

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Richard Tolbers

Date of Interview: August 09, 2006

Location of Interview: Not specified

Interviewer: Dorothe Norton

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 36.5 years

Offices and Field Stations Worked: Fergus Falls Wetland Management District; Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge; St. Paul Federal Building; Minnesota Valley, /Twin Cities ES [Ecological Services] Field Office

Positions Held: Biotech; Ecological Services Field Officer;

Most Important Projects: Wetland protection; Canada geese banding;

Colleagues and Mentors: Goodan "Goody" Larson; Louis Swenson; Joe Scott; Don Peterson; Michael Lindeburg; Roxanne Ligam; Gary Wege; Paul Burke; Nick Walsh; Robert Welford; Lynn Lewis; Joe Scott; Rollins Siegfried; Richard Joarnt; Rick Berry; Bob Braem; Bud Fuchs; Bradley Johnson; Robin Thorson; Mark Madison;

Key Words: Refuges; surveys; river basins; hunting; research; law enforcement; habitat; birding; waterfowl; ecological services; Federal Aid; wilderness

Dorothe Norton: Richard, you gave me such good directions, I had no problem finding this place and I appreciate that.

Richard Tolbers: Well that's great. I'm glad to see you again Dorothe.

Dorothe Norton: Okay, so we're going to start this off and I'm going to ask you the date and the place where you were born.

Richard Tolbers: I was born on November 6, 1941.

Dorothe Norton: In what town were you born?

Richard Tolbers: I was born in St. Mary's Hospital, that's in Minneapolis, Minnesota. That's what my mother said anyway, I don't remember it!

Dorothe Norton: What were your parent's names?

Richard Tolbers: My mother's name was Lenora, and she went by Becky Tolbers. Her maiden name was Beckedahl, from Austin, Minnesota, which is way down just south of the Iowa line. Austin was my hometown, I lived there just about my whole life and went to Austin High School. My mother was a sweetheart.

Dorothe Norton: Your dad's name?

Richard Tolbers: My dad's name was Dick Tolbers.

Dorothe Norton: What did he do?

Richard Tolbers: He was a musician, he played guitar in a band.

Dorothe Norton: Good for him!

Richard Tolbers: Other than hunting and fishing, music was my life.

Dorothe Norton: Well, we can talk about a lot of things when we get into this interview.

Richard Tolbers: Dancing and music, I love all of that stuff.

Dorothe Norton: Is that how he earned his living, at playing music?

Richard Tolbers: Yes, pretty much.

Dorothe Norton: That's good. So you spent all of your early years down in Austin.

Richard Tolbers: In Austin I was a hunting and fishing. I would run home from school and grab either my gun or fishing pole and run, I had about five blocks to get out of town. On the outskirts of town you could hunt whether you had a bb-gun or a 22 [gauge] or a bow and arrow. We would shoot rabbits around this old sugar plant. I just shot everything, my buddies and I.

Dorothe Norton: Did your dad take you fishing?

Richard Tolbers: Yeah, yeah. I just loved hunting and fishing, I did for many years.

Dorothe Norton: Did you ever have any other hobbies other than hunting? Did you read?

Richard Tolbers: That was the big thing. I think I went out for a couple of sports in high school but I just didn't like staying in school, I wanted to go hunting and fishing and so I just did that until I finally got out. I worked one year at Hormel Pack Plant and then I went into the Navy for four years, from 1961 to 1965. I graduated from Austin High School in 1960.

Dorothe Norton: Before you graduated from high school, did you have a job then? Is that when you were working at Hormel or was it after?

Richard Tolbers: It was before, it was before I went into the Navy. I worked on farms for two or three summers and that's how I earned a little money. Then, like I said, I worked at Hormel Meat Packing Plant one summer. I think the summer before I went into the Navy I went up north and worked at Grand View Lodge, it's a big fancy lodge, for one summer.

Dorothe Norton: Is that where the Spam Museum is now, in Austin?

Richard Tolbers: Yes, I think so.

Dorothe Norton: I've never been there, I want to go down there some day though and see it.

Richard Tolbers: Hormel is famous for all of that, yeah.

Dorothe Norton: After you graduated from high school then where did you go?

Richard Tolbers: I graduated in 1960, then I went into the Navy in 1961, and I was in the Navy from 1961 to 1965. I got out a month early, shy of four years, so I could go start college. I started college in my home town, Austin Junior College, the first year.

Dorothe Norton: Is that part of the University of Minnesota?

Richard Tolbers: No, it's just a junior college, Austin Junior College. Then, well I'll go through the history of my first wife; I was going to the University of Idaho, that was

my dream because I could shoot everything there you could imagine, from elk to... every big game animal you could shoot in about 50 miles from the spot I was going to live. But we never made, we headed up north and it was so beautiful in the fall by Duluth, we just fell in love with it. We turned around and went back to Duluth, I got a job and worked. I started with UMB [University of Minnesota, Duluth] and I worked there for another year. Then, to get my last two years in wildlife management, I had to go down to St. Paul Campus. So we lived down here in a trailer home [I had two kids from my first marriage]. I graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1970, and then I started with the Service about a month after, the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dorothe Norton: Your degree was Wildlife Management?

