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The following transcript was provided to Archives and Special Collections by the Upper Swan Valley Historical Society with its associated audio recording.

Oral History Number: 422-003
Interviewee: Harold Haasch
Interviewer: Suzanne Vernon
Date of Interview: July 17, 1999
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Note: Harold was interviewed in 1999 for the Swan Valley Oral History Project. The Haasch family homesteaded near Glacier Creek. Harold lived near Condon most of his life. His wife, Doris, was raised at Woodworth. Her family also had early connections in the valley. Other interviews with Harold Haasch and Doris Haasch were conducted in January and February 1999.

Harold Haasch: The way the outfitters made their living out here. People came from back East.

Suzanne Vernon: Mostly elk hunters?

HH: Most of them, pretty near all of them, went into the Bob Marshall. They hunted deer down here. People would come in and stay at somebody's place that they knew; have a camp by a creek or somewhere. Mostly businessmen. Take their little vacation. Go hunting deer. I remember way back, boy there was hardly no roads. There was two old fellows from Butte come over every year. They had an old air-cooled Franklin. High-wheeled. They tooled around on these old roads. (laughs) They didn't care whether they got a deer or not. They were just on vacation. There's a lot of people that way. They didn't care whether they got a deer or not. There wasn't any elk in here very much until...I don't know what year. Early days.

SV: Were they hunting for trophy deer?

HH: No. Just meat hunters. They liked to get a nice buck. There's a thrill in shooting a nice buck, but it wasn't really trophy.

SV: Remember Dick Idol?

HH: Yeah, he was trophy. There's some big bucks, you bet. Most of the trophy hunters wanted to go into the South Fork after elk. I guided for trophy hunters. That was a real nice job. One person. If they didn't want the elk, just go on...leave it. If they didn't get one, they didn't get one.

SV: When you were guiding like that, how long did it take you to know a drainage enough to find the elk?

HH: I don't know. You just kind of come to it. You just wandered around and got used to it. If you hadn't been there before, let's try it. That's how you got used to it.

SV: When I talked to Ollie Hill, he said there was elk came out of the South Fork into that Buck Creek area.

HH: Yeah. They'd come out of there when they'd hunt them. This is how we finally got elk in here. When they'd hunt them over in the early season. It's all bare and everything. It's not that hard to come over the top. Morris Thomason used to go up over Buck Creek there somewhere [Avalanche Pass (?). See Bud Moore transcript] instead of going up over Holland or anything. He'd just go right out over...

SV: You said everybody used to walk?

HH: Miles was nothing. You either had to have a horse, or walk; didn't have a car. I run most of the time! Loved to run. I just used to like to run. It felt good. A fellow gets there quick. I used to go down to Hollopeters down here. They used to live where the post office was. I used to run down there all the time. It wasn't that far. It didn't take you fifteen or twenty minutes. Gyda Newman's brother [Jens] and I used to run all over this country. Fishing. Walk. We went all over the mountains. Elk Creek. Red Butte.

SV: Red Butte was kind of a popular hunting area?

HH: That was one of the better ones; is now, too. You're right close to some real good elk country. I haven't been in there for a long time. A lot of them [hunters] go through there up at Lindbergh and come through to Kraft Creek. It's kind of...not really much going on back there. Timbered and grass. I don't know...they [elk] like to get in that where it's real thick. There's always a bunch of elk over in that Loon Lake area. I know Styler's kids, boys, they'd go chase them out of there and get on their trail till they had them.

SV: Elk feed out in the open areas?

HH: Yeah, they come out at night...early morning or evening on those open slides and that. They come out there on the slides pretty near always morning and evening. I think they spend the night there. I think they are just the same as a deer. They like to get out there in the opening so they got a little bit of a chance to see stuff. The deer come out here and lay out in the open spots, out in the field. Certain times of the year, I think when there's coyotes and stuff around, they go out in the open more so they can watch. Fawns. Generally just cache (?) those little guys. We've got a doe and two little fawns now. She was gone for quite a long time. I'd see her out here. But when she has the fawns, eventually she brings them in. They get spoiled just like she does. Tame.

SV: They probably come in for the grass. . . .

HH: They love that grass. We put some hay out there by our hay shed last winter and they never touched it. They like that old moss. They just love that moss. That moss has got a lot to it.

