big tree. A big ponderosa. And, you know, I had no problem. I did a let down, and everything, but it was the only tree in the whole spot, and I was the only one to hit it. [LAUGHTER] But, also, people aren't use to spotting me, because I'm a lot lighter and therefore they have to... usually, have to carry me further out.
in order for me to hit the spot. Well, I ran most of the way with the wind and I still didn't make the spot. So, you know, who knows? Everyone says there's no such thing as mis-spotting, it's only your own parachute handling that messes up. But, I think there's definite elements of mis-spotting. And I think that's was probably part of what happened there.

SG So, most of the people that jump are heavier than you?

KM Oh, everybody is. I'm the lightest jumper that ever existed. They even gave me my own special harness this year that's a tiny, little, baby harness, [LAUGH] to wear.

SG That's another question I was gonna ask: what... is the equipment hard for you to use? Since you are smaller and lighter than a lot of other jumpers?

KM They have small, medium, large jump suits. And I have a small, and I just adjust everything as tight as they can go. And it... the jumpsuit's OK. The harness used to be that I had to adjust it all the way down, as tight as it would go. And it would be all right that way. But now that they have the new harness, it fits a lot better. Because they make... now they're making the new harnesses small, medium, and large, too. And they're a lot lighter. It's a... part of the program to lighten the weight of pack-outs. Partly because women are getting into it now. And they think they need lighter pack-out weight. Part... the pack-out bag... called a "smitty bag" is way too big for me. And the fanny... the belt goes down below my hips, and all that kind of stuff. So, I have to re-adjust it. And I have to sew my own... parts of my own gear back together so it will fit me right. And, once I learned that I had to adjust things like that, it was OK. But my first pack-out, I didn't have any of that stuff adjusted. I... did... just a lot of things that I didn't know. When they show you how to pack-out, which's what they do on your first... first week of training, you do an all-night dig and... dig a line all night and then the next morning, about nine o'clock, pack your own bag and then pack it out about two and a half, three miles, something like that--up and down. And everyone says: "Pack it high. Pack the weight high. Put the helmet and all the heaviest stuff up high." Well, that's great for someone who's six foot two [inches], but for me, having all that weight up high just makes you tip over. And I was just falling like crazy, just every other step, falling, and having to get up. And with that much weight on, it's hard to get up... it's hard to stand up.

On my first pack-out, I learned pretty quickly. I had to... we were going on a trail--it was a fairly easy pack, it was probably about four and a half, five miles, something like that. It was a fairly easy pack-out because it was a trail. But then, there were parts of it that were... trail was washed out. And we were going along this river and there was, basically a cliff, and the trail had washed-out. Well, we had to hang on with our hands and feet and it was just a little, tiny ledge. And I knew that if I were to tip over, I'd go ponying down the cliff, you know,
with my pack. So, I had the belly band off, in case my pack started going, I'd just let it go. Well, sure enough, it did that. And it went rolling down the cliff, right into the river, to gain another ten pounds. And I went running after it as fast as I could because I didn't want it to gain any more weight. And I pulled it out of the river... it was probably about a hundred pounds at that point. And I rolled it back up the hill to the is little, tiny ledge... which was only about six inches wide and I just decided then and there that I was gonna repack the whole thing. So, I took everything out of it. It's quite a process... packing it. It's a real skill. You have to really develop it, because it has to be tight, real tight. You jump up and down on it. So, I repacked it, and I packed all the weight lower. And it was just a hundred per cent different. I wasn't falling down, I could carry it, it just fit in a lot better. Of course, the belly band was still down to my knees, but it was much better. I could hang on, you know, I wasn't falling down. That was my first pack-out.

SG Had you had any experience packing... packing that pack before you went on a pack-out?

KM Not... except for during training that one day when we packed-out as part of our test.

SG What was your first pack-out like... you just talked about that fire jump. Where about was your first fire jump that you did?

KM It was in the Bridger Tetons. That was my first fire jump and my first pack-out... same jump.

SG What was the fire like on that?

KM Well, there was, I think there were six West Yellowstone jumpers who were all ready on it. So, we got there, and there really wasn't that much to do, except for start mopping up. So, we stayed on there for, let's see, two or three days, and... basically mopping up. And then we packed-out and... it was beautiful country, just beautiful. And you could see the mountains all around. It was a year where there wasn't many fires, so it was just good to finally get on a fire. Then we spent that night in... the day after we packed-out, we drove to West Yellowstone and spent the night there. We had quite a time. [LAUGHTER] Going in hot pots and....

SG What was that pack-out like? Was that very special?

KM That was the one I was just telling letting you about.

SG Oh, that was the one. OK. Was it real common after you finish a fireup like that, to, kind of, have a good time?

KM Get wild? Yeah. Not everybody did it that time because we kind of got separated into different hotels but... a guy named
Steve Betlock and I went out and... it was great. [LAUGHTER]

SG Well, how soon after you finish a fire like that, do you have to go back... and get back to work?

KM Oh, you're on duty, I mean, basically we would have flown out that night except for that there was a really bad storm coming in and the pilot wouldn't fly that night. So, we flew out the next morning. In fact, we tried... we loaded up and tried to get out, and he just looked at the winds and the weather and said, "No way." So, he landed again and we stayed... spent the night. And then the next day we flew out. You're on duty constantly. You don't get a day off for anything. Unless it happens to be your day off, and they let you off.

SG Did you jump with mostly rookies that first fire jump, or was it mixed with rookies and...?

KM It was mixed. It's whoever lands on the list. You know, they... at the beginning of the year they'll draw up... pick names out of a hat and that's how it is on the list. So, interspersed rookies and "old men". And they get to be... you know, it's the luck of the draw.

SG How was, it to be a rookie, working with the "old men"? At that point when you had gone through the training and gone through the period when you said a lot of the "old men" you said, wouldn't talk to you very much, and...