Richard Tolbers: Yes, a wildlife degree in Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Management.

Goodman Larson, Goody Larson, he was the one, the personnel officer that hired me for the Fish and Wildlife Service. My first job was at Fergus Falls [Wetland Management District]. So I got the best station in the whole country. I just love Fergus Falls.

Dorothe Norton: Did you ever know Dave Kraft up there?

Richard Tolbers: No, I don't think so.

Dorothe Norton: Joe Hopkins? Well, you're not that old.

Richard Tolbers: Oh man, we had...

Dorothe Norton: Well, we had a law enforcement officer at one time, but I don't think when you came in he was there, it was 1970.

Richard Tolbers: I didn't know the law enforcement people. I was at Fergus Falls for about four years. Lou Swenson was the manager out there. We had four counties: Douglas; Grant; Otter Tail; Wilkin County.

I loved it, the fishing and hunting was just unbelievable. I would go out on these WPAs [Waterfowl Production Areas they would acquire with duck stamp funds and I would map out everything on them, you know, where the power lines, where the croplands, where the wetlands are at. You would type them.

Dorothe Norton: Did you bring the animals home and somebody would cook them for you?

Richard Tolbers: Oh, all the time. I hunted all over up there, knew all the good WPAs where there was good bow hunting. I knew the lakes where there was good fishing, I had unbelievable fishing. I love Fergus Falls!

Dorothe Norton: It's a beautiful town.

Richard Tolbers: Unbelievable, yes.

The next station I had, I went to Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, which is up by Big Lake. I was there for about two and a half years, I guess, and that was great too. The hunting and fishing was deteriorating though, it wasn't good as Fergus Falls but still was pretty good.

Dorothe Norton: While you were in the Navy, what were your duties, what was your job, what was your rank and all?

Richard Tolbers: I made [Petty Officer] Second Class in about, I don't know, a year, year and a half. I couldn't make First [Class] because I had to ship over, so I was a second class torpedo man for the last two years, anyway. I made First Class in about a year.

Dorothe Norton: What duty stations did you have?

Richard Tolbers: I went to boot camp in San Diego and then I came back on leave and then went back and went to Class A School, it was an anti-submarine warfare school in San Diego. After I graduated from that I got my first ship, which I think was the U.S.S., what was it, I was on four destroyers.

Dorothe Norton: And over into the Pacific?

Richard Tolbers: I am trying to think what it was called, I can't remember. Oh wait, the Westpac cruise, yeah. We were home ported out of San Diego, then it was Long Beach, and then San Francisco. I had three home bases where our ship was home based out of. We made a Westpac cruise in 1963, I think it was. Went over to Japan, Philippines, Hong Kong, and Hawaii, we went to Hawaii for a couple of weeks. So, that was great.

Dorothe Norton: Did you get any decorations or medals or anything?

Richard Tolbers: No, no medals.

Dorothe Norton: You were just a good old sailor?

Richard Tolbers: I was in during the Cuban blockade, if you remember that.

Dorothe Norton: Oh, yeah.

Richard Tolbers: So we were close to it. If the Russians would have challenged us, our ship would have been headed to Cuba. We never did. But that was as close I came to getting into combat. I got out in 1965, and like I said, a month to start college.

Dorothe Norton: Can you tell me when and where and how you met your wife.

Richard Tolbers: Let me get there. After I left Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, I was there for a couple of years, two and a half years, I went into a new program called Ecological Services for the Fish and Wildlife Service. I got a GS7 there, which was kind of hard to get in a refuge at that time. It was a new program opening up and it was in the Twin Cities, that's the only bad part, but I just loved it. We were located, actually where the Fish and Wildlife Service right now is, in the regional office, that's where it was, it was called the Old Minneapolis Field Office. Joe Scott was the...

Dorothe Norton: Joe Scott, yeah!

Richard Tolbers: Yes, Minneapolis field officer; and Joe, he is a sweetheart. He was my supervisor. I was there and Don Peterson and, oh cripe, who else was on that, trying to remember, Michael Lindenburg was there. He's still a federal agent. We started out together and ended up together. And so I was in the...

Dorothe Norton: You've seen him, he's just this little short guy. I keep teasing him, I say, "Okay Mike, when are you going to hang it up?"

Richard Tolbers: Yeah, I know, I know. So I was in Ecological Services for like 20 years. We worked at St. Paul then, the Federal Building in St. Paul with all of the judges, I think we were there for a couple years. Then we went to another place in St. Paul and then there was another one. We moved about every other year we moved because of the funding and the space rental. Finally the last move they put us to Minnesota Valley, where now we're called the Twin Cities ES [Ecological Services] Field Office.

Dorothe Norton: Right next to the refuge, yes.

Richard Tolbers: I was there my last four or five years.

Dorothe Norton: Did you work with Roxanne?

