

Maureen and Mike

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**Oral History Number: 172-014, 015**

**Interviewee: Carl Dammann**

**Interviewer: Bruce Van Voorhis**

**Date of Interview: July 25, 1981**

**Project: Nick Sundt Smokejumpers Oral History Project**

Bruce Van Voorhis: Just make sure I got your name spelled right. C-a-r-l D-am—

Carl Dammann: M.

BVV: A.

CD: N-n.

BVV: How old are you?

CD: Thirty. Real old.

BVV: Well, you're little bit older now. How long have you been jumping? What year?

CD: My 11th year.

BVV: Why do you jump?

CD: It's a good question.

BVV: Or, not necessarily maybe jump, but why are you a smokejumper?

CD: It's kind of a long process. It just happened to be one of those type of jobs where I did it in the summer to get a little money and go to school—go to college. Jumping looked like a decent way to do that. I was on fire crews before. Jumping looked like a little more enjoyable work than slugging through the brush all the time and just mopping up all the time. So, I started jumping. Then one thing led to another, and it just kind of developed into a year-round job. I just never did get into anything else. I liked it well enough to not seriously look for anything else. I got stuck here now. [laughs] So here I am. For a lack of anything else to do now.

BVV: Were you working on district crew then?

CD: The first year I was on a district crew, and then my second year with the Forest Service I was on an IR crew—[unintelligible] IR crew, that type of crew. Then the third year I started jumping.

BVV: So, it wasn't a burning goal to be a jumper. I mean like, you said, "Well, I'll go get my two year's fire experience and then go jump."

CD: Yeah. I didn't have any burning desire to be a jumper to begin with. The only reason—one of the main reasons I started jumping was in 1970 was on the IR crew. They had quite a few fires that year, ended up just mopping up for months. I hate mopping up. I looked around, I go, "[unintelligible] I don't see any jumpers mopping up here. Well, that's got to be the way to go." So that was one of the main reasons I got into it. Just to get out of a little mop up and do something a little more interesting.

BVV: You came and mopped up a lot of jumper fires then?

CD: Well not so much that, but as a 20-man, well, we were a 25-man crew then, and we'd spend three or four days on initial attack and then we'd spend three weeks on mop up it seemed like. It was just a long, drawn-out process. It got real old real fast. I just got kind of tired of it.

BVV: Where'd you go to school and what'd you get your degree in and stuff?

CD: Went to Washington State and got a degree basically in underwater basket weaving and cake decorating. [laughs]

BVV: [laughs] That's pretty useful.

CD: Yeah, [unintelligible].

BVV: What was your degree in?

CD: Social sciences actually.

BVV: [unintelligible].

CD: Pretty much around there. Actually about a semester short of a history degree, but I never did go all the way and pursue that too much further. I just kind of played at it. I didn't take anything serious in college. I just took what was kind of enjoyable.

BVV: Then when you got out, you said, "Well, what am I going to do now?"

CD: Yeah, I got out of school, and there was absolutely nothing I could do with that. But then I didn't plan on doing anything with it. For some reason, I just thought I should go to college for some reason. I don't know why. So, I just continued jumping after of college and here I am, still doing it. Thirty years old still doing it.

BVV: You initially got into it because you hated mop up or didn't like that, and you saw this—I don't if you'd say—an easier way of firefighting, or how—

CD: I didn't see it so much as an easy way. In fact, I knew it can be a harder way in some aspects. I thought it would be less boring. I wouldn't stay in one spot and do the same thing for two to three weeks at a time. What really got me started on that...and it hadn't been for example say, '70, 1970, I probably still would have been on IR crew for a couple more years. But in 1970, there was a fire on the Chelan District of the Wenatchee Forest [Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest] called Safety Harbor. We were initial attack for about five days. I enjoyed that.

BVV: This was on the IR crew, right?

CD: Right, on the IR crew. Then we go out for another month mopping it up. We'd go out for ten days at a time and come in for two days, then go out for ten days. I just got to where I just couldn't handle that anymore. There had to be a different way to make a dollar. That's when I really got serious looking around and saying, "There's no jumpers here. They're not doing this, and they're making just as money if not more than I am here." They may have to work a little harder on the fires—initial attack or something like that—but they don't have near as much mop up. It was just so damn boring. I couldn't take another year of that.

BVV: Because it's just basically making sure all the smokes are out.

CD: Yeah, you just around the fire and put out all the smokes. They had us to the point where they'd fly over with a helicopter and drop toilet paper down on stumps burning—down the middle of 500 acres of black—and walk us down there and mop it up. It was just ridiculous—

BVV: They would just do that to see if there was any embers there.

CD: They'd pick out a smoke someplace that was 16,000-acre fire with a total mop up. It was insane I thought.

BVV: I think I heard about that fire. Was it about two or three weeks after they had another big one someplace up on the Okanogan or someplace?

CD: Yes.

BVV: Yeah, I heard that.

CD: Oh gosh. They brought a crew in from California—a burnout crew—and they dropped napalm on it [unintelligible] about 400 acre island. Well, that never did catch. So you're down there for two weeks trying to mop up the napalm. [laughs]

BVV: Seemed like a good idea at the time.

CD: Yeah, yeah. Good idea at the time, but it went to shit in a big hurry. So, after a couple of weeks of this [unintelligible]. This isn't for me. There's got to be a different way of doing things.