KM Well, you know, being a rookie no one would talk to you anyway. So, it's just part of the... what do you call it, the process of becoming a jumper, is that you have to be checked out. And, you know, they will watch you. And if you're on a jump and there's a bunch of chutes that land in the trees, the rookies who have to climb up and get them. And the rookies have to pack this... and they're always doing the extra work. And if there's any line to be dig, just a little bit, it the rookies have to dig it. It's just part of initiation. So, I did my share of that. Of course, we didn't have all that many jumps my rookies year, or even the year after. So, we didn't have too much shit to take.

SG What about... what did you do when you weren't jumping?

KM I was in Missoula that year, and we just did project work: rolling hose; making streamers; working on the grounds. We did a lot of work on the grounds; remodeling the basement there. And just, you know, little projects.

SG Did you find it real different working with the jumpers on... doing project work than doing jumpers... working with jumpers on a fire?

KM Not really. I think people... you know, it depends on what the project work is. Basically, I think its pretty similar.
SG  Did you notice any special treatment, since you are a woman?

KM  Special. [LAUGH] Special in some ways....

SG  Well, not always positively special, but just different... maybe different.

KM  Yeah. Definitely. And it's been that way ever since I've... you know. I think anything, no matter whether I'm a mechanic, or working on a trail crew, or working on a fire crew, or jumping. If it's a traditional men's job, it's just... you're just not as likely to get the responsibility that the men are gonna get. You're not likely to move up as fast. You're more likely not to get as much experience. In Alaska, for instance, if you were a man, you could move up and get a whole lot of training and become a sector boss, a division boss, just move up the ladder really quickly. Where, as a woman, it just took forever... it at all. Just because... you know, I guess the trust isn't there. People just don't know that women can do the job. And, probably... I believe, there's reason for that; there are a lot of women who can't do the job. And who's gonna know? You know, you just got to prove yourself, and it takes a long time. And each person that you work with you have to prove yourself over and over and over again. I wish that wasn't true, I wish that people would assume you could do the job until you have proven that you can't. But they don't want to trust you, they don't want to put you in a position and find out that you can't do it. Especially if they're your boss, and they're responsible for your work. So, that's a big part of it.

Yeah, you know, you're on a fire, and someone has to run the pump--which I've run for years and years and, you know, it's a real simple machine to work--well, you know, they're never gonna say, "Maynard, go run the pump." You know, it's gonna be somebody else. Or sawing, or just being responsible for something, or just going and checking part of the fire out, you know. Gradually, I think, people begin to learn to trust you. Especially now in jumping, I've been there for three years and I can see a difference. People are beginning to have some understanding, I guess, that we can do the job, or they're willing to give us a try. Which I think is good.

The other thing that I really like about jumping, is that there's not a... in other kinds of fire work, even the IR crew, they're not as much... there's a real hierarchy and people believe that if you're new, you know, you don't know much, and they're just gonna show you the same basic, rudimentary things over and over again. Well, in jumping, there's stressed an assumption about everybody, that they know basic things, that they can think logically, figure out problems, and can basically take care of themselves. And can be trusted. Now, I think, it's much less so for us women, but it's much more so than I've ever experienced. And that was really refreshing. For people just to say, you know, she's a jumper, you know, she knows fire, basically. And that was really good. So, it's kind of back and forth, it's a little bit of both.
SG It's a little bit of both...

KM It's a little bit of mistrust, and not sure whether you can do the job. And at the same time, they do kind of have an assumption that you do know a fair amount about fire. And sometimes I'm not sure what's gonna happen. Which side they're gonna take.

SG How do you go about getting that responsibility them, how do you get them to try to let you try to run a pump, or... can you ask to do that on a fire?

KM Everybody has a different way of doing it. And particularly women. I think the men do, too, but I don't think it's nearly the issue it is for women. The men, probably, just do their time, and that's pretty much it. Um... every... like I said, everybody does it differently. My way is, to more... just continue to prove myself. And just do the work, and if it, you know, if it's not... if I don't get the responsibility I just keep on doing the work and finally people get to recognize it. And people have. Many people have come up to me and said, "You're a real hard worker." And one of my bosses even said, "If you're thirty pounds heavier, you'd be the perfect smokejumper." [LAUGH] So, I think... that's my way. Other people are more confrontational and they'll say, "Hey, you," you know, "Why don't you let me try this?" and "You're not treating me fairly," or something like that. But, I believe that people have to go at their own pace, and just see it. And it's a real pain, sometimes, for us... for the women. But, I think that's the only way it can be. And it's gonna be decades before people will have a... just a general acknowledgement that women can do the job.

SG Have you noticed any differences, yet, between those two approaches, confrontational approach, or just kind of letting things develop as they develop? Have you noticed any... you being more successful than, say, some of the other women in getting the experience? Or is it too soon to tell?

KM As far as experience goes... I'm not really sure, because I really haven't been on many fires with other women. But, as far as just general treatment, yeah, I have noticed differences. And I... as far as what's more successful, I can't really say. I know that, at least some of the people who are more confrontational tend to have... people don't like that. You know, they like the good old boys and old system and don't... you don't make waves. And at the same time, maybe that's the way to, really, take a step forward. Maybe it would make things go faster. I'm not sure. Myself, I think it makes it take a step backwards because people... that was one of the biggest fears, I think, of women getting in, is that, "Oh, it's gonna change. We can't say what we want to say. We have to be careful. We have to help them out. We have to, you know, our whole way of life is gonna change." And one of my goals is to show them that it's not and that we can... we're tough, we can take everything and give
it back, and, you know, we can do the job. And I really believe that. That's part of the reason why I'm there, because I kind of like that kind of toughness, and I don't expect to be treated differently than the men. You know, and then other women who think; "It's about time that these men started realizing some of the things that they are saying is harmful and it's our job to tell them." I don't know, I... you know, it's just, I guess, two different approaches.

SG Is um... how did you feel after that first year that you jumped? Did you feel good about your work?

