

Maureen and Mike

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Oral History Number: 172-037

Interviewee: Paul Sulinski

Interviewer: Nick Sundt

Date of Interview: July 13, 1983

Project: Nick Sundt Smokejumpers Oral History Project

Nick Sundt: I just going to be plugging this in. This is the monitor—it monitors the tape after it's recorded so I can actually hear...there's kind of a delay. Every now and then, I'll plug it in. I guess what I'd like to start off with is just...all I know is your name. I believe I've got that right. It is Paul Sulinski.

Paul Sulinski: Yeah, Paul Sulinski—S-u-l-i-n-s-k-i.

NS: S-u—

PS: I-i-n-s-k-i.

NS: s-k-y.

PS: I.

NS: Sorry, I.

I don't really know anything about you besides that, and I believe somebody said you rookied with Moody [William "Bill" Moody].

PS: Well, no, I think it the year after I started at Winthrop in '59. I was jumping with him in '59 and '61, and then I jumped up in Alaska in '62. Then I was gone for 12 years, came back to Winthrop in '74-'75, and I've been jumping up here in Alaska since '76.

NS: God, where do I start on that? Let's go back up just a little bit and tell me a little about your background, maybe where you were born and raised and kind of how you ended up in the jumper program.

PS: I was raised out of Jersey City, New Jersey, and 17, I hitchhiked across country and wound up out West. Went in the Marine Corps for a couple of years and came out and worked for the Forest Service. I was on a trail crew in Washington. They got a lookout, and I heard about jumpers and decided I had to do it. So next year I got to be a jumper.

[someone whistling in the background]

NS: How old were you then when you—

PS: About 21. I'm 46 now.

NS: Were most of the guys who you started out with about that age?

PS: Yeah, that age...more young guys, I think, at that time. They'd stay for a few seasons. There were some old guys, but there wasn't as many now. More young guys at that time. Less guys were married at that time—a lot of college students and forestry students who jumped for a year or two to see what it was like and did something else.

NS: What was it like in Winthrop way back then?

PS: I kind of liked it. We had a small crew, and being from back East, I just thought the West was great. The Methow Valley is beautiful and [unintelligible] Northern Cascades as well. I think you have the first mountains are the ones you love the most, and I really like the Cascades. I like the Sierras and Alaskas, but the Northern Cascades are really beautiful. And the Methow Valley was really pretty. The highway wasn't in back then—that Hart's Pass Highway so it was real quiet and it was just fun.

NS: Secluded.

PS: Yeah, it really was. It was real pleasant for me. Met a lot of those old-time packers and people like that. That was kind of nice.

NS: Do you remember much about the people who you were working with then—what their backgrounds were, where they came from?

PS: One guy was a doctor—he was going for a doctorate. He was in med school. Then we had quite a few forestry students, as I remember. Then a lot of guys were from the Methow Valley vicinity. Lufkin [Francis Lufkin] got a lot of guys from around Tonasket in Washington for some reason. We didn't have a lot of out-of-state people at that time. I think that changed a lot after a while. Maybe that's the people who recruited. I think they probably just got people who were close in who they knew and who worked in the forest or something like that. But there were a lot more people who were definitely around that area in the Winthrop area—Eastern Washington and Western Washington area.

NS: So how do you account for that change now?

PS: I kind of think that probably more people started hearing about it possibly. At that time, they just kind of took people they knew and who had worked on the Forest Service and things like that. That was my impression—that was my limited impression. But I think probably more people heard about jumping as the years went on—more people applied.

NS: What about the actual selection process itself? Was Lufkin still through the years that you were in Winthrop, was he still just as involved in the selection process as he was at the very beginning, or did he start losing some of his control over that?

PS: No, no. When I was hired, I think it was Hal Wyman (?) and Francis. They really liked to see someone personally, who came up and talked to them. I was hired by mail. But I think they kind of like to have someone come up, and they wanted someone who was really interested and enthusiastic about the job and they figured that was a good way of telling—talking to the guy and whatever. Again, that's my impression so I never was [unintelligible] position but it was kind of—

NS: Tell me a little bit about Lufkin. When was the first time you saw him and talked to him?

PS: Oh goodness, he was like a legend in '59. I mean he was always pleasant to me, and he was just a legend—just an old timer, and an old timer back then.

NS: You'd heard a lot about him before you even went there?

PS: No, no. I didn't know anything about him. I just knew there was smoke jumpers, and I just kind of...In fact, I applied to Washington, that was the only place I applied. I was lucky to get hired there were so many people applying actually. I got a pretty good recommendations from the forest I'd worked [unintelligible]. It was kind of like I just walked in sight unseen. I just felt right at home. It was great. I loved it.

NS: Do you remember your first day there? What happened when you got there?

PS: I had already come out of the Marine Corps. I'd been through Marine Corps boot camp, so I didn't pay much attention to rookie harassment and I was in top physical shape so I had no problems going through the training. I wanted to jump. I wanted to do that. I enjoyed working in the forest and I like fighting fire and I was young and gung-ho. I thought that was great, I wanted to jump in the fires. It just seemed like a lot of fun.

NS: What was training like?

PS: It was hot. [laughs] I remember that. As I said, it was pretty tiring, but the lucky thing was I felt I was in real good shape. I'd been down Florida that spring, and I was working out and running a lot. So that helped me a lot. I thought we had a real good training. I liked...the trainers did a real good job. It wasn't too much different for nowadays, I think, it was a smaller crew. It was a little more intense and more and more man-to-man contact that way so had more time than having a big rookie—we had a big rookie crew for Winthrop. It was nine people that year. That was a pretty good size, good crew, I think.

NS: Did you go through an initiation? Was there an initiation back then?

PS: Yeah. Well. Not as much now. I have a personal thing about that, I think. I like to see rookies get some flak a little bit to keep them in shape, but I'm not for this fraternity initiation. I never went through that myself. I wouldn't do it, and I don't give it to other people. There's a line you draw. It's nice to give rookies shit, so make them want to do the job. But the frat initiation, I don't really like that. I don't think a lot of smoke jumpers like that.

NS: Did you go through that at all?

PS: No, no, no. I think that got heavy after a while a little bit more, and it wasn't so—there were some people who pushed that, but it wasn't really. I never liked it, and I never did it or stood for it. So that's how I felt. But also it was kind of like the physical part, you accepted that—when you learned, you learned from the old jumpers and things like that. But you got to the point where the guys who were really giving you good information and who were giving you shit because they wanted you to be a jumper and guys who were just harassing you. I think a lot of guys were giving me good information. They were trying to get me to get that stimulus to perform [unintelligible] and do a good job.