BVV: How did you happen to get in forest firefighting. I mean, was it just you heard about and said, "Well I need some money for school and this seems sort of interesting."

CD: Financially, all I had...See, my dad was raised up in Winthrop, and my grandparents still live up there and all that. So, I was pretty much aware of jumping in the Forest Service and firefighting. I knew about it. My uncle raised or ran cattle on Forest Service range land. So, it wasn't something that I just kind of heard about. I knew that this operation was going on—

BVV: Jumping.

CD: —and jumping was around since a little kid. When I became a teen, I thought, "Well, the Forest Service. Okay, there's a way to make a few dollars in the summer." So, I kind of went that route.

BVV: You grew up in Winthrop, right?

CD: I actually grew up in Wenatchee. I spent all my summers up in Winthrop.

[knock on door]

Unidentified Speaker: Anybody seen Carl Allen?

CD: No, he's gone.

US: Carl Allen?

CD: Hey, if you've got money come on in.

US: I don't have any money, but I'd like to place an order. When do I have to pay, that's—

[Break in audio]

BVV: All right, back to the ball game here. Wanted to ask you something. Why are you still jumping?

CD: Why? I can't find anything else that I like better. Used to work on—well, before I transferred to Redmond and La Grande in the fall and the spring, they'd ship us out to the districts quite a bit and we'd do district work, various thins. I never could find one of the district works or even see any of the real district works that I really enjoyed or would want to do for

very long. So that pretty much kept me from getting out of jumping and continuing someplace else in the Forest Service, and then getting totally out of the Forest Service looks like the acceptable way to go.

BVV: You mean because you sort of explored everything.

CD: Well, I haven't explored everything. There's still a lot of areas I haven't seen, but I really haven't yet seen anything I like better.

BVV: Do you think that someday down the road you will eventually get out of jumping, or do you think that you may stick—

CD: I'll probably eventually get out. It's starting to get just a little old. [pauses] So, I'll be looking. Not looking real seriously right now. Keeping my eyes out.

BVV: Something comes along. You've got how many jumps—you've got over 200 at least, right?

CD: I don't know what it is, two something. I kind of lost count. I'd have to look it up.

BVV: [laughs] What is it about jumping that you like? I see how you sort of got into it, but—

CD: Well, what I like...That's kind of a good question. I'm not real sure. It's a lot of little things I like about it. It's the people that I work with. I like that. I like the average jumper, and...[pauses] It's just a little bit different. For that, I like it. It's not something everybody wants to do or that everybody does. I like jumping...I like that it's a small reward for all the other crap you have to put up.

BVV: What's that?

CD: Just the jumping part. It's a small reward for all the rest, but I enjoy that. Right now I just like working with parachutes and playing around with that. That's nice. It's kind of a hobby or a toy I get to play with for my job. That's enjoyable.

BVV: You said something about it's just a little bit different. It's—

CD: Yeah, it's a little bit different. It's not like being the garbage man or the roofer or something like that. It's just a little bit different than that.

BVV: Is part of it the fact that a lot of people can't do the job, or—

CD: No, I don't think it's that because a lot of people could if they wanted to. That's just not it. I really don't know how to explain it. Just a little bit something different. It's like driving a different type of car. It's no big—it's just a little different.

BVV: Right. Somebody else doesn't have one. How long do you think you'll jump then?

CD: Oh god, I don't know. What's really surprising, right, started jumping and thought I'd do it for probably about three years. I thought that would be about the end, thinking about three years—I'll jump about three years—and then I'll get off into the real world and do something. After 11 years, [laughs] still I have no idea. I really don't. I wouldn't last another 11 years doing it.

[long pause]

BVV: Is that because the physical demands on your body, day in, summer after summer it gets old or anything?

CD: I don't think so, although it's obviously harder now than it was 10, 11 years ago. But for example, I like the runs in the morning. I enjoy going out there and running. I don't mind that at all. It's getting old. It's losing its charm and that. It's just getting old. It's time for change. I always get bored easily. It's time for something else. [laughs] Not that there isn't challenge much or mistakes made, things like that. It's just getting old.

BVV: Doing that long, you got to try and find something else that—

CD: [unintelligible]. Do I want to do this another 11 years?

BVV: So, you have no definite plan. Is it sort of a year by year decision then?

CD: It's usually a [unintelligible] decision. I know next year I'll be here, and the year after that I'll undoubtedly still be here. After that, I'm not real sure. I'm just kind of in the process now of looking around, trying to think of what else I could do.

BVV: What else might interest you or that you'd like.

CD: Something else that I could, perhaps, get into. Whereas three years ago I really wasn't thinking that at all.

BVV: Do you think that...one thing I've sort of noticed about jumpers that they all like what they're doing, versus many people in other fields that don't necessarily enjoy what they're doing—it's a way of life. They got to make money and stuff like that. Do you think that a jumper gets to the point—so like you are where you're thinking about doing something else but you don't know what. Instead of just quitting and jumping and taking maybe something that comes along or something or going to work in the mills or whatever, that they search harder for something that they really enjoy doing.

CD: I think they do. If you enjoy it for any length of time, I think they do. If you've only been jumping for a year or something like that, then probably not, but for any length of time. Well, if they've been jumping for any length, it's probably an indication they kind of like the job. So, it's gonna have to be a fairly decent job someplace else for them to get out and look for something else. Unless there's some kind of a financial security they're looking for like they're married and have some children or something, then their financial security is pretty much top of the line.