I worked for the Fish and Game one winter on a range survey. This young fellow I was with, he knew all about the bushes. I knew more about the deer. So he took care of the forage. He took some of that moss and had it analyzed. It had a lot of food value. Protein.

We also had our food...those little Vienna sausages. We had them analyzed. There wasn't one bit of meat in them! It was cereal and coloring. Flavor. We was sitting there one day and eating a lunch. I said, "Marshall, I wonder if this has got anything in it." "By golly," he said, "I'll take it over to university and have it analyzed." It wasn't nothing in it. Salt.

That moss, they'll eat that moss...the wind blows. They won't even touch the grass. The summertime...just as much in the summertime as wintertime. You see them out here, with a limb, about that long and all full of moss. Had it in her mouth and cleaning it off.

SV: Maybe a little bit of blow down is a good thing.

HH: You bet. The wind is...that's another thing where the game stays. In a type of timber they're in. These larch trees, they're real brittle. The wind breaks them off. They always have a lot of different moss on them. The deer and elk are going to hang around where that is. They prefer...I don't say they don't eat it, the grass, but they prefer the moss. Elk too. They eat a lot of moss. We analyzed that, what they eat, see what they were eating.

We had this...they called this the restoration division in the fish and game. The government put up some money and hired a bunch of us. He and I was from the summit down the Blackfoot then up the Blackfoot. There was other ones in here. They analyzed all that stuff. They'd take...you'd have a game kill, natural death, see what killed it. Malnutrition. Disease. Wintertime. We started out right here at the summit first. They wanted to know where all the deer come from in their winter grounds. Concentrations. At that time, pretty near all the deer in any reach, they all went to Salmon Lake. They wanted to see what time they got on there. Every other day, sometimes every day if it snowed. We just followed them till they got down there on the winter range. It got so bad down there that they didn't have no grass or nothing.

Then all at once, I don't know what happened for sure, a few years after that, they just didn't come down there. I sit in one place down there and counted four hundred and some. They had done a little logging in there and they were in there eating the moss. Funny part of it was, until you got up toward Ovando, the farther up in that, you didn't see no deer. You get up there and there was grass. Open there, by Marcum Mountain there; that would bare off. If it didn't bare off they were in that thick fir, eating them little trees.

Up the Blackfoot was another winter range area, clear to Lincoln. Then we run into some elk...that was 1942, 1943. There was elk around Ovando. Up around Lincoln, Alice Creek, to the Divide.

We had one of the first one...they called them the motor-toboggan. Ed Underwood's got one up there. One of them that we used. It was a big toboggan with a motor on it and a track right in the middle, like a cat track. Nose up around there, sometime up there. Jerry knows where it is, I bet you. That was the first one ever heard of. That was pretty near as much work as walking.

SV: Snowmobiles?

HH: If we'd a had them, we'd a had to run every day. But it packed us. It packed a lot of stuff. On the level, pretty good going. But when you get that big old thing stuck...we was up at Alice Creek and we stayed at Lincoln there, ranger station. We decided to go to Alice Creek. Ranger decided to go along. He said, "I'll snowshoe up there." We said, "Ah, no." Real nice, crusty. Here, the three of us we get on this thing. Sleeping bags and stuff. Had a nice cabin up there. We stayed there quite a few days.

It snowed. Big old fluffy stuff. We started out of there, jumped on that thing. We didn't go, the three of us, the length of the room. He says, "I'll snowshoe." I don't remember which one of us, we tried it again with two. We sent this Marshall, said, "You just take this out of here. Just keep it going. We'll snowshoe out." We get out there by the highway, by the old road then. It was just about dark. Here he is digging around in the snow. He killed it. He's got a step-on started. It flew off of there and he lost it. We dug around there, found it. Boy he was sweating.

We've had our troubles with these new ones, too. We had a big Johnson. We spent quite a bit of time wrestling that thing around. Uno Strom used to say, "I never figured they'd ever built an outfit that us old people could ride around in the wintertime." He just thought that was the most wonderful thing there ever was, was a snowcat.

SV: You snowshoed a lot?

HH: We snowshoed. I had some skis when we went to school. Dad used to make us skis. Birch. I remember we used to...they steam them to turn them up. We had a place down there on the old house we stuck them in and let them hang there when we wasn't using them. They stayed curled that way.