NS: Did everybody live on base there?

PS: I think so. There's a lot more guys who are married now. At that time, most of the guys lived on the base. Some of the squad leaders were married, and they lived around Winthrop or Twisp, but actually, there were a lot more single guys back then as I remember. Yeah, it was real nice because we had real good cooking facilities—the cooks and the food [unintelligible] always excellent there.

NS: You had this fairly prolonged absence there. What was it for?

PS: Twelve years.

NS: What happened? What were you doing during the 12 years and what, why did you come back?

PS: See, I was a high school dropout. I never finished high school and then I got married and went to school and I got a couple of degrees and a credential. Got married a couple of times. I don't know. I kind of dropped out of smoke jumping. It was nice getting away from it. I'm glad I did. And I just kind of went working back for the Forest Service, and I had a Recreation Tech job in California. I just put out applications just for the heck of it and got hired, so came back in '74. It was real great.

NS: Now, that was back at Winthrop in '74?

PS: Yeah. I was 37 years old, and I came back and felt great.

NS: Okay. God, I'm real interested in hearing what kind of differences, what kind of changes you saw in a 12-year period at Winthrop.

PS: In essence for me, it was like I felt I was 21. I never really felt...I was an athlete, I got into sports and everything, but since I didn't finish high school, I never really got into college. I worked my way through. I think jumping was like a group I belonged to. I felt real close contact with guys, and it was kind of like...I'm losing track of what I was getting at. It was like being on the winning football team in high school, and guys talk about all their life and never go back. I felt I went back. That's exactly how I felt. I went back, and it was great. The differences were: the airplanes were a little faster; the chutes were better. I think it was more safe—definitely more safe. I had two malfunctions in the old days, and chutes were a lot better. I noticed there was less opening shock. They turned better. I just felt there was a real safety factor—a lot more safety. On the negative side, it was a little more intense, a little more crazy. It was a little more too speeded up. I like that slow aspect of the old days.

NS: I mean, the actual parachute was slower?

PS: No, no, no. I meant the whole firefighting atmosphere. It wasn't just the smokejumping. It came down from the whole firefighting atmosphere. I just seemed in that 12 years there was more of an intensity of...It's hard to explain. I think it was more of a...It wasn't neglect. It was a laid-back attitude more. It wasn't like lazy attitude, but it was like it got real intense. You got more of a “zzzz,” kind of a speed up thing, which I felt—I still feel that's unnecessary in a lot of ways. It seems to be a tendency with the firefighting.

NS: Now, you had a change in leadership at that point too, by then.

PS: Yeah, Bill was in charge.

NS: Did that introduce any kind of changes there?

PS: [pauses] Not really too much. I really think one thing. I think that Bill was probably, since he was younger and he had worked with a lot of the guys, he had more communication with them. But I don't really think...And Francis' personality—he was more of a quiet person too. I don't think it was... Bill was younger, and there was a little more communication with [unintelligible]. That doesn't take anything against Francis. I think he was just kind of—he was, he was in a world by himself in a sense. He was a legend in his time in that sense.

NS: You had the '60s—the great period of the '60s in there with the long hair and the drugs and everything else. I've heard from most of the people I've talked to that seemed to have had—all the jumper programs went through quite a—

PS: I missed that.

NS: —quite a period.

PS: because I was living in Haight Ashbury in San Francisco and Berkeley at the time, so I was going through it then.

NS: Oh, were you in Berkeley? I went to school there.

PS: I was going to San Francisco State, in fact. In '68, I went through the strike [student strike at San Francisco State College]. I was [unintelligible]

NS: So you know all about Hayakawa [Samual Haykawa].

PS: Yeah, I went through a different phase, and I came back and I wasn't even into that. I intended to wear my hair where I wanted to, and if I wanted to wear a beard, it was fine. But by the time I came back in '74, you could do what you wanted to do, I mean, in that sense. I say do what you wanted to do, as long as you kept yourself clean and groomed and everything like that. Cut your beard and shit, and nobody bothered me about that at all. I've never been bugged about that. I guess that was the time that I was gone, thank goodness.

NS: Were there any changes in the kind of people that were there when you came back as opposed to kind of people that were there when you left? Was Moody the only person left, who—

PS: Yeah. So it was kind of...Bill's a personal friend in that sense. And again, I was 37 so the guys seemed younger, but I didn't feel...what's the word, out of sync at all. I just fit right in. In fact, I have a lot of old friends who are still in that crew. It's kind of nice.

NS: Who were some of the people that were...Are any of those guys that you came back to in '74 still jumping now?

PS: Oh, yeah. Jerry Bushnell (?). Jamie...A lot of these guys were rookies too in the '70s. Jamie Tackman (?). I know Reno and Steele, and a lot of people I've...No, I met Steele up here in Alaska. That's right. I didn't know him down here. I also came back in '74, they trained...They opened the La Grande [Oregon] base so half the guys that rookie—I went through old man's training, but half the guys went down to La Grande that year, too. So, a lot of the guys I met casually, they left, so they split the crew up that year.

NS: Is that when Vickers (?) went?

PS: Yeah, Vickers was there too. That was kind of the transition, so a lot of guys—and Pino (?), I just met him. Not Buck, I mean John. I jumped with Buck in the old days, but John, his brother, I just met him and he moved down to La Grande. So he knew a lot of those guys that I made

contact with, but I didn't really, I never jumped with them. White's another guy. Some of these guys came up in '76 when I started in Alaska. I know some of those guys joined Steele and Hayes Perkins (?) and Nemore (?), people like that.

NS: Let's see...Can you think of any differences at all between the early '60s or the late '50s?

PS: It's really funny. I banged around that, and it's kind of sometimes it seems like a dream I go back too far and then—from my perspective, it's similar a lot of ways. It hasn't changed a lot. You're still doing the same thing—you're out there and the jumping's fun. I've always enjoyed it. You're out there beating fires out. The big difference to me is—and this is a firefighting line—that little more intensity, a little more of a buzz going. I think we could probably slow up. I'd like to see them slow up a little bit. Like up here, we had Doug and the goose, and now we're pushing for speed. I'm not sure how much we buy with that, but that's my aspect on that.

NS: What happened after '74? Can you go through that? How long were you in Winthrop, and then when you went to, came to Alaska, why did you come up here?