BVV: Okay. When you say decent job, you don't—by that you mean one that pays well or has good career opportunities versus one that they really like doing. Maybe they know they could make more money doing something else, but they prefer the job and doing it over the money.

CD: It'd have to be a little of both, I'd say. [laughs] I mean, a decent job [unintelligible]...I wouldn't classify a decent job as, say, \$15 an hour going back to Detroit putting cars together. That's not a decent job, but a decent job might only be making \$6 an hour doing something else someplace that you really enjoy. In fact, going back to Detroit and putting cars together, I can't think of anything that would be decent about that. [laughs]

BVV: Probably just going back to Detroit. [laughs] Have you ever been back East?

CD: Yeah. Yeah, I have.

BVV: It's a little different way of life out there.

CD: If all those folks want to stay out there, that's fine with me. [laughs] Stay back there.

BVV: I think maybe that's the problem with the West is people are fed up with that back there and they're coming out here [unintelligible].

CD: [unintelligible] out here now.

BVV: Yeah. What do you like least about jumping?

CD: I don't like the mop up, and I don't like [pauses] all the little petty rules and regulations that go along with just working for the federal government. [pauses] Basically that's it. There's just so many things you can and cannot do whether it makes sense or not. It's at times really frustrating.

BVV: The rules are you mean?

CD: Just federal regulations, rules. Our forest policies. Just policies that are, at times, asinine in my eyes, but you still have to go along with them.



BVV: I know what you mean. [unintelligible] Do you think you jumped to prove something to yourself about yourself?

CD: I don't think so because when I got into jumping, I didn't have that in mind at all. It was just trying to get out of something else. In fact, when I applied, I had second thoughts about even applying because on the IR crew—when I was with the IR crew went on trips—we could places and see new country. I wanted to do that, and my idea of jumping at the time was that they didn't go very far and they never really go on trips too much. I thought, 'wow, I don't know if I really want to do that or not.' So, it wasn't anything to prove to myself. When I applied and was accepted though, I really didn't have any doubts of myself that I wouldn't make it. I knew I would physically. Not that I'm any kind of physical specimen, but I could at least do that. I knew it wasn't that bad.

BVV: Now, that you've been a jumper 11 years, and you mention the part about you like the IR trips—you to go to, probably, a lot of states—and the jumpers more or less went and jumped in the forests—

CD: That's what I thought it was, but it didn't turn out to be that way at all. It was the other way around. I've gone a lot more places jumping than I ever did with an IR crew. I like that. I like to go places. It's kind of fun just to pack it up and go someplace. Where you don't have a lot of warning, you're here and just sitting here thinking that 'maybe two hours from now I won't be here. I'll be someplace else.' I kind of like that. Not really knowing what's going on.

BVV: You said knowing that you're sitting here and two hours later you might be going someplace else.

CD: I kind of like that. Where other folks it would bother them. Can't plan their day out or their week or something. I don't want to plan it out. [laughs]

BVV: So, in some ways you like the uncertainty of the job about what you're going to be doing with your time?

US: I'm going to make a little noise pretty soon.

CD: Why's that?

US: Vacuum the—

CD: Oh, no! No.

US: [unintelligible]

CD: That's okay. He's probably bored here.

[long pause]

Yeah, the uncertainty part about it isn't that big of a deal.

BVV: It was something I didn't think about, and some of the other guys have mentioned the same kind of thoughts. They liked the idea of 'well, right now I'm here mopping the floor, but you never know. Maybe in an hour I'll be on a plane jumping someplace.'

CD: Kind of keeps your insanity going at times when you know [unintelligible] some little bs job someplace. There's always that possibility of an out. Something else might happen.

BVV: Oh. When you're sitting in the door, what are you thinking about?

CD: Actually what I'm thinking about is how I'm gonna make the spot. [laughs] Usually I'm always looking down to ground, and I head out the door trying to see exactly where I'm getting my [unintelligible] at, so I know before I open up whether I'm gonna have to run or hold or quarter in or exactly what kind of maneuver I'm going to take to make it in. Then plan my approach—what side of the spot I might come in on or just exactly how I'm going—

[vacuum cleaner noise; speakers difficult to hear]

BVV: So you're almost...before you go out the door, you're planning 'how I'll probably go down so far, and then I'll do this and that.'

CD: It's just like a problem, you're just planning approach to that particular situation. That's the best time to look it over is when you're in the door. You got best look at it. So that's usually what I'm doing is just putting the last touch to how to get down there.

BVV: Is there any...how do I phrase it? Adrenaline rush or anything or anything like that?

CD: Not really. I used to get butterflies first year or so, and then I don't get those anymore and I'm not excited about it. I enjoy jumping so I know it's going to be fun here in a minute. But I like sitting in the door actually. It's just kind of fun to have all the wind blowing in your face and look out the door and just look down—watch everything go by. As far as the jump part of that, I don't really get excited about that as far as adrenaline.

BVV: Oh, okay. It's not like a nervous thing.

CD: No. I don't get nervous at all anymore.

BVV: It's more like—after 11 years it's more or less, you like doing it so boy here comes another jump?

CD: Yeah, it's just another jump. This will be fun; I like jumping.

BVV: When you're coming down, what's the sensation like? Since I can't jump [unintelligible].