KM I felt good. Yeah, I really liked a lot of it. Of course, again, we didn't have very many fires. I was... a lot of people had doubts about us still. And in my own mind, I felt really good about aspects of it. I wasn't sure, I had never... except for... you know, I had hadn't had many pack-outs and I wasn't really confident in my own ability, as far as that goes. I think over time, I've... my confidence has been built up a lot more than that. But at the end of that first year, everybody had doubts. And I had, you know, my own. I felt good about it and I did feel that we could do the job, but it's not just being a woman. In fact, to me, that's not the issue; to me it's more that I'm five feet two [inches] and everybody else is six feet tall. And that's the big difference. I think that one of the things, too, is that everybody is, you know, male or female has different levels of ability and whether it's figuring something out, or whether it's lifting something, or digging a line, or whatever it is, everybody is gonna be different. And there's gonna be lesser and better men in each one of those things, too. As long as the women don't fall into the lower categories of each one of those, I think we're doing fine. We don't have to be the best smokejumpers that ever existed, I think that we just have to be as good as an average smokejumper. That's... I'd like to be the best, but I think that that's gonna be ways off.

SG Any particularly memorable fires or jumps that first year? Things that stand out in your mind?

KM That first jump was probably the most memorable. Just the... you know, in a lot of ways, just, maybe because it was the first one. The second jump I made, we made at nine thirty in the morning. Got off of it that evening, so it was a terrible jump because you don't get any overtime. [LAUGH] Not too much. No, that first year was pretty boring, basically.

SG What about the second year that you came back?

KM Ahh, geez. It's hard to divide them up into years. I... my second year I was working in Lincoln. And we did a lot of Eastern Montana jumping. And that was pretty good. I don't remember anything significant. No major pack-outs, no accidents that I can think of. [LAUGH]

SG What about differences in your treatment as a woman being...
that was the second year that they had woman jumpers?

KM Second year was a little bit different, partly because I was in Lincoln and we had two people: one was a... what we call "thirteen and thirteen". A squad boss that's been around for a while; and another squad boss... a newer squad boss and that was it. And we had a lot of rookies in... we were second year rookies because they didn't have a rookie class that year... we were still at the bottom of the totem pole... my second year.

But, we got to do a lot of things. We got to build things. We got... we did a lot of wonderful project work. And I really like project work. I like working hard and going in, and mowing down trees, and hoeing, and building fence, or what ever we're doing. I just like that a lot. It was... that was significant that year.

I was weird being in the sub-base. We feel like we got screwed around, but, you know, everybody is gonna say that.

SG Tell me a little about the sub-bases, as they relate to... you didn't work right out of Missoula, then?

KM We worked out of... that year I worked out of Lincoln. And they... the idea is that they... when you get to the top of the list... you rotate as a sub-base. Lincoln is on the list. And then when they come up... well, the ten people from Lincoln will then, supposedly, come down to Missoula, and when there's a fire they'll jump.

It doesn't quite work that way, and they won't call you down unless it's a going fire season. And so, if there's just an occasional fire here and there, you miss out on it. They're gonna call the people who are there, who are in Missoula. They're not gonna wait an hour and a half for the people to come from Lincoln. So, you feel like you get screwed out of a lot of things, and of course, people in Missoula probably feel like they get screwed out of things, too. It's just a... it's hard because it's a change and the jumper list used to be sacred. There was... it was real easy, because, you know, you come back from a fire and you're on the bottom of the list, you move up... jump off the top of the list. And there's just certain rules and they always applied. And you don't screw around with the jump list. And it was just a real good way and people didn't... most of the time, people didn't feel too manipulated. Well, with this sub-base system, it's really difficult and people feel like they're being, you know, rooked out of deals here and there. They're trying to work things out, it's still in the process.

SG Was 1983 the first year they used the sub-bases?

KM No, they had them in 1982, but I was in Missoula that year, so...

SG Why was there no rookie class in '83?

KM Partly because of the economy and people are coming back more and more. It use to be, you know, ten years ago, people
would jump while they're in college and maybe stay on for a little bit longer. Most people didn't. Then there's a high turnover. Now, to find people who've jumped seven, eight, ten years is not unusual at all. Also, at this point they're trying to cut down. This next year they're gonna have less jumpers than they ever had... or than they've had in the past... in a long while.

SG What about when you came back this season? Backing up a bit, did you decide at the end of each season that you were gonna return the following season, or was that something...? Like, do you have in your mind that you were gonna do... be a jumper for quite a while?

KM Oh, everybody says, at the end of every year, "I'm never gonna jump again" And next... the next spring everybody's back. You know, it's just the way it goes. I guess you get tired of it, you know. And there comes spring and you start getting the itch to get back in the woods, at least that's what happens with me. See, our first year we were GS-5's and then the next years we were given a permanent... an appointment. What they call an appointment. And you... you're on probation for one year's of work, so it's not just one season, but a full... twelve months of work, and at that point, you become, basically, a permanent employee of the Federal Government, although seasonal. So, we got our GS-6's last year... our appointment... and then this year was our second year. And so it will be at least another year... two years before my probation will be over. I think I, pretty much, made the decision to come back. They only ask if you're not coming back. Once you have an appointment, it's real easy. You don't have to apply, you just slide back in. You don't have to fill out all those papers anymore. [LAUGH]

SG What about the training for each year, do you go through the refresher training?

KM Yeah. You go through a little week refresher training. They do a little bit of medical. You go through the units once or twice. And you go through practice jumps... two practice jumps. And you basically meet up with all your old buddies and get back into the swing of things.

[END OF SIDE ONE]

[BEGIN SIDE TWO]

SG What was it like, coming back that third year and seeing your buddies again.

KM This year? It was fun. You know, refresher training's pretty fun. And you see... ask people what they've done all winter. It's pretty interesting. Nothing unusual as far as practice jumps go. It was landing really hard at the beginning of this year. But, I got over that. [LAUGH]

SG What was that from?
KM I don't know. You know, I was playing around with reverse and doing a couple of things on a chute, and I don't know if that has anything to do with it or not. Sometimes you just get a big downdraft just before you land. Usually I'd land lighter than anybody around, you know.

SG Have you felt like you've improved in your jumping over the three years?