PS: I was there for two years, and then we started having split work weeks. I've never been very happy with the bureaucracy, and I could see it coming into Winthrop and coming in the Forest Service. I just came up here. I never stayed in one place more than two years usually for working. I came up here sight unseen, and I just fit right in up here. I like this crew. It's one of the best crews, and Al Dunton is one of the best people I ever worked for. I really enjoy being up here in Alaska with the Alaska smokejumpers.

NS: You've stayed here longer than two years?

PS: I've been here, it's my 8th year or so. I like the country up here. I can go on about this crew for a while. [laughs]

NS: Go right ahead. I was going to ask. That's something that I really need to get as much information as I can on it.

PS: There's a really unique thing happening here. In fact, if you get a guy named Murry Taylor—he lives in Northern California—he'd be a neat guy to talk to.

NS: What was the name?

PS: Murry Taylor. He's an ex-jumper. If you ever can get hold of him, he'd really give you a good interview.

NS: Is he up here?

PS: No, he's not a jumper anymore. He's living down...he lives around Yreka (?). You could find that out from—he's a friend of Davis Perkins (?) and Russell. We all know him. He was a DS-9. [unintelligible] down in Los Padres or Palm Springs and came back to jumping. He's quite a character. It was really unique bunch of individuals up here. It was a real more looseness up here, and I don't—that's not any individual. It's the Forest Service became more bureaucratic. It wasn't the people getting away with anything. It was just more responsibility with the older guys. I don't know—I just like it up here, and I still do.

NS: How many of the people here at that time, and even now, are roughly what kind of percentage were Forest Service—I guess you'd call them—refugees, and how many were people that just came up here and rookied and started out here?

PS: Well, in '62, when I was up here, I was up here one year in '62, there was nobody up here was a rookie. Everybody was Forest Service people refugees. We had about a 30-man crew, and we'd get about 24 from Missoula. They had some rookies—a couple in '76. I'm not sure exactly when they started the rookie program—wasn't much earlier than that, and they were very small groups of four or five rookies, three rookies. Most the guys came up from the south, and it's been more...you can probably find that out, eight or ten people may have been the most rookies they've had in Alaska. There's a lot of people come up from the south, ex-Forest Service jumpers are most of the people up here.

NS: I guess that might in part explain why there's a definite feeling here about the down south, the lower 48-ers. Is that just common to Alaskans generally, or is that something particularly strong with the jumpers?

PS: It's kind of like, they're family. We get a lot of guys from McCall and Redding. In fact, they ask us about guys who want to come up here, and we talk about who—"Do you have any suggestions about a guy you think is a good worker and would make a good jumper up here." We've turned them in and said "Hey, this guy might be good, and if he can qualify"—whatever the score is on his application. So, there is a crew input, is what I'm saying, to some of the guys that are hired, which I like—there is crew input up here that has been over the past years. I think you get guys who are—I don't know, it's funny. I was trying to find the word for it. There's more openness up here, more looseness. Yet there's responsibility taken by people. It's just been a pleasure. A lot of that comes from Al Dunton. Alan Dunton is the best boss I've ever worked for.

NS: What's his background?

PS: I don't know. I'm really not—he's an aerial fire coordinator. He [unintelligible] the next step in the business, but he started up again somewhere in the early '70s. One of the other guys could probably tell you more about that. I know Al personally in that sense, but I don't know much about his background, because I wasn't here. There was nobody here from that '62 crew. Again, it was like I was—

NS: Yeah, totally different.

PS: It was an interesting bunch. It was just like a kind of a bunch of individuals, and kind of almost semi-desperadoes who got together. It was a unique aspect of allowing people to be themselves. I've always liked that. To me, jumping has never been—and one thing in Winthrop, I think you had to fit more of the macho image. There was kind of [unintelligible] front, but underneath that you had everything else going on. Up here, there wasn't the necessity to do that so strongly. But in both places, I've always like jumpers because I just don't find them these macho superman. I find them very sensitive people, intelligent people, and I enjoy working with them. I've had a lot of friends and even off...even on a jump or on the fire—lots of things to talk about, people who are interested in things, well-read people, sensitive people—

NS: It's pretty surprising.

PS: —well-educated. I like that like. I really enjoy it. I'm interested in a lot of things and a compulsive reader. I have great conversations with people around the fire—good friendships—and it's been real nice.

NS: Something that I haven't asked you yet. What do you do during the off-season?

PS: Oh, I've been skiing for about 25 years, and I drift around and just kind of—I've been semi-retired. I call myself retired. My off-season's my responsibility to entertain myself, which I like doing that.

NS: Do you earn an income during that part of the year, or do you—

PS: Usually not. I've been ski patrol a couple of winters. I usually wind up—I love May, September, and October are my favorite months. So if I can get them free, I like to be out in the woods and just out by the ocean or something. I wind up collecting unemployment maybe two months a year because I'm traveling in that time. That kind of gives me a little extra money. But usually when I make here, I have a very low lifestyle so I can go on—it's kind of like a seasonal migrant. I mean that's a real, I think, another aspect of the job that draws people in. You can make enough money to make it through if you have a low lifestyle, low profile. In fact, I just reread *Walden* on the fire—couple last fires—for about the 6th, 7th time, and I thoroughly agree with Thoreau, we're here to do more than make money in our lives. You get out with people in the woods like that in those situations, and they open up and you're really get a contact with everybody. That's really pleasant. I mean you can work here with guys—even jumpers can work here on the base with them and do things with them—you know them, but there's something about going out with a guy for three days, a couple guys, and the mosquitoes and the dirt and work, and you get around the campfire and it's really amazing the transition in people. I love it. I kind of do my own little studying. You can open up and be yourself. That's

another element. I really like that. You can open up and be yourself in this job. I really feel—I feel real freedom. Given a lot of freedom in a sense [unintelligible].

NS: It seems to be quite different from down south where people are much more—things are just generally more regimented.

PS: Again, working with these...I've been working with down south—these Missoula guys, Redding, and all kinds, Yellowstone—and the guys are the same. I've made a lot of friendships now, but there's an overall regimentation that's there. I was talking to a Missoula guy. We had a fire for five days—a couple Missoula people, we jumped about seven loads over there in Canada—and so we did a lot of mop up and we caught the fire. They dropped us all over to catch the fire. We discussed [unintelligible] and that kind of thing. I don't know. I think it starts with a regimentation and not giving guys enough responsibility, and up here, they give guys a little more responsibility and not so much regimentation. I think it's worked up here. During a [unintelligible], when the first guy in the door is the fire boss. You know you might be the fire boss next time, so you don't want to be saying, "Well, fuck that guy. I'll let him do all the work." You help each other because next time, you'll be fire boss. It's not always the same people who are fire boss, and it's good to do that.