CD: God, I don't know. I never really thought of the sensation. It's just nice—it's just a float. You're just up there. I can't really, a lot of time, perceive...When I'm first coming down opened up with a couple thousand feet or 1,500 feet up or something like that, I don't really have a sensation of falling. I'm just floating. Just suspended up there just looking everything over. Just suspended more or less just looking everything over. I'm not sinking at any rate that I can really tell. Obviously, you know you are. But you're just kind of floating around. So, it is kind of a nice quiet place to float around and look the country over. Actually, the last 300 feet are the most enjoyable for me, because that's where you find out if you're going to make it or not. [laughs] And by then you definitely know what kind of a [unintelligible] rate you got out and how are things shaping up and that's where you're going to make or break it. That's the most fun part for me.

BVV: So, the last 300 feet are the most critical as far as where you're going to be when you hit the ground.

CD: Right. Unless you got a lot of wind and that, and then if you're off, the last 300 feet isn't going to make any difference. But that's where you can make or break it, depending on the situation.

BVV: [unintelligible].

CD: Yeah, you might as well 500,000 feet because it's too late. If you're in the ballpark, that last 300 feet or so it's going to ace it or make you off a little.

BVV: Is the firefighting part, is that a big danger?

CD: I don't think so. I don't think really anything [unintelligible] dangerous myself. There's precautions to take. I just don't see it as being that dangerous.

BVV: Why do you say that? Because of the safety features and so forth?

CD: I don't think it's dangerous. It might be...Precaution, obviously, has to be taken all the time, but with a reasonable amount of precaution and just some prudent commonsense, you can eliminate most of the dangers. For that reason, I just don't think it's dangerous. It's not something that you have to strictly plan out step by step and be constantly aware of. It's just using your common sense [unintelligible] pretty much eliminates most of them.

[background is very loud; can't hear speakers]

BVV: You said with prudent commonsense and some precautions you can eliminate most of the dangers.

CD: I think you can.

BVV: It becomes more or less a job than...because it's not like....I think Joe-blow public may have—when you hear about what smokejumpers do—you get the...First of all you're sort of awed at the thing where you say, "That's pretty crazy," or something like that. But for the jumpers, especially the ones that've been doing it for a number of years, it's just like a job.

CD: It's just another job—something you do. I suppose your first couple of years you're pretty pumped about it yourself because it's new to you. I imagine the public would be really going, "That sounds crazy." But it's just like any job. Once you get to know a little bit more about it—not that I know all there is to know—but once you get to know more about it and are a little more used to working with us, it's just like any other job. Only maybe just a little nicer of a job. [unintelligible] fires myself.

BVV: Well, you haven't had to worry this season.

CD: No, this season's been really nice. [laughs] Really nice.

BVV: When you say that you mean because of the work involved to put the thing out or to pack out or—

CD: Just all of it. Well for example, last year I was on a—dropped a fire out of Winthrop at [unintelligible], and we were driving a line around it and then we'd gotten down to the mop up part of it. You just stop to think, 'God, Carl, you're 29 years old (then), and you've been doing this for how long? And you probably doing it next year. All you're doing is hand and knees grubbing through the dirt.' There's nothing glamorous about that. There's nothing exciting about that. It's just grubbing in the dirt. That's all it is. After a while, you get tired of grubbing in the dirt.

BVV: I think it's real easy to make a job glamorous. I mean just describing the job to somebody that doesn't do it. This what I've wanted to do for ten years or so, really, just do my own thing or whatever. You spent all that time going in one direction or you get diverted here and there sometime, and then you get there and it's a job. You enjoy doing it, but it's the job. You get up in the morning and you shave [unintelligible]—

CD: Just like everybody else and you go to work. You come most of the time.

BVV: Yeah. When you said maybe [unintelligible]. I'll flip it over [refers to audio cassette]

[Break in audio]

BVV: When you said, maybe the job's just a little nicer, nicer how?

CD: Well, a little nicer in that some of things I like to do are in the job. I like to go places and once in a while I get to go someplace. Like Alaska. I would probably never ever in my life get up to some of those places if it hadn't been for this. And some of the other places in the United States—back East and that. My best friends are all jumpers. Some are in La Grande and some are in Winthrop still. Some of the I work with are my friends and people I associate with and can have fun with. It's nice when your friends are also people you work with. It's just nice like that. Plus, now you have the opportunity to do a few things you've always wanted to, perhaps, in a loft or something—try something out. Little bit of freedom to explore a few avenues. Not many, but a few. [laughs] A few small, petty, minor little things.

BVV: Few alleys here and there.

CD: Back alleys. I mean I don't have somebody constantly over my shoulder making sure I only take a 15- minute break or I don't do this or do that.

BVV: Now that you're a loft foreman? That or the fact that you've been around so long.

CD: Just been around for a while. I don't have to sit at a desk all the time. Get up and move around.

BVV: Do you keep in touch with old people that you jumped with before that you know aren't jumping anymore?

CD: Oh yeah.

BVV: Where they are and what they're doing?

CD: Sure. Yes, there was two chaps—my rookie class—that I still talk to and go visit and keep in touch with and that.

BVV: Do they live near, basically, in this area—I mean, the Pacific Northwest?

CD: They both live in Washington.