SV: Wax?

HH: Yeah. You had to take good care of them. Most of the time they were soft lumber. They wouldn't stand that crust.

SV: Do you think the homesteaders' clearing the ground had any effect on the elk coming down here in the valley?

HH: The logging did. I know that to be a fact. Actually we didn't have that many elk in here until they started logging. The elk or nothing would ever stay over here. They'd be down here on the

flat. When they cut them thick old trees, I grant them that they probably grew up too brushy, too thick, and they don't use some of it now. Just as soon as that brush and grass started coming back they come in there.

SV: They like it a little more open? Like the South Fork?

HH: There's more open places in the mountains there. Years ago, probably fire [opened it up]. Again you'd see a place so thick you couldn't walk through. They'd go in there, too. They'd crawl in those places. We used to go in there where we knew it was thick. Trophy hunting. Bugling. Have them come out. You go in there, they'd run out of there ahead of you. You couldn't go in there without making a bunch of noise. When they were bugling, that was the way to sit. Sit there and don't get excited. Sit there all day sometimes. It would pay off. Get one you thought was a pretty nice bull, or you wanted to see, you'd set there till he come out. If they didn't want him...They wanted one. But they didn't get mad because they couldn't get one. They wanted a trophy. Nice big.

We had a fellow in there that passed up a big old trophy and a grizzly bear. He said he couldn't come back next year if he got one. He wanted a big old grizzly. We were there at Lena Lake. Buff went out with him, to check the horses. Went out there and here was this big old grizzly. Just perfect. Close and below them. Old Buff says, "There you are, Gil." He looked at him and said, "If I kill him I won't be able to come back. Won't have an excuse to come back." He let him go. He never got anything. He didn't care. He really enjoyed the trip. That's the way a good trophy hunter was. It was pretty nice to go all by yourself. Most of the time just by yourself.

I spent some time with a young fellow. We didn't have no cook or anything.

SV: Did you cook?

HH: Cook or go hungry. I used to cook all the time and Joe would do the wrangling. If we went together, Joe would take care of the horses and I would do the cooking.

SV: What did you cook?

HH: Fresh meat for a couple of days. Fish. Then canned meat. You had to use your imagination in making a meal. Her brother's wife taught us that a lot. [Florence Holmes] She could make a meal out of nothing. She'd go in there. She could make a meal out of... old Buff was pretty stingy. Conservative, I should say. They figured on the fish and stuff like that. If you didn't catch the fish and stuff like that, and was running late, by the end of the trip, you'd be getting pretty low. By golly, she'd cook up a meal of something. She could do it. I built an angel food cake in there.

SV: I suppose all the eggs broke on the way in. You had to use them....

HH: We was down on the river. We didn't have to go with the fishermen, Joe and I. We had the old Kimball stove. I said to Joe, "I think I'll build a cake." He said, "Ah..." I had this angel food mix. I took a wash basin and I set a glass in the middle of it. We were breaking...we were going to break a mule to ride. I fixed the fire, went to the corral, got to playing. I thought, "Oh God, I forgot my cake!" Went up there and it was just right. The fire went out. The guys came in. Joe says, "Harold made a cake today for you." They said, "Nah." He went to Big Prairie and got that. You know they...we were right close to Big Prairie Ranger Station. Just used a little wash basin. Worked good. It was fun. I don't know what we was doing. I never did figure out what we were doing with an angel food mix in there anyway. I'll bet they'd like a cake, they said, probably.

We really had some nice trips. Joe and I together. Little later years, we went with Buff. Joe worked with him for quite a little while. I worked a couple of seasons. Summer, too. Fishermen was a nice...summertime was really nice. You didn't have to have all that equipment to keep warm. Like stoves and tents. Just put a fly up. Something light. Nice weather. Fishermen, you'd just lay around and wait for them. Take them somewhere.

We had quite a lot of summer fishermen. We had three outfits one time for hunting one fall. Three camps. We come out about the first of November. People wanted to get out of there. He'd set that up so they didn't have no hunters later. The weather gets bad. You never know. We seen old Sunny Benson get snowed in there...there was other ones, too.

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

HH: That's miserable country that Little Salmon country. Closed in. Narrow. The trails are bad. Parker said yesterday they are going to rebuild that Little Salmon trail. It wore out so deep in the mud and down in there the packs was dragging on the...where it had washed...