The rookies are handled—I really notice the rookies get more responsibility. We let them [unintelligible]. We want them to do things. We want them to get out—and they tend in some places to them rookies for two or three years. If a guy proves himself and he wants to do something, he can do something up here.

NS: I found that really striking myself—the treatment that the rookies got.

PS: [unintelligible] I'm going on about this, I consider myself a smokejumper first. I like this job, and not an Alaska smokejumper, I mean. But it just so happens I'm up here because I think it's the best place to be jumping right now. It's the freest place, and that's why I'm up here. It's nice country, but it was nice going the Colorado detail. I like the country down there too. I really like Washington and everything, but I just got tired of a lot of the regimentation of the Forest Service. That's no individual [unintelligible]. It's no individual. It's just the whole Forest Service procedure down there and the whole government bureaucracy is too strong down there. You come up here—well, the people around here too who move up to Alaska that way, I think, it kind of expands off into the BLM up here the way people work up here.

NS: Do you see that kind of process eventually taking place here—that kind of slow regimentation?

PS: Yeah. I'm not sure where I'll go next. I thought about maybe Siberia, but the Russians are even worse than we are. They're really bad. You wouldn't want...But I also see it extending—over the past year I've gone out and made a point of getting new BLM people too, not just jumpers. I have a lot of friends out there—a lot of people I like—and I think it extends out

through that whole organization, not just the jumpers. It's hard to explain unless you work under it. You can't put your finger on it exactly. I mean, I'm not saying that people—that it's so loose and crazy and do all crazy things. It's not that at all. It's almost just like allowing people a little bit—allowing them a little bit. It's funny—when you allow people a little bit, they do take that responsibility. That's been my observation. You give people that opportunity to take responsibility and they will. That kind of makes it real nice up here. A lot of people are leaving down there because they came up here for that reason—they feel that. Even the country's like that. It's just wild. I've been up in the Brooks range, now, for about three jumps—we've been gone all week here—and it's beautiful out there. It just goes on forever—bears, Dahl sheep, streams full of fish, you can sit down and take a bath and drink in the stream. I mean that's going down south. It's a real uniqueness, a real uniqueness. If I wasn't...I'd go out in the woods anyway, go hiking, a backpacker, a river runner, a skier.

NS: If you can get paid for it.

PS: Yeah, and I could pay for it. I'm more restricted, but I'd be doing that and I'd be doing it in the summertime and work in the wintertime—a teacher or something and in the summertime backpacking, climbing, and things.

NS: Do you bring a fishing rod or anything with you on your fires?

PS: No. I've been a vegetarian for 14 years so, which I find real easy too, up here. There are two of us, I'm the only one and people just accept that—whatever your gig is.

NS: How do you survive on fires?

PS: No problem. It's no problem. If I got lost and didn't have any food for three days, I'd eat fish or a moose.

NS: But normally the C-rats [C-rations] aren't really oriented towards a vegetarian.

PS: Oh, well it's no worse on me than anybody else really. The meat dish is real small and mostly the garbage anyway, so the C-rats are C-rats—they're not very good food.

NS: You go ahead and eat it anyway?

PS: No, I don't eat the meat part, but there's plenty of other things. I mean really, you don't really lose anything, and C-rats are C-rats. You can't do any better. That's the best they can do, and they do the best they can with—and we have a lot of dried fruit and things like that. Just so much you can do with C-rats or that kind of—because you have to store those fire packs. Some bases they have individual choice—you pick things up—we couldn't do that. We just move around too much, so that's no problem at all. That's never been a problem. Even the fresh food, we get fresh food drops—they have onions and carrots and potatoes and all kinds of things like

that. So, there's plenty to eat. We have a fix on protein in this society and we eat too much meat—that's one of our problems. It's not the fact, anything wrong with eating meat, we just eat too much of it. Anything too much can be like that.

NS: Just trying to think of other things that might be unique about jumping up here. What kind of—

PS: Oh, the square program. The square program. That could have never gotten off down south.

NS: Tell me about how did it get started and how's it working out.

PS: It's Jim Veatch and Al Dunton. Jim Veatch had the idea, and it's just Jim Veatch's character. He's a real intelligent person who's willing to do things like that. Al backed him. Al kind of ran the...what'd you say? It wasn't involvement, but you could see that kind of ran interference for him. The BLM was open enough to allow that program. I just watched it, and I want to get trained this summer. I probably would have tried last summer, but I was looking for a teaching job up here. So I wasn't really—I wasn't sure what I was going to do. But I see it as being much safer now. I was dubious. I'm watching, and I see it's much safer and it's something that the Forest Service would never have done. Not because any specific individual down there wouldn't want to do it, but they're just too—

NS: Nature of the beast.

PS: Too uptight. Of course, you have the potential that someone could really mess up with it, but then again with people with good training, you've trained rookies up here and they can come in much better on the spot—you can jump them in winds. It's just a good, a real good, safety feature. [unintelligible] handling. [unintelligible] try-out in Colorado this summer—that should be interesting.

NS: Oh, they haven't used those in Colorado yet?

PS: No, they're going to take them down there and try them. I don't see any reason why they shouldn't be effective down there. The only place they might—in the big trees—but I'm not even sure about that. That should be interesting. Because there's no big trees in Colorado, just on the West Coast. That's a real innovation. I mean, I don't think anyone realizes the innovation—it just hit me last summer—of what was done. This time—the guys put in their own time, like Jim Veatch and Lundo (?). A whole mess of people [unintelligible], and it's a real innovation. It reflects that openness up here, I think.

NS: Are there any other examples, maybe not as dramatic, but any other examples of maybe small things that you think are innovations up here that might not have occurred down there—just any kind of innovation you think of that's important?

PS: Yeah, yeah, I think there's something else—also again, firefighting's a little different up here too. Down there, you have more commercial timber and more people and more watershed and you're protecting a commodity so to say. Where up here, if 1,000 acre burns, it really doesn't do that much damage. I'm not saying...I can see firefighting from a person—I'm a geographer and biologist. I mean, that's my background. I'm really interested in ecology and stuff like that, so I'm into the aspect of plants and land, landforms and such. You know, you're not really doing that much damage with fires, and yet you don't want to have them all go burning everything up, so I can see a process of [unintelligible] possibly coming up, like the Park Service is doing but I don't know—that's not my line anyway. I'm just a [unintelligible] jumper, but I'm still curious.