BVV: Are members of a rookie class, as they grad...First of all, you're going to have X number of people who aren't going to make it, and then the people that do make it, then as they go through their jumping career, are they a little closer than...you meet other people and so forth—

CD: Usually they're a little closer. Because those are probably the first people when you start jumping that you get to know first and get to know the best usually. Rookies gonna have to stick together otherwise, a lot of shit. [laughs] And all the old men are always coming down on them. So it's the rookie, your other rookies, who isn't giving you a bad time probably. So you kind of hold together that way.

BVV: Is that part of the idea behind the program, maybe consciously or unconsciously, that the old men sort of galvanize the rookies together as a group, or just the pressures of the training do that?

CD: Well, it's the training—the way I kind of view it is the training is kind of designed to do that. The old man attitudes are kind of designed to get the rookies together and make them one little unit. But then the training—for example, some of the harassment and the more or less military attitude about it all—isn't really there to get you in good shape because it's not going. You're either in shape or you're not. It's not going to do it in two or three weeks. The only reason I see it's there is to kind of weed out those who come here with the idea that 'well, that looks like fun or that sounds like fun. I think I'll try it.' Versus the ones that 'I think I'd really like to do that' or put the effort into really doing it. Kind of weeds those out who really come just the idea, 'that looks fun,' without the willingness to put out and really make [unintelligible]. If you're not real serious about it, you not going to put up with all the bullshit. If you want to do it, then you will.

BVV: One thing I've sort of noticed about the jumping program is that the attitude—how important the attitude of the jumper is. It seems like it's—you have to give 100% all the time when you're jumping on fire or packing out or whatever.

CD: Yeah, I think you do.

BVV: That jumping itself isn't necessarily a way of fighting forest fires, but smokejumping's an attitude. Is that...

CD: Yeah, a lot of it's an attitude. Everybody here likes to think of themselves perhaps a little bit different or the job a little bit different or something like that. Once you get to the ground and you're out there on fire line, you're just like everybody else. The only way you can perhaps set yourself apart, or maybe not trying to set yourself apart, but the only way you can please yourself is maybe do a little better job. Work at it a little harder. Because once you're there, you're just like everybody else. I don't know really how to explain it. It's just maybe pride in yourself and your job, where you can show right there it's just to put out more. Then that becomes something itself where you have to because that's a reputation you're trying to build or hold.

BVV: So in other words, the more you do that, you put out the group or the whole puts out and does a good job, the more you have to to make [unintelligible].

CD: Yeah, the more you have to then. It's kind of [unintelligible].

[knock at the door; break in audio]

BVV: What do you usually make in a fire season?

CD: Oh god, I have no idea.

BVV: It's a little difficult because you're all year round now.

CD: Yeah, well it's been difficult because every year for the past five years, I've had one thing or another drastically changed my income.

BVV: You mean as a jumper you mean? What do you mean?

CD: Well for example one year, as a 6 and a next year as a 7, working longer—temporary 7. Then the year after that, I went to a W-A6, but I worked different than that—different pay rate than a 7 someplace else. But then it was a poor year, and I took two months off to go to New Zealand. Then last year a 7 kind of became a 9. Poor year, but good year here. I was a 9 here. It varies so much I don't know what I make.

BVV: Can you give me a ballpark figure...Like from \$5,000, \$6,000—

CD: For just...I never have figured out what I'm make in the season. I just figure out what to make for a year, 12-month period. Last year it was about \$23,000.

BVV: That was for 12 months?

CD: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Twelve months. That adds a lot of things in there too. Moving expenses and that too.

BVV: What do you generally do with your money? Again this is—

CD: I blow it away on women and beer. [laughs] No, I squeak when I walk, I don't like to spend money. I save it. Right now, what I'm doing with it is building a house—buying some land and building a house with it.

BVV: Around Redding, right?

CD: Yeah, just some land out towards [unintelligible], build a house on that. So that's what I'm doing all my money, and I can't afford any of the loans that the banks are offering. So I'm just

doing it all out of my pocket. That's where all my money's going. But then I had a house in La Grande [unintelligible] fairly well, so then I sold that [unintelligible].

BVV: Yeah, if you've got a place to sell, that helps.

CD: That helped a lot.

BVV: Is that where you were at before you came down here—La Grande?

CD: Yeah, I was at La Grande.

BVV: This is your second year here, right?

CD: Yeah, and then before La Grande, I was at Winthrop. Everybody gets tired of me and gets fed up and, "Let's get rid of him." So, I pack it up and move on. Pretty well exhausted all the bases in this region. Got to move to another region now. [laughs] Everybody's wise to me.

BVV: in other words, you're getting to the stage in life where your money goes more for family or security type things or homes or whatever it. Before you are married or whatever, how did you spend the money?

CD: I didn't spend all that much. I still saved quite a bit of it. I spent a lot more for enjoyment, just fun. Skis, gas to get places, women and drinking—stuff like that. [laughs]

BVV: Basic necessities.

CD: Toys, just toys

BVV: Before you were more or less permanent as a jumper, what did you do after the season? How'd you spend the other months of the year?

CD: When I first started jumping, I spent on skiing and just traveled around. Went to Europe one year, went skiing another year—and just that type of stuff. Then hat I was going to college for a while too. After that, just a lot of cross-country skiing and hanging around. Spent one winter up in Winthrop, went cross-country skiing about three times a week, four times a week because I lived about ten miles out of Winthrop and we had about five feet of snow right where I lived. We lived out in the country, so we just put the skis on the front porch and head off. Then the guy I was living with was pretty much into cougar and bobcat hunting, and so we did a lot of that. Lot of that. Did all that on skis.