SV: You said it was good fishing back there...what was the Swan River like then?

HH: Good fishing.

SV: Did you notice any changes after the flood '64?

HH: I don't think it changed the fishing. The fishing was going out already before then... when they put that dam in there at Bigfork, that took care of the bunch of the fishing. The fish would go out of here and go into the (unintelligible) stocks and out. They couldn't get back. They put a fish ladder in there. Just about like your orchard ladder. Never had no water in it. They got one in there now. No water ever goes through it. What we depend on now is some that will stay in Swan. Then come back.

SV: Bull trout, mostly?

HH: You bet. They leave here. They won't stay here in the wintertime, unless it's in the beaver dams.

SV: River fish are different populations than like Holland Lake.

HH: Yeah, but there's a lot of them go out, too.

SV: Nobody mentions fishing at Lindbergh. Is that because they just don't talk about it, or is the fishing...

HH: I guess I don't know as they fish it that much. Any more than people that live there, I don't think people fish it that much. I know we only fished it two or three times. Holland used to be real good fishing. We used to have tons of whitefish. We used to catch them. Canned them. Pickled them. Eat them fresh.

SV: They were a native fish? What pushed them out?

HH: I have no idea.

SV: When did you first fish for salmon? Did you catch salmon as a kid?

HH: No. We didn't have any salmon until I can't tell you what year. They planted them. We had some good fishing, some. Just what they planted. There wasn't no reproduction. There might have been a little bit for a few years. Got less and less all the time. We had some nice sockeyes here. They really grew good. We had a lot better bull trout, too. They eat them buggers...

SV: I saw a picture one time of a bull trout hanging one time from a saddle horn, almost to the ground.

HH: We had them in here. Elk Creek...they closed it now. A lot of them went up there and snagged them. That caused some dissension. They just finally...you could fish trout. They couldn't watch it all the time. This bull trout thing started, so they just closed it—it and Cold Creek and Jim Creek. There was a lot of bull trout in those creeks. There's a lot of bull trout in this river here in the spring. Come out of Swan Lake. They go down in there. They're the only ones that really stay in the lake good. They just make their run and go out again. They don't stay in the creeks.

SV: Why do you think the fishing declined?

HH: The first year that I was around where there was bull trout fishing, there was a lot of people, they were rough fish. They were a rough fish. They caught them and threwed them in the brush, if they caught them. Like a sucker or something. You try to tell them same people that they were good eating and they weren't that good eating I don't think then either. They wouldn't believe you. They'd throw them away if they caught them. Up the North Fork, we used to catch them, I'll tell you. Talk about some bull trout. The North Fork of the Blackfoot. Go up to the falls. Under the falls there in those holes, in the summertime. We'd keep them and eat them.

Then over there on Monture, above the falls in the Burnt Creek country, there was bull trout about that long [sixteen inches] just like a snake. They was so strong that you couldn't eat them.

SV: Was it the size or what they were feeding on?

HH: I think there was just so many of them. I think those fish probably that long were just as old as in the good water a fish that long [three feet]. That's what I think. They would eat them, but I tell you they weren't very good. I was packing for the Forest Service there and had the trail crew up there at Burnt Cabin. I was going to move them out. I got in early, so I put my stock away. I thought I'll go get supper for the guys. I went down and caught a mess of those. You'd just go like that to get them.

They come back and this one guy says, "You cooking some of those fish!" He grabbed the frying pan, with the fish and throwed the frying pan and the fish, the whole works, out. They had tried them before. I never figured that out. Unless they were...I didn't know enough about them.

They were just as old, probably older than, some of them big fellows in the good fishing. They were isolated. Some of them would come out of there. Some of them did. And grew up. Monture Creek had lots of big bull trout. It's a nice creek. You bet. High water, boy that bugger is wild.

SV: Are there any other creeks on this side that had bull trout?

HH: Jim Creek did. Cold Creek. Cold Creek, they never went as far. There was a reason. There was nothing up there. Cold Creek, down in the valley, down above the river, they had some good bull trout. It's a spawning ground. That's why it's so...a lot of people think that's a bunch of stuff [counting redds] but they can tell pretty close. They find those nests.

SV: You guys like cutthroat?