Oh, going along with that, I was going to say that I think there's more opportunity for guys to get out on fire and do things they want to do. Like if you want to be a line boss or a sector boss and get that kind of experience, there's a lot of opportunity for guys. Personally, I'm not too much into big fires, but if a guy is, boy, they'll give you the room. If you want to rig up here, you want to get the [unintelligible] on explosives—talking to some of the Missoula guys and such that come up with the rookie guys. I don't know why, but there's just less opportunity for a guy until he stays around a while and kind of gets in a clique or something. I really feel there's more openness. I really feel that, again as I say. It sounds like I'm prejudiced for Alaska jumpers, but that's why I'm up here and that's one reason why I'm up here.

NS: Let me switch this real fast [referring to audio cassette]

[Break in audio]

PS: I think a lot of guys—that's why I say, Murry, Murry Taylor is really verbal on a lot of this stuff. I've had these great discussions with him—and a lot of us have talked about that—was trying to put a lot of input into keeping the base that way, keeping it open [unintelligible]. It was real nice that there was a good communication going across and between overhead. There was not so much of a distinction between overhead and people, who were so-called grunts or so—it was more like a team kind of thing. It still is. It still is that way. There's a lot of camaraderie in that sense. It's just the opportunity—the room—to do things. Like I've been the gardener for the past two years. I started working the garden so—

NS: You're responsible for the garden.

PS: Well, John [unintelligible] and I. Other people work in it—I'm just saying that that's been my main business. Planting the trees, about '78 we put the trees in. So you say, I'm going to go do that."

"Okay, great. You do a good job doing it."

It's really fun, and they give you room to do that. If there's something has to be done, of course, on the fire [unintelligible], you go in and pack chutes or whatever has to be done, but

during the slack time, you're not so much doing busy work. We try to stay away from busy work and do something that guys want to do—anything. There is work that has to be done, we do that too. What I'm saying is that they don't make you do busy work in that sense.

NS: If there's nothing to do, then—

PS: Yeah, it's that atmosphere. Then someone finds something to do. Whatever. Like beautification. You go out there and do the lawn or do something else.

NS: Doesn't necessarily have to be mandated from above.

PS: The amazing things that come about that---it's kind of like I get to the education process, permissive education and then extreme, real strict education. It's almost like—I don't think it's either one of those, but like here, so it's like if you give someone a room, I don't see a lot of people sitting around a lot. I mean I'll sit around if you come out here and you don't feel good one day. You say, "Well, I don't feel good."

You say, "Okay, take it easy for a while," but [unintelligible].

[audio quality decreases; likely due to wind and background noise]

NS: I was talking to [unintelligible] it sounds like I'm getting down [unintelligible] Forest Service, but let me ask you this. Nemore [Steve Nemore¹] was telling me that—we were talking about hiring practices up here as opposed to down there and reasons why you wouldn't get hired down south and reasons why you wouldn't get hired up here. He says one reason why you wouldn't get hired up here is if you don't work because that's really the only thing that would cause you not to get hired if you don't work.

PS: Up here?

NS: Yeah. You say that people keep busy and all, is there any kind of element in there when people are working of any kind of in the back of their mind concern about, 'well, if I don't make myself busy, if I don't find something to do—'

PS: No, yeah. That's exactly about—when he says you don't work, I mean, everybody works on the fire and if there's a job to be done, people do it, something that comes up. You have, not so much worry [pauses]...There's just nobody who sits around does nothing. That doesn't happen, but [unintelligible] push, this pressure to keep busy or keep [unintelligible]. That's [unintelligible] freedom to [unintelligible]. If something came up that you wanted to do, you could do it. Again, I knew that would be [unintelligible]—if I want to make a bench—one guy wanted to make a bench. We [unintelligible] picnic tables, and we didn't have them out there

¹ Referring to oral history interview with Steve Nemore, OH 172-036 of the Nick Sundt Smokejumpers Oral History Project.

and he made a picnic table. [unintelligible] and he made this great picnic table. This guy, in his slack time, that's what he did. No one said, "No, you can't do that. and you got to go over and make chutes." There are enough guys to make chutes. Things like that.

NS: What are the occasions around here in Fairbanks—the jumper base—for celebration or get-togethers. What kind of—like down south, we'll have a party when somebody has a 50th jump or 100th jump. There might be a few other occasions at the end of the year—the determination party. There's rookie party—the rookies give the old men a party when they make it through. Are there any kind of things like that up here, or things that you do that are done every year for some reason or another?

PS: The first one was that—in fact, the first year it started was '76 with the annual pig party. That's kind of become a combination of a get-together, a rookie party, and everything. It's probably the first party you have when everybody—just before the fire season when everybody comes back. We wind up—the rookies have finished their training. Also, it's just getting together. It's gotten a little more mellow. It's not quite as wild. People aren't out there throwing one another around as much. It's more you wind up sitting around talking, "What'd you do this winter," that kind of thing—getting back in contact. Because it's nice to be up here in the summer and then it's nice to leave. Get tired of guys too. Everybody goes for the winter and does their thing and comes back, and everybody's curious about you've done this winter. I think that's probably our big occasion—the pig party. I think Troy [unintelligible] the pig. He [unintelligible] the pig and gets some beer. It's real nice. We have it up here at Birch Hill (?), so it's out of the way of everything.

NS: Troy is the guy who operates a lot of the aircraft?

PS: Right. [unintelligible]. Then guys jump in—[unintelligible] jump in and that kind of thing. It's a nice party. Well actually, we've had a lot of lawn parties. And that's from Big Mac, we have a jumper fund. Mac McMurtry (?) is a character. There's a couple characters up here.

NS: Who are the characters, and why?

PS: McMurtry's a character because he kind of knows where everything is. He takes care of the jumper fund. He's gotten the...what do you call that movie thing back there?

NS: Video cassette player.

PS: Yeah, he's got that. Got movies for us. He kind of sells T-shirts and saves the money, and he gets food from the mess hall and invites people over for the party. We probably have about two or three lawn parties, and it's been nice having the lawn real nice and the garden over there and invite people over. Same thing—it's a get-together. People can talk off the job and just kind of get the rap and try and get more ladies out there, that kind of thing. It's kind of more difficult—we have [unintelligible] people bouncing back and forth. So, it's really hard to get

everybody together at a specific time. Usually the big parties and termination parties—people terminate at different times—[unintelligible].