BVV: In other words, you could can make enough money jumping in the summer that you could do whatever you wanted to in the winter. You didn't have to go find a job.



CD: Sure, yeah. That and being a leech off the state. I was drawing unemployment. So, between that—I made enough money jumping that I didn't need the unemployment that bad; although, it certainly did help. Otherwise, I'd be dead broke. [unintelligible]. What it allowed me to do was save the money I made during jumping to live off unemployment. That paid all my bills. Of course, then I was getting \$85 a week unemployment and my rent was \$40 a month. [laughs] Paid for a lot of beer. I didn't really have any expensive hobbies. Living up in Winthrop you can't have any because there's nothing doing in the winter. Go buy a couple cases of beer and go home and drink that. Go do skiing and hunting. Did a lot of hunting. Made things for myself like made sleeping bags and just sit down by some material and make it. Make a pattern up and just spend the winter making things like that. Playing.

BVV: You didn't jump to make the money for the winter. I mean, that wasn't why you kept coming back to jumping?

CD: No, no. It wasn't that at all. It wasn't the money at all.

BVV: [unintelligible] the winter off.

CD: I would've worked longer, but I just didn't. And when I had the opportunity to work longer, I always do.

BVV: You mean at the end of the jump season—

CD: Right, in the jump season I worked as long as they'd let me, so it wasn't, well, I'm just gonna work so long and bag it. I just always worked as long as they'd let me. Except past—year before last I took two months off. Of course, took it all annual leave.

BVV: But the last two years you've been more or less on a permanent situation here anyway.

CD: So it's getting to the point now where I'm going to have to take time off. I won't be able to draw unemployment or anything like that, but I don't care about that. It's the least of my concerns. I just need time off. I'm not a full-year person very easily. I got to have the time off. [laughs] I mean, it only has to be a month [unintelligible].

BVV: Now, you live here in the offseason and so forth.

CD: Yeah, this is my only job. It's what I do, so I don't run around too much in the offseason.

BVV: What's your wife think about you jumping? You're married, right?

CD: Right. She doesn't mind it at all. She's pretty nice about it. I really like that. I was jumping for quite a few years before I even met her. Then we were running around together for about four years before we finally got married. So, she's pretty accustomed to it. It's nothing new to

her. She hasn't minded at all. If I enjoy doing it, that's fine with her. We don't ever have any problems about that. Our jobs are so totally different—the jobs are totally different from what I do and what she does.

BVV: What's she do?

CD: She's a schoolteacher. What she does now, though, she's a career specialist for Tamarack Learning Center—it's a private school thing. Her job isn't anything physical at all. It's all just sitting around dealing with people on all kinds of emotional levels that are beyond my [unintelligible] or the ability to deal with people. [laughs]

BVV: When you say counseling, you mean it's people with problem type things.

CD: Well, she doesn't so much counsel. She used to, but what she's doing now is teaching career skills and helping young adults who are having trouble holding a job or finding a job or getting started job—teaching them some skills and some job finding skills and how to once they do get a job, how to hold onto it. How to deal with their employer. Basically, how to get going and be able to hold a job and find one.

BVV: Sometimes [unintelligible] can be important. [laughs]

CD: Yeah, real important. Real important.

BVV: So, she knew more or less what she was getting into as far as jumping?

CD: Oh yeah. She was totally [unintelligible]. She'd come and visit me in the summer. When I was jumping at Winthrop, she came to visit one summer. It happened to be a pretty good summer in '74. Fair amount of fires, and I went down to Wenatchee and picked her up and took her up to Winthrop. The next day I was gone for a couple days, and I was home for a couple days, then I was gone for a while and then back. I would say for about half the three-week visit she was there. She got accustomed to it real fast.

BVV: Got indoctrinated.

CD: Yeah, she knew exactly what she was getting into.

BVV: Do you think it helps somewhat that the jumping is only like a three or four month proposition out of the year that they say, 'well, he really likes it and I can tolerate it for—'

CD: Yeah, I'm sure that's it, and knowing that we don't get that many jumps too. It's under a really pretty controlled atmosphere that we jump; although, it may not appear that way. It's pretty controlled. A safety factor, and it's taken with a fairly professional attitude. All the risks involved are taken a look at and calculated out. So, you know you're not getting out in a

situation's that's totally unsafe. So it's basically not a bad job. So she can handle that. Actually what scares me the most is riding in the airplane. [laughs] I think her folks and my folks might have a different view of it, but that's basically how that goes.

BVV: They know you've been doing this 11 years, and you're focusing...I mean did they think that, did they wonder is it ever gonna give this up, or did they have the attitude of, we didn't bring him up very well. He's jumping out of those airplanes.

CD: Well, when I first started they thought it was great—that it looked like a pretty nice job to them for a couple of years [unintelligible] summer. Because my folks are well aware of jumping and all that. They were around it; they knew what was going on. So, that was nothing new to them. But then after I continued doing it—that was all I did, [unintelligible] the winter—then they got a little concerned. They weren't concerned about the job so much. They were concerned about when I was going to get out in the real world and make something of myself. This jumping sure is fun now, but what are you going to do later? Then my wife's folks, they have a little different attitude. There is, "God, I don't know, Carl. That could be dangerous. You could get hurt, and besides, what you do in the winter? You obviously can't make a career. You only got so many jumps in you when you get old. You're gonna be all broke down, so what are you going to do? When are you going to get a real job, get some security?" Some security is what they're looking at because it's their daughter, and we're relying on my paycheck at the time. I didn't look like I had too secure of a job. [laughs] I could be getting busted up, and it'd be all over with in a big hurry. So, they were concerned about that.