HH: I don't know. Rainbow, cutthroat. Brookies is good.

SV: Do you remember catching brook trout when you were a kid?

HH: There were brook trout in here. They been in here since the beginning of time I think. No big ones. So many of them. They generally get in a place and outlive themselves. There used to be some beaver dams down behind the Andersons. [Frye Meadow]. Some of those old brookies would stay right in there and they got pretty darn big.

SV: What about brown trout?

HH: Never had them in here. They come as far as the barrier at Seeley Lake. My brother caught a nice one right there by the road at Salmon Lake. I saw them when I worked on the highway, flagging and stuff. I've seen some nice fish down over the bank swimming around. I imagine they were brown trout. They really grow. They claim the Blackfoot is one of the nicest rivers there is for fish to grow. The Blackfoot is a nice river. People love it to death. Most of this, it isn't the fishing; it's the rafting. I imagine they fish it quite a bit, too. You say all you want to, but there's always garbage. People in the water ain't going to help.

SV: When you guided at the Bar 33 or the Gordon Ranch, did you bring them over here?

HH: Not very much. They wanted a trip in the Bob Marshall. Go down there on the river and fish. Down on the South Fork. There's a lot of it that's no brush or nothing. White River. Boy that's a beautiful river. White rocks. Not too many great big holes. The last time I was in there, and that was a long time ago, under pretty near every one of them riffles, rock, behind a little rock, a nice fish.

The old cook used to...I'd cut the tails and the heads off and they'd be about that long [20 inches]. Just fry them. Same way out of the Big Salmon Lake. In the fall, you could catch those.

They weighed a pound, pound and a half; big old chunky fellas. There's where you could catch a bull trout if you wanted to catch a bull trout. Over there in that Big Salmon there. Clear to the falls, them bull trout lay in there. We used to catch a few of them. Go down to the lake. We caught a few right by camp. Go down to the lake right by the deep holes. We'd fish for the natives. Pretty quick, we'd see them all come out and get on the lure, throw it in there and catch you a great big bull trout. He chased them out of there. Going to eat on them.

SV: When I was here one time, you talked a little bit about salt licks. Were there any natural salt licks on the Missions side?

HH: Not that I know of.

SV: What about above Hemlock?

HH: Must be mineral ground. Clay ground. Mineral in the soil. I don't know if I told you before, but down there on the river, just before the Salmon Forks, big old high cliff. They'd come clear from Brownie and Tango, which is six or seven miles along the ridges. Along the trail, the brush would just be white where they'd been dragging through it. They come down that far to get to that salt. I walked up there and looked down. They couldn't hear you at all. You'd look down there and there would be four or five of them down there.

There was a big salt lick up across the river on the mountain. Lick Creek got started—Lick Lake and that—all over a big salt lick. It was half as big as this house. Where they'd dug it out and eat it out. Last time I was there, there was not a sign. The only one I know of was down on the river. This is the ones I know of. I'd bet that one there is because it's a bank. Keeps sloughing down. These others are just right on the flat. I think they just give up.

SV: I better ask you about forest fires and get it on tape. Let's see, 1929. You were born in '17. You were old enough to remember what was going on in '29.

HH: Yeah. [Homesteaders were burning slash]. They had quite a fire going. The weather got real hot, windy. Away we went. It didn't last that long. It made its big run in the afternoon. Mostly just one afternoon. The rest of it, they were putting it out so it didn't get away again. It snowed, rained and snowed. I imagine they were probably a couple weeks on it. Fire camp.

SV: What kind of country was it?

HH: Lodgepole. Windfalls. One of the best things that ever happened to that country. There was windfalls, go into some of those places, look just like a log house, the ends. Up like that. Out there toward old Roxcene's place, and Stoner's over by them. It got into that. Best thing that ever happened to the ground. They took a lot out of the big stuff, the old larch that didn't burn. They've logged a lot out of there. They're getting a lot of good posts and stuff out of there now. Didn't get nothing before.

SV: Tell me what happened. You said you had to be evacuated.