NS: Always a tough thing to get together.

[unintelligible speaker in background]

PS: Yeah, it's been a while. I haven't been on a fire with Bill for...god, let's see...'61. No, no, not '61...I think, '74, '75.

NS: Long time.

PS: Yeah, it was back in the '60s, I haven't been on a fire with him.

NS: No kidding! What did you talk about?

PS: We didn't really—there was seven of us out there, I mean, eight of us out there, so I didn't get together just with Bill. It was all of us talking. It was kind of nice; it was pleasant.

NS: [unintelligible].

PS: Seven o'clock. [laughs] I was surprised because he said he was going to come at 8:00, and I figured it would be at 10:00. The first time in my life when a planned plan helicopter came in an hour early. [laughs]. We woke up at 7:00 because we got off about 1:00, and we stayed up two hours talking by the campfire. We all went to bed it was real cold, and he came in about 7:00. So we just shut him down and put all [unintelligible]. It was kind of wild—like déjà vu there. I told bill he looked like me with his stubble, I said, "Let's go catch a freight. We look like two bums on the road."

Basically, I think it's the similarity of the comradeship and the communication. Plus, it's kind of like that high. I find that skiing too, when you push the limit a little bit. Jumping's really not that dangerous as you know. Driving a car is more dangerous. But it just evokes that sense of adrenaline. I get high jumping. I really do. That's the exact word for it. It's great. I really like it.

NS: You mentioned that there were some real characters here. I was wondering if you could just—you mentioned Murphy. What are some of the others? Can you just kind of describe them?

PS: Don Bell (?), John Duvay (?). Don Bell's not jumping this year, but he's a load master (?) over there.

NS: Why is he a character?

PS: Oh god, you could write a book on Don. We have all kinds of Don Bell stories. It's amazing. He's a character. [laughs] I can't really put it much more than that.

Murry Taylor, I was talking about him, and bringing him up again, he was making a point that we must try to consciously allow for people's idiosyncrasies. I don't mean looney. If guy's are crazy or a pain in the ass, without offending other people, a guy is allowed his eccentricity without offending people or offending the job process—getting in the way of the work process—doing the job that has to be done and that kind of thing [unintelligible]. I think a lot people up here feel more free. Again, this is observations over the years. That's why I'm up here, as I say, eight years now—eight straight years. It's kind of that people allowing themselves to be more themselves. People don't do that in the real world, talking about the real world and this world.

NS: Real jobs—

PS: Yeah, smokejumpers and such. I noticed that. I get that. I can handle the real world. Hell, I've got all the credentials to handle the real world. I can play that game too, but I always notice that I can—of course, there's a grossness. I mean, you can say fuck and shit, but it goes a little deeper than that. I really observe that. I think with me as I come back more and more, it keeps me [unintelligible] as I do different things and I get more into the job, I start enjoying—rather than worrying about how many jumps I'm making, I got enough jumps now, I start getting into where I am more. I start getting into, "Hey, this is really. This going to be the same next time. Be here with this one and enjoy it." [unintelligible], and getting more into the people, just kind of interacting with people. I just [unintelligible] people. The jumping process itself with the adrenaline rush and high and being out of the woods allows people to come out, and also it's just that kind of atmosphere.

It's amazing when you get there talking about sex and shit and jumps, and pretty soon you get some wild conversations and really get to know people. People have all kinds of stuff that's on their mind. A lot of people are well-read. That goes across the board, not just Alaska jumpers. Same thing with down south guys. All jumpers are in that category—

NS: Got to do something with all that time.

PS: Right, right. We get tired of talking about sex on everybody's mind and shit and [unintelligible]. After a while, you get out there beyond the mosquitoes and the dirt and everything, and it's kind of nice. To me, there'll never be anything—I like jumping fires. I like eight-man or 60-man jumping fires, and my reasons for that—even now, I'm fire boss on my last four or five fires, and I'm usually not the fire boss because we have and everything like that and that's fine with me. But the sense from a fire boss position, I didn't have to worry about guys working. I didn't have—I keep the time and say do this or I [unintelligible] the overview. But you tell someone to do something and they do it, and guys even knew things before I tell them what to do. Jumpers are like that. I'm saying is you have other crews, which I've had

before, you got worry about the guys are going to do this or do that. It's fun working with jumpers. Things are done, the camp is made up, [unintelligible]. It's nice. People almost are pushing one another away to do it—it's a real pleasure, a pleasure working with people. It's just nice having—goof-offs don't last very long. No one would dare be lazy. [laughs] There's too much peer pressure. That's a real pleasant thing [unintelligible].

You don't have to worry about safety either. Most of the jumpers are safe [unintelligible] in the first place in general. It's not a matter wearing your hard hat [unintelligible]. Guys are watching each other. Every guy's a monkey—last guy on the load is a monkey, which I am right now. So rather than a spotter checking, every jumper's checking. Every jumper has that responsibility. If [unintelligible] in the airplane, just looking, 'are you okay?' Even if you're not the monkey, [unintelligible] sense of responsibility. It's amazing. The same with the fire. Just because you're not the fire boss, you're not [unintelligible] make sure there's no spot fire out there. It's my fire, it's not just Joe Smith's—it's my fire too and I do the best I can to help them out. Because next time, you might helping me out. [unintelligible sentence].

NS: In the time that you've been jumping [unintelligible], what kind of changes have you noticed other than the jumpers getting somewhat older, maybe more married jumpers and as you said the pace has quickened? Are there any other kinds of things that you've noticed about the jumper organization and the jumpers themselves that have been changing? Anything that comes to mind? Or also, an extension of that, do you see changes—what do you see in the future, 5, 10, 15 years?

PS: That's a hard one. Kind of curious about that. I don't know. I think possibly, I think, well, we go through those cycles of centralizing and decentralizing, like Missoula's going through that right now—decentralizing now kind of, some bases. So, it's really interesting you have certain cycles go on. I'm kind of worried about Alaska in the sense I see more of the bureaucratic—on the whole, a bureaucrat's like an animal. It's like an animal. It grows and protects itself. You need you need organization...I mean, that's crazy. You need some organization. But almost like it becomes paranoid. It becomes a paranoid animal, and starts getting all this red tape—all this stuff that's just bullshit. It's actually status to protect itself and forms a self-protecting mechanism, and people get caught up in it without thinking. I got fearing that coming up here in Alaska [unintelligible]. I think that's probably the thing that as [unintelligible] the Forest Service [unintelligible] up here in Alaska firefighting. But I see that kind of moving up. Yeah that's it. That's it specifically. It's too much more—more and more red tape, more rules and regulations.