BVV: How long have you been married?

CD: [pauses] Good question. Five years.

They're looking at it little differently. Plus I'm in a position now to where I have an appointment so I have some guarantees—a little security behind it—whereas before just as a temporary, working five, six months out of the year. But now they look at it little differently. I'm sure they'd all be pleased if I found another job.

BVV: Big sigh of relief.

CD: Whew! Finally. But they'll never say that to my face. [laughs]

BVV: So, your wife now, she doesn't worry about what's going to happen to you?

CD: No. I'm sure she always worries a little bit when you're late, but just like I worry when she's late. She doesn't lose any sleep over it.

BVV: I guess I ought to ask is what you'll do after you stop jumping. It's more or less, if you find—you don't know right now, when you find something—

CD: When something comes up, that's what I'll do.

BVV: We touched on this too—the dangers of the job. You don't really perceive it as that dangerous.

CD: No, I really don't.

BVV: That's basically because of the training, the safety precautions.

CD: The training that's been into it, and the number of years the job's been around that most of the risk parts have been analyzed and identified so you can pretty much do it. I just don't see it as that hazardous of a job, and that dangerous. If it was, we'd be hurting and killing people a lot more. We're just aren't doing that—other than the minor dings and prying and occasional broken legs. But all the injuries are real minor most of the time.

BVV: What effect, if any, do you think women will have on smoke jumping if they eventually do become smokejumpers?

CD: Well, it's going to take some of these guys and blow their image of themselves. [laughs]

BVV: By that...if I just heard that, I would think that these guys have this big macho image and—

CD: Some of them do.

BVV: Really? You think?

CD: I think so.

BVV: I didn't foresee that—

CD: Well, some of them do. Maybe not so much, you're trying to downplay it a little bit, but I think a lot of the guys here kind of view themselves as perhaps they have a job that just not everybody can do. It's probably a little tougher and a little rougher than others, and for that they kind of think highly of themselves, which they probably should maybe not think highly of themselves but they have a little pride themselves. Which everybody's got to have some pride themselves. When women get into it, then it's just some of that pride would just kind of, 'oh well, gosh, she can do it [unintelligible]. It was a big deal, and I was really proud of it. Now, it's not such a big deal anymore.' By that, that's kind of what I meant.

[knock on door]

CD: Yeah?

[Break in audio]

CD: —say something else about that [unintelligible].

BVV: You were talking about the women and how it may blow some guys' image here that maybe the job's not quite as special as what they think it is.

CD: Yeah, probably take some of the prestige out of it a little bit. I'm not so convinced it's a real good idea yet, but I'm trying to keep an open mind about it. But I'm not 100% for that for sure. I'll just sit back and wait and take a look.

BVV: What doubts do you have now about it?

CD: The only doubts I really have are—well, the doubts I have are, I've seen a lot of women on fire crews and that, and not to sound real biased or anything, but I really haven't seen any women that do what I would consider really a job that I like jumpers to be doing. The stamina doesn't seem to be there. I'm not saying there aren't any out there, I just haven't seen any, so I kind of think that possibly it's gonna be a real small percentage of women who will do the job as well as it could be done. I fear that if women start getting into it, the standards are just going to gradually get lower and lower. Just kind of like I think they have in IR crews. I think they've been lowered. IR crews aren't what they used to be. I'd really hate to see that come to jumping; although I'm sure it's just a matter of time. So, hold out as long as possible. That's just my big fear is that the standards are just gonna get lowered to where it'll be kind of the norm for it to be there.

BVV: When you said the standards will be lowered and it'll just be the norm to be there, does that—

BVV: Yeah, something along those lines of what I meant—

BVV: Is that the work jumpers do will just be normal like the work anybody else does, is that what you mean by that?

CD: No, [pauses]...It is to some degree, but what I was trying to—some of the work we do now, we'll just bust our butt to try and outdo somebody else and do better. Really work at it to try and do better. IR crews used to—I thought—were the same way. They just busted trying to do better, and they still are. A lot of our crews still have a lot of pride—just do their best to work better. But with the women on there, they don't—I haven't seen it yet—they just don't dig as much line. On mop up and doing other things and running hose lines, they're just good; there's no problem, just as good. But when it comes to a 12-hour shift, swinging a Pulaski, they just aren't as effective. When you have a certain percentage of your crew that way, the work goes down. It's real hard to keep this guy—a good worker—pumped up when he's looking right

behind him or right in front of him, and somebody else isn't working as hard. It's not because they aren't doing it, they just can't do it. It's not that they don't want to. They're just not—they just can't do it. Not physically there. So he just kind of goes, 'What the hell?' Then pretty soon the whole attitude kind of goes to hell, and the work starts to slide a little bit. It just isn't as good as it could have been or was.

BVV: Let's go to the pre-woman era and you had the jumpers and you had all these IR crews and everybody was—was it a competition thing between all these different groups: you wanted to be the best and have the best reputation or be known as—

CD: Yeah, there's a lot of competition.