KM Yeah. A whole lot with my chute handling, as far as being able to get into the spot and knowing what's the wind doing. Yeah, it just comes with practice. It helps... the more you jump the better you get. It's just that simple.

SG How different is smokejumping from the skydiving that you mentioned you did, back in New York, before you became a jumper?

KM I don't remember what kind of chute they had there for us. They... it's a, you know, they... lot of skydiving now. It's square chutes almost all, once you get past a certain point. And then it's free falling, so that's a big difference right there. But, our first few jumps were static line. The main thing is the exit, is that you do a spread-eagle kind of exit. Where as for us, we do a military position, a tight, kind of, bent over pose.

SG What do the different positions do... I mean, how does that affect you're jump?

KM Well, the idea behind the skydiving... the spread-eagle type is that you learn, that's you're position for free fall. And so you just simulate pulling the rip-cord when you get out of the plane, and, you know, your in the position for falling. You, know, you've seen skydiver pictures and they're all spread-eagle. Well, our's, you know, you would never pull the rip-cord, so the tighter position you have the better it is for the opening shock of the parachute.

SG Any memorable fires that year? Any memorable jumps?

KM This last year? Yeah, there's several. At least two. One of them was, we were... we were called out to Eastern Montana. I was based out of Hamilton, and we were called... they picked us up, in fact, in Hamilton. And one of the people... they were called up at night, or on a weekend, or something, anyway, they called people all over. And we came out to the airport and one of the guys just barely made the plane, he was running out there in his bare feet, waving down the plane. The plane stopped and picked him up and he suited up. We got out there. We went to Eastern Montana were there was quite a few jumpers on it already. Maybe thirty or more. And, I guess it had blown-up on the day before. We were jumping in the morning and it... by the time we got there it was practically dead. There was no smoke to tell which way the wind was blowing... it was so dead. Well, we made our jump anyway. We were sitting... well, we got down there and
the fire... we started back burning... backfiring certain... part of the fire. And I worked for about, oh, it must have been two hours just on this little corner, because it was running up the hill where I didn't want it to go. I kept on looking up, and there's this big cloud coming over. And I thought, "Boy, it's gonna dump on us pretty soon." And it was the dry Eastern Montana gully, you know, kind of area, where they had some neat rock formations with cliffs and things like that.

Well, I got the fire out, and started looking for everybody else. And we all started gathering. Well, I was working at that time under a guy named Fite, [Larry] which is the foreman down in Hamilton. And he kind of led us down... we couldn't stay on the side of this hill, because it was a pretty bad lightning area. And, so he wanted to get down lower. So, we went down, basically, to the bottom. And there was this, kind of, gullies where the different side hills came together.

And cloud got darker and darker, and came closer and closer. So, I got out my mantie--my tarp. And there was this little tiny bush, it was the only one around. And I tie it off to it and it was about... oh, two feet high, or something like that... three feet high, and I tied off onto it. And then I tied off another side of my tarp to my pulaski and set that down on the ground. Just as I was doing that, it just dropped. And it... it was within two seconds that you could have been totally soaked. And so I jumped underneath my tarp. And I had my little PG bag, my little pack where we carry my personal gear, and I put that down and I was in there and I could see downhill from me somebody else, who was just kind of tucked under the tarp, they hadn't tied off to anything so they were really getting hit hard by the water.

Well, after not too long, all of a sudden you heard, Ping! Ping! Ping- ping! And it was... it had started hailing... hitting everybody's helmets. And all of a sudden you heard people saying, "Ouch! Ouch! God Dammit! Ouch! Ouch!" [LAUGHTER] They was coming down hard. I think they got almost to the size of quarters, it was really hard. It was hitting my hand; I was getting bruised. But I thought it was funny. I was laughing so hard, just sitting underneath this little, tiny thing and the rain's pouring down.

And a little bit of water started trickling down, so I stood up and kind of stood on this little mound that had my little bush on it. I stood right near my little bush and I saw the guy below me get up and he started moving away. And about that time the people behind me, that was up hill from me just gave a big yell, and the next thing I knew, a three foot wall of water just... Kaboom!... just hit me sideways. I was pinned between this bush and the wall of water. And it was up to my chest... up to my shoulders. And I was sitting there laughing so hard, it was just the funniest thing. It was just like a scene out of a movie, it was so funny. Well, my tarp was all, you know, off of me, wrapped around this bush, and I was wrapped around this tarp, pulaski was just kind of bent over. It was just... I was just pinned there. And this... another guy on my crew... he was about six foot six [inches] and he's just huge, and he comes walking over. And he's in his rain gear and he said: "Hold on to me, so
I don't wash down stream." And Fite comes over and both he and I are just laughing really hard, and trying to untangle me from the bush... from my tarp, you know, it was wrapped around my canteens and wrapped around everything. Just laughing and laughing until finally we got... I got untangled and got over kind of to the side. By that time it was a river... it was a huge river. It was just a typical flashflood. I'd never... was seen, before. No one had. Even Fite, who'd been jumping years and years, had never seen a flashflood over there. So, we just stood there and he had this shit-eating grin on his face, and someone took a picture. And I watched my tarp kind of dangle by this bush and it was all ripped to shreds. And we had a cubatainer go floating by. Soon, the fireboss calls out: "Are you OK down there?" [LAUGH] It just literally washed the fire off the hill. You could see the big black just come streaking down, and it was gone. It was pretty amazing. Anyway, I, kind of, got an name for swimming on fires at that point.

SG What was your name?

KM Oh, just... you know, not any name, just... They all asked me about my flashflood.

SG No one was nervous about a flashflood, or nervous that water was coming... pouring down a hill? It seems like everyone... you said that everyone was laughing...

KM I was. I don't know, I really wasn't looking around to see if anyone else was laughing. I know Fite was, and I was... I thought it was funny, I was just like a situation comedy. Another fire this year...

SG Before you get into that, where about exactly was this in eastern Montana?

KM This? Oh, geez. I'm not very good with names. I think it was... well, it was somewhere near White Sulphur Springs, but that's all I know.