It's like Confucius made that—not Confucius, but [unintelligible] Chinese—Confucius had all these regulations [unintelligible], the more regulations you have the more screwed up your society is. There's a point where rules and regulations go crazy. You need them, but there's a point when no one pays any attention. Well, safety's like that. When safety becomes a forest then people become more unsafe, and you have all these signs and rules and regulations. You have to really have [unintelligible] responsibility for safety [unintelligible] person. They have to

really know that if they do that [unintelligible] it's going to hurt them or hurt somebody else. When you take that responsibility, then you have a safe crew. But if you keep on them all the time, they think [unintelligible]—

NS: No, that's all right, go ahead.

PS: You wear a hard hat because you're working in big trees, and the branches will fall on your head. That's a good point. [unintelligible] hard hat. Same with No-max (?), I mean, No-max will burn just as well as anything else. They're free, though, so I wear them. [laughs] But if they tell you have to wear something...But basically the job itself—I think jumping, I think jumpers are basically...It's funny, I'm sure other people looking in go, "God, those guys are crazy, and they're really cocoo loonies," but I find jumpers really safe because they're looking out for you, looking out for them. That's my opinion. Because you realize this is where the boundaries are—about the unsafeness when you're dropping cargo or you're jumping, there's always that margin of error. So, I think people are more aware [unintelligible], working with helicopters, all that kind of thing. Firing explosives or something. There's a real safety. That's another thing I've noticed. There's a real safety going on, and it's beyond safety meetings and safety slogans. It's a real safety, which is interesting. It's not really pushed, but it's always there. It's in a guy's mind. Some guys just kind of stay away from it, and they start swinging a Pulaski.

NS: Something else that's on a lot of people's minds is the question of women smokejumpers. Do you have any thoughts, comments?

PS: Oh well, I can answer. It's really strange because one, the aspects of this job I have to admit...I see the whole lib movement as being real positive. I think women have been pushed down, and I think also it's part of opening up the female part of men and letting ourselves be more sensitive. It's been a real blue and pink society, and that goes [unintelligible] the society's change up. But smokejumping's been kind of a last refuge for men. It's like the Canadian bars where only men can go in one bar and the other bar had the couples. Guy's could go in there and it was lit up and no games. There [unintelligible] chairs to sit in and good beer. You'd come back from working and you didn't have to dress up or comb your hair. You had a beer and sit there and cussed or...you know. At home it's different. When you go out to a bar—the Hustle (?)—you're out there and being different. I've had the ladies on the crew. I worked on crews in Mexico [New Mexico?—I had crews in Mexico and Arizona, and it just changes things. Guys start acting differently, and it has nothing to do with the ladies. I think they should have an equal advantage, but I really wish that smokejumping would stay male.

I was on a fire in Canada, and we had the two ladies on the fire. You just find yourself—I was talking to them and rapping. They worked and everything else, and it was fine and they were both nice people. I got to know them pretty well. I worked with one of the girls for two days and the other girl for two days, so [unintelligible] part of the crew, it just happened that way. They both worked; they both put out. They didn't slack off or anything. But it still comes down that point. It was nice having them out there, and they're neat people. Got in conversations

with them, but it's kind of...It's like guys are aware they're ladies. When you're out there—and to be very blunt—you're out there two days and you get a little horny. Here you are—I found myself doing this—I was talking to this girl just like a guy, just like I'm talking to you here. Really, we were laughing, and it's really fun. All day long, we're kind of singing songs—the whole mess of us, the crew of eight guys—and we'd tell them stories, jump stories and stuff. She's just a guy. Then somebody [unintelligible], she was walking ahead of me and I looked down at her ass [unintelligible] make love to her—fuck her. But that's there. You don't get away from that, and that's in fire camp. That's just normal, but that does change things. [unintelligible sentence]. So it's going to change things and that's happening.

NS: There's a real effort, at least down south, to get women in the jumper organization. A lot of rules and standards are being changed.

PS: I'm objecting because that's a real detriment. That's too bad they're doing that. I think that's part of it—I can go for the society thing. I'm for the women's lib, I really am; I think it's men's lib too. But when you start getting the extreme lib-ists who are saying we'll have equal time and everything, then you get craziness. Everyone has to meet the standards, so to say. I say standards—I don't meet the standards you make, but they have to be able to pull their weight. In fact, a woman's going to have to be pretty strong; she's going to have to be an athlete to be a smokejumper or else she's not pulling her weight. That's the way it is because it's hard if you're lighter, if your frame is...to carry packs. It's hard to work [unintelligible]. A lot of times you have time on standby, but when you have to work—as you know—you got to work. You got to really put out. You got to put out with a lot of physical work, and it's easier on a man so a woman's going to have to...What am I saying?

NS: Well, if the standards, in fact, are changed and women who say otherwise and men who otherwise might not made it into the jumper organization make it anyway, do you think that's going to be...do you think that's going to change the nature of the organization.

PS: Yeah, I think it's a real detriment to the organization, because one of the things I've seen—this is my viewpoint, I'm just giving my opinion—that I've seen is like talk about rookie harassment. The fraternity stuff is bullshit—these [unintelligible] games you still see happening in the fraternity. But there was a physical thing where guys were pushed, and it was almost an intimidation, and you make them feel like rookies and give them shit and they have to want to do the job. There's a certain intensity that the guy gets pissed a little bit. I remember being a rookie, “These sons of bitches! I'm going to make it. I'm going to make it,” because I wanted...and guys drop out. You wind up dropping out two or three guys, and you look at them. Some of these guys may be really physically able. In fact, some of them might be even better physically able, but there's not that intensity. They go, “Fuck this! Why should I go bother? Why should I do 100 pullups a day,” and they'll drop out. Once you get with the guys that stay, you get that little extra, and when you're on a fire, when you're really in trouble, that little extra comes out because it's there. It's already there.

We've had a lot of good rookies up here. I've noticed that. The guys we have come right, and they'll be there—you know they'll be there. You've got to have that desire. It's a funny kind of thing. If you make the standards less, all right, so...But you lose that. You lose that at the critical time, and it's the person who wants to be it, they're more interested in the job and they're going to be more safe. They'll be more aware of the criteria of what's happening. They won't just say, "Oh well, I'm a smokejumper now." They'll be watching the spotter, they'll be watching, sizing up the fire. It's just that more intensity, more desire, it really brings out. The innovation in people and just an enthusiasm. I think you lose that by lessening the standards. I mean, really, you'd lose the shoe and the horse loses his horseshoe and the whole thing goes plop and the whole thing falls off—it's the same kind of thing. I really think it's a detriment.