BVV: And you've said that that has gone down.

CD: It doesn't seem to be quite as much there. It's still there. There's still a lot of competition, but for example, you can have...I just can't talk about...the top of my head here, so I haven't given it a lot of thought, but...There's still competition, but it doesn't seem to be quite as keen as it used to be. Just not quite as keen as it used to be. [pauses] I'm trying to refer to is I used to fill in on IR crews at La Grande, for example. They'd have several women on their crew, and then looking at women on other crews and being on crews with other women—not just that crew—the women would do pretty good for a couple hours. They were in there swinging away. Then after about four hours of just digging, and especially if the digging was kind of rough going, you'd look and you'd watch them. You're digging there and you're kind of keeping an eye on what they're doing. The pulaski's going up and down and they're scraping dirt, but it's not doing anything. It's just the motion being done, and you find yourself going over the same area that somebody else has just gone over. It really starts to grate on your nerves after a while. You just go, 'what's the use?' It's just ineffective work. They're out there putting all their all out, but it's just nothing's getting done.

BVV: That's what's [unintelligible] more or less same thing.

[Break in audio]

BVV: What sort of brought the competition thing about between the jumpers and various crews, or even jumpers and jumpers from different bases.

CD: Same thing. Just jumpers between other crews, jumpers against jumpers, IR crews against IR crews, it's just your crew...it's like your football team. You get two groups of people together, and it's going to be competition. There's no way around it.

BVV: Yeah, I can see what you're saying. I just think, especially if you've got a really bad fire and everybody's really got to go to get it. maybe you're not thinking so much competition as you are thinking, 'God, we're got to catch this.'

CD: Well yeah, it's true that—I don't want to give the opinion that we go out and our only goal is to be outdo somebody else. That's not it. We're out there to do a job and try and do it the best we can. That may look like competition, and it is because we want to do the best we can. [unintelligible; loud noise]

BVV: That's what I sort of figured.

CD: No, it's not just out there to try and to beat the other crew. It's not that by any means. A lot of times we're not even doing that at all. We're not trying to beat the other crew; we're just tired of doing it. [laughs] We're just tired of going out here and busting our butt all the time, just so somebody won't call us slugs.

BVV: Moving on to the training a little bit, not quite sure how I want to phrase this, but we touched on it earlier about the attitude of training, how important that is. Is it true if you got two people and one guy's physically in good shape and so forth and can do the minimums and everything—can do good let downs and exits and blah blah blah—but he's only trying at 80% or so but you got this other guy that's not in quite as good a shape but he's giving it all he's got and he can do good exits and let downs—he's close, but he's just maybe a shade, he's marginal—just a shade. Is it true that to develop that attitude—jumper attitude—that what you might do is either try and weed out the physical—the guy that's in good shape—or to pressure him to put out more and then if it appears after a week of doing that or whatever, that he's not going to put out that you somehow get rid of him.

CD: Yeah, that's basically it, because you don't want...I personally wouldn't want him around.

BVV: Why is that?

CD: I guess I just put so much on the attitude. I would view it this way. The guy who is, say, physically fit, but he's not just put out—he's putting out enough to get by and do the job. He does okay. He just does what's required, and that's it—nothing more. When you really want him—a real need someplace where you gotta rely on somebody—you just need an extra effort, somebody just to bust butt for you and do something, get something done, he's not gonna be the guy to do that. He's probably going to be one he'll just do what's required and that's it. The other one is going to be constantly in there trying to do better, trying to improve. His whole attitude is going to be one of do as much as you can. Maybe the first year he's a little marginal, but the second or third year, he'll pick it up. In the long run, he'll be better than the other one. The other one's just going to reach a level then just plateau out, where the other may continue just to improve himself. That's how I view it.

BVV: Because when you get out on a fire, especially if it's two man which a lot of your fires are, you've got to rely on that other guy.

CD: Yeah, you're relying on him and you're relying on him for a hell of a lot. And if he's just a guy that does just enough to get by, that's really not the kind of guy you want rely too much on. But on the same side you don't want to rely everything on a guy who's trying his damndest but doesn't quite make the grade. I mean, that's not good enough either. You got to have something in between.

BVV: I guess we're talking about, maybe, people on the margin. Only they're on the margin for different reasons—one's on the margin for physical ability and the other's on the margin for attitude.

CD: Well, the physical ability, you can always, with trying, improve that. That's easier—seems to be a lot easier to improve than attitude. If you've got a good attitude, your physical will probably come along. If your attitude is, 'phft,' it's going to be real hard to get somebody's attitude up there.

BVV: Looking into your little crystal ball there, what do you see for the future of smokejumping? You sort of touched on this too, but—

CD: I just don't know.

BVV: Not necessarily just women per se, but—

CD: Yeah, well, women are going to be in it—that's all there is too it. I'm not totally upset about it. They do the job fine.

I don't know. It's just going to depend on the money. We're awful damn expensive. So, we'll have to see where the dollars shake out. There's going to have to be some major changes, at least in this region, as far as the jumpers; otherwise, as far as numbers and locations and disparate [unintelligible] and all that...I think we'll be around for a while. I don't think we're dinosaurs yet. I think we'll still be around.

[long pause]

BVV: Anything else?

CD: No.

BVV: That pretty well wraps her up then.

[End of Interview]