We jumped... it was one of the later fires, and we jumped kind of near [inaudible] Pablo and there's... it was a bust. There was fires all over, and we found this fire. It turned out to be a big one. Actually, Grangeville jumpers had jumped it the day before and they'd dug a line all night, and then they called us. It was a... it wasn't that big, but it was just a tough mop-up, and there were spots, and stuff. So we had eight, or sixteen jumpers on... just jumped on that one.

Well, there was no real spot and there were snags, and there was Larch. There was really no clearing. So, I remember John Harper spotting was and he said, "OK, just stay clear of the snags." And a snag, you know, if you land in a snag, it can break off real easily and you can really hurt yourself. The same thing with Larch. They're real brittle trees. I... the first load had all ready jumped and I was, probably, in the middle of
the second load and came down and, you know, I thought I was doing just right. I was going just where I wanted to go. Perfect, you know. I was looking down... just where I wanted to be. And all of a sudden, I didn't hit the ground. I'd hung up in this snag. And I thought... well, you know I looked up to see how well I was secured, because I thought at any moment I was gonna drop-out. I wasn't that far up, I was maybe twenty feet up. But, you know, it could be bad. And I... being light, it really helps. Someone yelled out... Clairmont yelled out to me, "Well, Maynard, are you OK?" And I said: "Yeah, so far, but I'm kind of up here a little bit. [LAUGHTER] Twenty feet off the ground." And he came over and I did my let down. Well, it turned out my chute was just wrapped around the tree. It hadn't speared it; it hadn't done anything, you know, it was just basically held on by tension... by friction. Well, I did my letdown and I was OK, but, I, you know, I'd thought I was just perfect.

Well, that same jump, the people in the load before me, one guy jumped and... Dennis Johnson... he landed in a snag. And he's... he's the second lightest person. He's not much bigger than I am, and he landed in a snag. And he pulled the snag over, right on top of him. And it landed... it hung up three feet off the ground, and it would have just hit his neck and just snapped it in two and he was just lucky it hung up. I mean it was a pretty scary situation... real scary. And some people just came over and just picked the log off of him and he crawled out. But, whew! That could have been it.

Another guy on that same jump pulled... hit a snag... a real tall snag and left a big, six foot square, patch of blue nylon parachute hanging up in the tree. And then proceeded to continue on down, and then hung up in the little trees. But, it was a pretty weird jump, that's for sure.

SG Is that good to jump into an area with so many snags? Or did you just not have any choice... was that the only place?

KM Yeah, that was the only choice. There was some reprod, you know, some smaller trees, which is not too bad to land in, but there were snags pretty much all over.

SG Have you been... have you hung up in a lot trees in your career as a smokejumper?

KM No, no I haven't. Boy, I can say, maybe, just two or three. Of course we have to do a timber jump as one of our training jumps. We intentionally hang up.

SG What about any memorable fires that you've... aside from...

KM Uh, geez. Not... there weren't too many. We had one where... again, Larry Fite and I jumped a two-manner and we had some big, big trees. In fact, we had about four of them. They were much bigger than I could reach ever, you know, much wider. And one of them... so, you know, being the... he being the one with seniority, he's the one that gets to cut them down. So, it
took them quite a while to come down. The first one came down, no problem, you know it just came down. Second one, it didn't come down; it didn't come down, you know he did the undercutting, he did back cut, everything, you know. It still didn't come down. Eventually it did: ninety degrees from the direction he wanted it, right across the road. And these were big trees. But, at least it got down. The third one, he cut and it went... it hung up in another really big tree that was leaning back, towards us... uphill. And it's just really... you know, big trees likes that, there's not a whole lot of options you can have. So, we spent, pretty much, all day just trying to chink it out and hoping it would twist out of there. Working on it a little bit here, working on it a little bit there. Eventually, it did come down, but it's... those was some pretty big trees. And it was called S.O.B. Fire: Son-of-a-bitch Ridge was were we jumped, so that was...

SG Where abouts was that?

KM It was over near Grangeville, up along that ridge, just outside the wilderness.

SG So, that was a two-manner?

KM Yeah, yeah.

SG Do you like jumping the two-manners as opposed to the bigger crews? Or...

KM They're suppose to be the best fires, you know. You jump these and you just have a good time just talking to somebody and... But I haven't jumped all that many two-manners... I've jumped maybe two or three and... in fact, I think I've jumped the second two-manner... the second co-ed two-manner that's ever been jumped. First one, Wendy Kamm did her first year. And then I did the second, which was this year. So, so far... yeah, I like them a lot. I don't....

I think a fire's a fire, you know, it depends on who people are. We had a great time on that one I told you we hung up on. And we got a fresh food drop, and there's four of us that stayed on... we just had a great time on that one. So, it depends on the fire.

SG When you're up in the plane, and you're about to jump... you're in the plane with a bunch of different people... I guess every time you go to jump, it's... there's different people and you don't know who you're gonna jump with. Do you get to thinking a lot about who they are individually? Do you worry a lot about who's on you're crew when you jump?

KM Who I'm gonna be fighting the fire with? Not too much, no. I mean, if there's somebody who... you know, it's nice to be with one of your good buddies, it just, you know, makes the fire even better. But, other than that... you know, it's really hard to find a bad jumper. Everybody's got a pretty good attitude and
it's pretty amazing, too, that that the people who make it through jumping, even though they don't test your logic, and they don't test your personality, and, you know, your capacity to take bullshit, and stuff like that, it happens to be that the people who become jumpers are pretty good people and their amazing wit and good humor and just good people. And, somehow, it's that's... maybe that's what the job attracts. So, it's basically pretty good no matter who you're with. Of course, there's people you don't like, you know, that's true for anybody. But, it's pretty good.

SG Do the boys get the same bullshit as the women did? I mean that did you find you were getting the same treatment... harassment, or whatever... fun harassment, whatever you want to call it... as the men?

KM Yeah. Well, I mean... it depends on the man, but oh, yeah. That's just standard everyday talk. Some... you know, I'm sure I get some a lot more in some ways, or from some people, and less from others.