NS: You're saying—you're going one step further and saying that even if a woman did meet the standards and made it into the smokejumper organization, that there still would be changes. There still could be changes occurring that might—

PS: Yeah, Well, there would be changes, but like I say, but it has to be a little different. It's not a man's world anymore, but that's what's happened. Who am I to put my foot in the way of progress? All I'm saying is that's what's happening in there, but I don't see any reason why they should change—what am I saying—the job itself. The value as a smokejumper, as a firefighter, as a worker, or as a performer—in the sense [unintelligible] efficiency and that kind of thing. You want to pull down that standard because there is that—there is an aspect of eliteness. You have it in the helitack crew too, or you can have it on our crew. I've seen it. I've seen [unintelligible] our crew because they do that.

There's a [unintelligible] with that. It is a point where the reality [unintelligible] Marine Corps or the Army. Basically, the difference...Marine Corps puts this "esprit de corps" so you get that little extra someone's willing to give and will give. They don't even think about it because they think, "Well, goddamn it, I'm out here," and they might be feeling really tired that day. But there is these other people out there, "hey I'm a smokejumper," so I'll give you a little extra. Same with the jumpers [unintelligible]. I was talking about that before on the job with smokejumpers, as a guy, you don't have to worry about people doing things. They'll just do them. That's part of that peer group pressure that just sits there. It's not even overt; it's kind of covert. It's just there because you feel a little respect for yourself and your friends.

So, if you lower the standards, you're going to lose that respect. I really feel that. Subjectively, I've said that all the time, that's what's fun about the job. So, it's not that you can do the 15 pullups or 10 pullups. You have to do a certain number because that's a reflection of arm strength, but then it also gives a little push. It's like athletes. It's the same thing. If an athlete's not striving to be a little more better or perfect themselves, they'll just never make it. That's a far analogy. But you start saying, "Well, if you want to be on the football team, you can be on," you're not going to have the same intensity of the game. It's going to lessen. You don't want all jocks—you don't want all macho people on the jumper crew either. [unintelligible sentence].

I don't know. That's a hard one. It's really a hard one. It's hard to put down on paper, and I don't think the ever will. But it's a detriment to lower the standards and start saying, "We have to have ten women on the crew this year." A woman has to be on because she wants to be on. She wants to be a smokejumper. She wants to be involved in the smokejumping—that semi-profession—and not because she wants to be the first woman smoke jumper or talk to *Newsweek* magazine or back the next winter and say, "I was a smokejumper." That kind of thing. A lot of the people that hang on—a lot of the characters—because they like the job and they come back because of that reason. A lot of people try it, and they think, 'oh, I don't like this. It's bullshit.' They'll try it for a year or two years, and they can say, "I'm a smoke jumper. I was a smokejumper," then leave. The same way with an athletic team—guys try out football, play football, and say, "I don't want to do this anymore." Some people stay on and go on to college and play football, semi-pro or pro, or anything.

[laughs] I'm getting off on a tangent, but I was looking at smokejumping as being an athletic endeavor. In fact, from the EMT standpoint, if we're looking at it from a medical standpoint, I think [unintelligible]. I've been an EMT for four years now and interested in that aspect of it. A lot of problems with the injuries is that we go to these doctors, and they look at this as being a common, ordinary person who's selling shoes or at a bank and they don't have to have any recovery time. Because if they come back six months later, it takes them about three months to heal their foot. It's okay. But a jumper wants to get back on the list and make money, the same as an athlete wants to get back in the field. It's the same kind of thing. So, you want to have preventive medicine and you want to have a sports medicine. I mean, you really want to get more into sports medicine with jumping rather than just medicine because a guy wants to be back. If his knee's messed up...if you walk and something...You got to look at it from their perspective too. There is a lot of similarities in athletics and smokejumping that goes back into the whole thing about desire and that kind of thing. We'll, you've seen that happen, and that's true, I think.

NS: I myself have been pretty deeply involved in the whole issue of lowering the standards and all. I'm the guy at Redmond who faced the Forest Service. That whole affirmative action thing was last winter, and it's something, I think, is very difficult to communicate to outsiders, to get them to realize that there's something...that there's a lot of stuff that's not written down and that's hard to capture in any kind of regulation or standard. Yet it's very deeply affected by regulations and standards.

PS: [unintelligible sentence] subjectivity. That's part of the joy of life, learning to [unintelligible]. We don't live in an abstract world no matter how we try.

NS: What do I have here? A few more questions [unintelligible]. Let's see...Can you think of anything else yourself that you think would be an important thing that somebody, say, 10 years from now or 15 years from now—a jumper here at Fairbanks or somewhere else—would be interested in knowing about being a jumper in the '50s or the '60s or the '70s [unintelligible]?

PS: It's kind of funny. I was thinking about that. [unintelligible] questions, especially some of these guys...I was jumping before they were born. I don't feel any older than a lot of these guys. Sometimes I feel younger than some of them, and that's emotional space. But I was thinking about that. I got thinking about that this year. I was thinking about, oh, when things come up like I've been just kind of enjoying this year. I do my job. There's no doubt about myself in that category. I just do what I am supposed. I do it. I put an extra into it. But it was just like looking into it and realizing that so much of the trivial stuff, bureaucratic stuff and who would be—gossipy stuff—just passes by the boards as you look back ten years later. I can look back to Winthrop and Alaska, well, even my second time at Winthrop, and some of the small stuff, trivial stuff, nickel-dime stuff that we thought was so important didn't matter. As I look back, what mattered was the friends I made, that I did the job, and we did the job. Whatever job it was, we did it as best we could, and that we enjoyed ourselves. The fires—I remember good times, good packouts. The camaraderie—things like that. Those things stick with you. I can talk about techniques changing and all this changing, but that hasn't. That's still there. That's always been there. I have old friends still from [unintelligible] smokejumper reunion there at Winthrop. Real close friends still after 20...well, jumping with Bill out there and being on the fire with him. That doesn't change. That hasn't changed at all. No matter how fast the airplanes, if it's a little more buzzy or whatever, but that's the real joy in the job for me.

NS: Can you think of any other jobs that it might compare to? Anything out there?

[Audio cuts out; end of interview]