HH: We left in the evening. Suitcase full of clothing. A milk cow. Russ, he was a baby in the wheelbarrow. Away we went; went down here to the neighbors. Old Jack Johnson had a team and wagon. He picked a bunch of us up. They took us down to Condon Ranger Station. If they had to, they were going to take us out, but that night it rained. It just kind of was the second day, more or less. It was coming quite a ways. People stood out there in the rain and sang. We were back home again. It didn't burn anywhere anybody lived. It burned some where the place was just sitting there. Deegan's—that's Mrs. Jette's place—it burned there. And her grandmother's place [Whalen].

SV: The Roll school burned too, didn't it?

HH: Yeah, but the Rolls they stayed there. They didn't burn out but it went all over them.

SV: What did it sound like?

HH: Just like a wind blowing, real hard. Sound like your stove, the draft. Boy it creates a draft. It jumped the road or something like that. It didn't make no difference. It'd just sail across the road or the creek.

SV: Could you see a glow from it?

HH: I bet you could see a glow from it! Smoke. Yes, you bet. They had that fire up there, in what we call the blow down, up at Lindbergh. When they had that fire, it jumped clear across that lake. They had quite a lot of fire over across the lake from it. Distance don't make that much difference.

We had a fire down there in Idaho and it jumped clear across the canyon. It never touched the trees on the bottom. We had a big fire camp and we had to run and just left it. There was a few sleeping bags burnt out on the edge, and the rest of the camp was setting right there. With a tub full of doughnuts that the cook had made. Boy he got in there and they was really going to feed us. We'd been on rations. They moved this big camp in like today. They set up and they cooked all night. Had a big breakfast. We went out on the fire. By three o'clock we were gone. We lost it, and run. The men that come through camp, they'd grab a doughnut! We went down three or four miles and there was a little opening. Creek. We stayed there. The fire didn't come on down then. We went on down to the Lochsa ranger station. Wasn't no roads then. The next day, that afternoon, it burned over there and at night.

SV: No stopping it?

HH: We never done nothing, but run! And work hard when we did. When a fire wants to go, there isn't much of anything to stop it—when you get enough cover, enough junk. That country over there was just all windfalls and brush and...

SV: Was that kind of a windy area?

HH: No, it was just a cycle of lodgepole that fell over.

SV: Maybe there had been some fires in there before.

HH: Yeah, there was. They rotted and fell over. A lot of that happening. When we first come here, this was a lot of windfalls, up here to Newmans. Trees that fell over. They dry, once it gets...and you overstory; it's coming back. Young stuff, fir, and larch and stuff. If it gets up in the top of it, it's gone.

SV: I bet everybody like you say, was standing out in the rain, singing!

HH: You bet. Anybody that's lost their place, they didn't have no money. Had a lot of hard work in their homes. I imagine the ones that burned there were railroaders. Some of them didn't live there anyway. But the ones that lived there...Yessir, it stopped right out up there by the place just above Ann Jette. That old fellow there that had the last place that they come close to, he said, "Well I come here with a pack on my back. I guess that's the way I'm going out." That's all he had. (laughs)

SV: Face reality, I guess. You said it burned all winter.

HH: It burned in that peat there by Nelsons. Smoked in there. Just like peat bogs, they talk about fires getting in it. Back there in Ireland they never go out; it keeps driving ahead. Just plumb full of them little tiny roots. Just like fuel. It's just the best fuel in the world. They burn a lot of it back in Ireland. They do in [other places] too. Build houses with it. Whatever works. But them big old blocks of that stuff.

SV: Change the subject. Do you know where the Condon name came from?

HH: Not for sure. I think it's named after somebody. The guy at the Forest Service ought to have that.

SV: They don't.

HH: They throw away everything old. I was thinking today. You had to keep a daily diary at the headquarters. And you had to do it at the lookout, too. Wouldn't it be something if they had saved that? Instead of just one year and they threw them away. Threw them in the fire and burned them. At the lookouts we had to keep a...went to water, crawled up on the tower,

whatever we done. We had to write it down. They set there; like in Monture Ranger Station, over in Seeley, all of them, the dispatcher had to write down everything. All day long. Took care of the telephone. I called in a certain time. Called in a fire. Trail crew called in.

SV: There must be some of those around.

HH: I don't suppose old Stilwell ever kept any of that stuff.

SV: He said he didn't.

HH: He probably didn't. People like him had the chance in the world [to keep stuff]. In the supervisor's office. Everything has to go in there.

SV: We'll just have to find some of that stuff.

[End of Interview]