SG Do you all socialize together after you jump a lot? Do you spend a lot of time with jumpers outside of your work situation?

KM Yeah. See, to me it's a world... it's a whole way of living in the summer. I just do one thing, and I don't do anything else. I just jump. Some people live here and they have families and they have, you know, other interests and other occupations. But that's one of the reasons why I like fire fighting so much, is that you stick with it. You're all one big family during the summer, especially in the sub-base. Or, I should say, in some sub-bases. You know, you're... that's what I liked about the IR crews, that you're all together. You're just... you live together, eat together, sleep together, for the rest of the [INAUDIBLE]

SG What kinds of things did you do in the evenings? Like, when you're socializing with the others after work? What sorts of things do you usually do?

KM Oh, mostly go out and get drunk. [LAUGHTER] There's not a lot of variety.

SG Get a lot of good talk or a lot of, you know, all kinds of... is there much talk about personal lives or...?

KM Not really, not until you're real drunk. [LAUGH] No, pretty much it's just bullshit, you know, just having a good time. It's different. For the men, they go out and try and get layed, probably. [LAUGHTER] I don't do that too much.

SG Yeah, how... talking about that subject... did you find that a lot of the women go out... well, spend time with the jumpers socially like, get involved with them personally? Is that real common?
KM  Like have relationships?  Well, it depends on the person, you
know, it depends totally. I don't know if you know it, but
two... a man and a woman jumper are gonna get married this year.
So, that's... I'd say that's a relationship. You know, I've
talked to different people, Deanne Shulman really thinks that you
shouldn't mix those two, that you really shouldn't mix business
with pleasure. And, you know, every woman has a different way of
doing it. Definitely, there have been relationships, I mean, how
can you avoid it? There's three women my first year with, you
know, 127... 125 men. There's bound to be something happening
there.

I try to avoid it. I think that it's a... I think that it
can be real dangerous. It's all ready that... you know, that
assumption, that... well, the women are here to find husbands, or
they're here to get layed, or they're here... you know, because
there's all these men workin around them, you know. They're gonna
take advantage of it. And that's just gonna... to me that's just
can cause problems. I don't think that you can really work with
men and have relationships with them at the same time. You know,
maybe if you stick with one person, that's maybe different.
But, basically... you know, if you're gonna move around, or it's
gonna be a light kind of relationship I think that that's really
tough.

SG  Have you been on crews where that sort of relationship
existed and caused problems?

KM  Yeah. I've seen that in jumping. It's caused a lot of
problems.

SG  How is it handled? How do they... how are those problems
worked out?

KM  Well, I don't think they really are. They just... the...
you know, at least some people they, you know, people just have
to get over, like, when it breaks up they just have to spend the
time getting over it. And they'll probably never be able to
really work together again real well. And then, both people's
best friends are, you know, are going to have something against
the other person. It's just, you know, it's just not good for
working situations. I think you need to remain pretty much aloof
to that kind of stuff in order to really work well. I also think
it really damages the image of women. That's a big thing.
They're... we need to show them that we were here to work and
here to do a good job, and we were not here because we want to
get married, or we want to fool around with a bunch of men or,
you know, I think that we have to show that we're serious about
the job.

SG  Do you feel like the women who've worked at Missoula, so
far, have up held that image pretty well? Do you feel you've
done a good job as a group?

KM  I think we... yeah, I think we've done a good job. I don't
really know the two women this year... the two new ones. And I can definitely say that my first year, you know, with Wendy and Marty, that I felt like we could do the job well. It was great, and I think that people were really impressed. And I've had people tell us that... or tell me that they were really wary of women in the first place and that they feel that they've been proved wrong. Or... and some women more than others. You know, they feel that some women do the job better than others. And, of course, that's always gonna be true.

SG Do you have any comments on the way the Overhead treats women?

KM The Overhead, I think, was scared at first, too. They didn't know what to do, and they were... even still they still come up to me and check me out and say; "Well, how are you doing? You doing all right? You know what..." and just making sure that I'm not cause any trouble. You know, if I was really mad about something, or I'm gonna sue them, or just cause trouble, they, you know, they make sure that's not gonna happen. At first, like, we were invited to a meeting of some Forest Service workers... women Forest Service workers, or something like that, I don't remember what it was, it was all women. And we were invited to go to that. But, we didn't want to get off the jump list to go to it, so we didn't go... ended up. But, that was done by one of the Overhead. And, you know, it was just... we were just looked on a lot more closer. And no one was sure how we were gonna react and whether we would be strong feminist and just yell at everybody if they had a dirty joke, or whether, you know, we were gonna cause problems. And, you know, it's so ripe an opportunity to do so, if you wanted to cause problems, you could. And they really would have to kind of jump to your complaints, because they'd be afraid of being sued and the whole EO [equal opportunity] thing.

Well, I think they realized pretty quickly that we weren't gonna sue them and that we can take the harassment and it's just not... you know, basically we we just there to do the job and were having a good time, just like anybody else. And just because we had different bodies, doesn't mean that we're gonna have a... you know, be a major change in the organization. And Overhead was... I think has now realized that, and they don't... I think they look at us a little bit differently, but they certainly don't... aren't as nearly scared as they were. You can never know who else is gonna come in. Just because we haven't done it so far, doesn't mean that there's somebody else that's gonna come and do that. Man or woman, you know. A man can cause problems in a different way.

SG You mentioned before that there was kind of a movement to lighten up the equipment that you put in the packs. Do you see changes happening in the organization that you think might be because of having women?

KM Yes. And some of it, I don't think is good. Some people.... Well, one thing is that they are changing the...
trying to lighten up all the pack out weights and they're trying to get it down to something like sixty pounds... sixty six pounds. Which is amazing, because now the average is well, eighty five to a hundred [pounds], or so. One of them is this new harness. Going into one piece jumpsuit. They... they just took out the old mirrors that we use to have and now they gave us light-weight mirrors. They, you know, they... one thing after another. Reserves... they're thinking of going to a new kind of reserves, which will be lighter and.... Most... some people have come up to me and said: "You know, if it weren't for you women, we'd still be carrying out all these heavy stuff, and so, I'm glad you're here." I think, you know, it's never any problem to lighten up the weight, nobody likes to pack it out. It's not fun for anybody--man or woman. The lighter it is, the easier it'll be. That's no problem. And, they were gradually doing that anyway. You know, I don't think they put the rush on it like they did now.

But, there are some major changes that I don't think are good, too. And that's in the training process. They... well, I don't know exactly whether it's been women or whether it's just... they're just... lawyers have jumped the gun and said, you know, "There's the possibility of people suing because of one thing or another." And one of them is: let's say that Redding has a different training policy that you have to... for instance, on this pack-out I was telling you about, if you... we pack-out two and a half miles or three miles... I can't remember, up and down and certain terrain, you know, and you're judged on that. If you don't make it, you know, you're washed out. Well... and you have to do it in a certain amount of time. You know, how can that terrain be matched with the terrain in Redding? Someone could sue because they say, "Well, you know, I went to Redding and... I went to Missoula and I jumped and, you know, I washed-out there, but I went to Redding and I can make it there. And that's not fair." So, they're trying to standardize amongst all the Bases. The other thing is: in the training, like... so, the one thing that they did is they eliminated the pack-out. They are saying the only thing you can do is do... (now, what is it they're saying) four miles, I think it is, on flat ground with a hundred and ten pound packs, rather than an eighty five pound packs. And that should make it standard. Well, that's just not... for one thing, you're not gonna hardly ever pack-out on flat ground. And sure, you can standardize that, but it's just not the same. You can't... how can you judge someone on whether they're going be able to pack-out later, if they can pack-out a hundred and ten pounds on flat ground? It's not that big of a deal. And they go around in circles and things like that. It's not the rough terrain, it's a pavement, you know.

So, I think that they should have standard tests that can be used... that are real practical that they can simulate real conditions on fires. But, can also be standardized. And like, I think that they should have type-one, or type-two fuels, you know; you have to dig line... eighteen inch line for forty yards; and you have to go through three logs, one three inch, one five inch, you know, one... whatever, and you have to do this in a certain amount of time. Then you have to... you have a bucket
or, let's say, fifty pounds of sand and you have to shovel... or a hundred pounds and you have to shovel that into another one within a certain amount of time. Pull-ups, push-ups, sit-ups, you know, that kind of thing. That's probably gonna be a pretty much stay the way it is. And a mile and a half, you know, in under eleven minutes, or whatever. But, they're even questioning that. "What does a mile and a half in under eleven minutes have to do with fighting fires?" Pull-ups they can justify because that's how you do you're let-down out of a tree. Push-ups, you know, what's that got to do with fighting fires? And sit-ups? You know, they... it's just... it's... they're really going through things. And one of the things that they're doing is eliminating those. And they're making everything slacker.

They use to have the obstacle course, and... well, in the beginning, they use to just look at you and if you didn't... if they didn't think you were doing things right, you didn't have quite the right attitude. Or you couldn't take their harassment, well, they'd wash you out. Well, it got to be that well, you couldn't... they had... you had to do two things wrong in a row and, you know they had to talk to you about it and you had the opportunity to better it. And now, they're getting to to point where... what kinds of standards can we set? And, there's no doubt about it, it's a tough job. You have to have standards, you have to be able to have people that are gonna be able to do it. If they start lightning up the standards and letting anybody come in and do it; one is... especially with the women, they're gonna... people aren't gonna respect women. They're not gonna respect the fact that you can do the job, because maybe you can't. you have to have some way of washing people out so that they can know that people who are jumpers are people who can do the job. And I think it's a real shame.

The other thing that they're doing is... well, I don't even know if they're gonna do it. The rumor had it that they were gonna have a woman squad leader real soon. Well, there's no way that a woman... that anybody who'd only been around for three years or four years, can be a squad leader. You just don't know enough about the organization, about jumping, et cetera in order to do the job. And especially a woman. Nobody's gonna respect her. She's not gonna have the authority it takes to be a squad leader. She can... it can be down-right dangerous. And there's just no way that people should push that. You know, EO or no EO, they're gonna have to wait until people have done their time. And, there's no women that are gonna accept the job, even if they offered it at this point. But... at least in Missoula. We've all agreed that that's really dumb. But, who knows? Just things like that. They are getting to the point of standardizing training. Hopefully they'll come up with something that's mutually beneficial. That is tough, but it will also be standardized. And, I don't know. I'd love to work on that.

SG Interesting. Because I'd heard that this year that they had a real high wash-out rate among men and women in the rookie class. And yet, supposedly these standards, they're lightning up a little bit so.... Do you have any idea why that... why they would have such a high wash-out rate this year?
Well, one thing, is they didn't go by the regular list, they went by student requisition. So, the people who... so that means that the people who were asked to come and jump were offered a job, are students. That they'll be going back to school, that was one of their requirements: that they'll be going back to school. And they're just not... probably they're younger. And generally looking at they didn't have near the fire experience most people had. And we had... in my rookie class we had 600 applicants for thirty five positions. That was a real high, you know, demand rate. And the people who were coming in were the best. They'd been the best fire fighters in the country. And they'd been around for a long time, and they know fire. Well, these student requisitions, they probably haven't had as much experience. Of course, they had some. And, you know, I can't say that for everybody. There's some good student requisitions, too. But, the general... the average is less. And, that's a big thing right there. And they often jumped a lot of women who weren't ready for it. They didn't have the physical ability. I don't really know the whole thing, I wasn't there when they were doing all the training. But, I think it's just a shame. I mean, what worse things can you say, than to hire twenty women, like they did in Redmond and only have one make it? You know, people are just gonna look and say: "See! Women can't do the job."

You just mentioned when you talked about the student requisition list. What is... what would be the regular sorts of list that they would go to?

It's just regular applications... it's just people who've been in fire, you know, and want to start jumping. Rather than going to the school and looking for people who've had fire experience and saying, "Do you want to jump?" One reason, it's been said, that that might be happening, is that they are looking to shorter term jumpers. Like people, like I said, are now sticking around longer, and maybe... one thing is, as far as budget and funding goes et cetera that they maybe... they may want to not hand out these appointments, so that people don't have a permanent job, and they don't get retirement and that kind of stuff. So, by having students, you know, the idea is that they're gonna jump while they're in college and they're gonna go back. They don't have to work for... they don't have to look for late work for them, because they're gonna be in school in the Fall; or early work. And, they're... by the time they're out of school, they're gonna be onto a different job. It cuts down a lot of hassles. And that maybe some of the... I've never heard that officially, but that maybe some of the thinking behind it. I don't know.

So, that rookie class that... when you were first jumping, what sorts of people were typically jumpers? Not usually students?

There's a few students, you know, in any case, but they're not done... they're not gotten through the student requisition.
They're not done by going to the universities and looking for people. There's people most of the people come off of IR crews... have been on IR crews for a couple of years. Or they've been... most people have had four or five years of fire experience before then, at least. Some have had ten, thirteen years, you know, more than a lot of jumpers. Some people had only a few. But, most have had high recommendations from their last job... from the IR crew or whatever they'd been on. A lot of them come from Montana, or Region-1. Some of them... a few from California. Mostly from Region-1.

SG What sorts of things do they do in the winter?

KM Oh, some people go to school... they go to school, like, two quarters of the year, so they don't miss any jumping. Umm, shoot, there's a couple of lawyers. There's people who ski... you know, collect unemployment skiing in the winters. There's people who's building their houses. There's people who... I mean, you get the widest variety of people, it's just amazing. They do... you know, some people just try and find any job they can. And there's some people who work jumping. You know, building equipment at Missoula Equipment and Development Center, something like that. With bums like me. [LAUGHTER]

SG I was just gonna ask: what do you in the off season between your jumping?

KM I've been... I do a lot of traveling. And I work... well, I haven't been working all that late because I, you know... I don't have responsibility. I don't have a car. I don't have a family. I don't have a house. I don't have anything I have to pay for, so it gives... there's plenty of money for me to live off of and interest some. So like, I spend the winters... my main interest is working against the development of a nuclear war. So, I spent a lot of time doing peace work in one way or another. Last year I worked on a boat and sailed to Hawaii. It was a... it's a boat that's working for nuclear-free Pacific. The Pacific is a very dangerous area. I just think that probably the most important issue in the world, at this point. And that it... deserves my time, as well as everybody's time. So I... that's what I like to do in the winter, and fire fighting frees me up to do that. Because there's not much money in doing any type of peace work. I go to Mexico, and I like to spent time in the warmer areas. I was in California one year. A few years ago I worked at the UN as a journalist for a Third World news agency in Switzerland. And I was a teacher for awhile... of a in high school.

SG Lots of different things in the off season.

KM Yeah, I like to move around.

SG Do you consider smokejumping a job?

KM A job? Sure is my livelyhood. It's the only way I eat. Yeah! I do. I don't consider it a career. I wouldn't do this
for the rest of my life. For one thing, the injury rate's real high. There's no room for development... for moving up in it. Except for you being a woman, you have a little bit of an advantage there, but, I don't want to take that advantage. And I think, you know, there's too many things to do in this world than to just stay with one thing. That's the way I look at it.

SG If you had some advice for someone who came up to you and wanted to be a jumper, could you describe to them what sorts of qualities they should possess to be a jumper? What sort of person they ought to want that... what kind of a person, I guess, would want to become a jumper?

KM That's a good question. I would say that they have to be real easy going. That's probably one of the biggest qualities. That they have to be able to laugh easily, have a good sense of humor... laugh easily. Take bullshit and give it. That's probably one of the highest qualities, beside being in really good shape physically and liking to be in good shape. That has to be a main priority, especially if they're a woman. They have to like the rough life, you know, not showering for days on end and being real grubby and... helps if they chew tobacco. [LAUGHTER] They... I think they have to like excitement and new things and adventure, and not be real interested in security. Because you never know when you're gonna be gone. One day your here, another day your gone. It's all... your hands... you have to give up your life to the hands of the government. They say you're going and you go. And you have to be able to take... be able to take that bureaucracy... that you're not in control. And I think another good, really good trait is to be able to really think things out practically. If there's a problem, you know, if you have to get a certain amount of gear from one place to another place, and you don't have the equipment to move it, how are you going to do it? Or, you're going to have to fix something that's broken... and that kind of thing, it really helps... mechanical skills. But, I wouldn't say that's necessary. Any kind of fire experience in woods and... experience is really good.

SG Is there certain a experience that you have to have?

KM You have to have a year of fire experience. And you have to be... well, you use to have to be so tall and have to have a certain weight and your eyes have to be so good, and you couldn't be over a certain height or a certain weight. Most of... the height and weight standard have dropped, pretty much. Dianne, er... Deanne Shulman had a little bout with the government, as far as that goes. And I think it was the year I got there that they eliminated the height and the weight. They... I think they had they said something like, "Well," and there's this big guy who's coming in and he was 220 or 230 or 240 [pounds] I don't know, but he was a big guy. And he was suppose to get down to 195. And the story goes that he was working on it, and working on it, dieting and dieting, and he got down to 215. And he just said: "Forget it. I can't do it." So, he wrote to them... he
wrote to the jump Base and said: "Sorry, I'm at 215. I just can't get any lower." So, he started eating again. And, well, they wrote back, and by this time he was at least 225, and they said: "Well OK, that's all right, just stay where you're at. And don't... you know, we'll try and take you as you are." Well, then he had to get back down to 215. So, they said something like: "Well, we got 'bigfoot' and we got 'five-foot-two-eyes-of-blue' coming in, so I guess we're getting rid of our standards this year." [LAUGHTER]

SG What year was that? '8...

KM That was '82.

SG Well, is there anything else that you would especially you'd like to have go on record about what you think about jumping or...?

KM Oh... I'll have to think about that. Why don't we shut it off? [LAUGH]

[END OF TAPE]