Richard Tolbers: I worked with Roxanne [s/l Lincoln or Wiggin], I worked with everyone. My buddy is Gary Wege, he's my buddy, he's just like a brother, I love that guy. And Paul Burke and Nick Walsh. Just all honey's, you know what I mean? You know, Roxanne Wiggin and...

Dorothe Norton: Well, I'm going to see her down in Albuquerque, we're going to go the regional office and look around.

Richard Tolbers: Just an unbelievable crew. I had different ES supervisors; I had Bob Welford, I had Lynn Lewis, and there is another one and I can't remember who it was after Joe Scott, I just can't remember who the heck that was. But, I loved ES, it was, well, I will give you something here that describes all of the duties. I had the western half of the states for reviewing all kinds of projects that have any kind of federal funds or federal permit involved; corps work permit for federal funds. Mainly looking at projects like trying to drain, big draining projects, draining like 300 acres of wetlands by this

judicial ditch, it was stuff like that. Highway projects and all kinds of stuff. I really loved that job, that's my pride and joy, what I did those 20 years for the Service. Wetlands has always been my big thing.

Dorothe Norton: Did you work with Rollin Siegfried ever?

Richard Tolbers: Rolly, oh I loved Rolly! Yeah.

Dorothe Norton: His "har, har, har" laugh!

Richard Tolbers: When I started at Fergus Falls, Rolly was at, where the heck was he?

Dorothe Norton: Morris? No, Benson? No, it might have been Benson.

Richard Tolbers: I know he worked, I think he went up north, he went up Detroit Lakes too I think. Didn't he?

Dorothe Norton: I don't remember that part, but he married Karen Siegfried, and she had been married to Bill Daughtery, who used to work in...

Richard Tolbers: I think Rolly worked at Detroit Lakes, I think he did.

Dorothe Norton: He might have been. I know I went up there with her one time, but I can't remember right now where it was.

Richard Tolbers: He started out at another ES field office, I think it was in the Dakota's or something, and then I think he went to Detroit Lakes. That's where I met him, he was...

Dorothe Norton: Hortonville?

Richard Tolbers: I think you're thinking about Dick?

Dorothe Norton: No, I'm thinking about Rolly. But Dick who?

Richard Tolbers: Who was the guy who was in Refuges who was kind of like their chief, and he was in the Wetland Districts? Dick somebody. That's who I thought you were talking about when you said Benson. We used to have a ES office, I mean a management district. Now we don't.

Dorothe Norton: Rolly's son is a St. Paul policeman now.

Richard Tolbers: Oh, I didn't know that. I always liked Rolly.

Dorothe Norton: Yeah, he's just, I think, two or three years he's been a St. Paul policeman now.

Richard Tolbers: Really, well that's neat.

Dorothe Norton: They're coming to the reunion in October in Albuquerque.

Richard Tolbers: I remember when Rollie retired, I've seen him a number of times. I've always liked that guy.

Dorothe Norton: Tell me about how you met your wife.

Richard Tolbers: I met my wife when I was in the Twin Cities here. Where was I, was I in...

Mrs. Tolbers: You were over in the New Hope area.

Richard Tolbers: When I was in the ES, it was when I was in ES in St. Paul, I think, because we were married for 24 years, it will be 24 years here this October or September.

Mrs. Tolbers: It will be 25.

Richard Tolbers: Or 25, I'm sorry. Well, I got my divorce from my first wife, and it was kind of hard for me, I had a couple of kids, a boy and a girl, from my first marriage. So I remember I used to go out dancing or roller skating or something, and there was a place I used to go, it was called the Iron Horse, on Sunday nights, it seems like I would go out, and just to dance. I remember I just went there...

Dorothe Norton: Is he a good dancer?

Richard Tolbers: Oh yeah.

Mrs. Tolbers: He's a good dancer.

Richard Tolbers: But I remember, there were two girls sitting there and I just walked over and stuck my hand out and she grabbed it and we have been dancing ever since!

Dorothe Norton: Oh, that's great!

Richard Tolbers: We're so much alike, it just amazed me.

Dorothe Norton: You have two boys?

Richard Tolbers: Two boys, we have Matthew, he is 19, and Travis is 17, I believe.

Dorothe Norton: What do they do now? Did they go to college?

Richard Tolbers: Matthew has a job with UPS part-time, he's loading these UPS trucks and stuff. He works like from 4 a.m. until 8 a.m. and then he comes home and he

sacks out for about five or six hours. He's a good kid. Travis is 16, he's working at a bowling alley part-time.

Mrs. Tolbers: He's in high school, Travis is.

Dorothe Norton: Does any of your sons have any children?

Richard Tolbers: No, that's what we're worried about. I'm worried about Travis, we call him a 16-year scaring the heck out of me!

Dorothe Norton: I have a nephew that became a father when he was 16.

Richard Tolbers: Oh, that's what I'm telling them, "Don't do that!"

Dorothe Norton: Now his daughter is 16, and he's 32! But they never got married, but they are still very good friends and he has paid his way as far as the child. So, it's interesting. I know you'd rather have it be the right way.

Richard Tolbers: Oh, I've told my boys, "I don't want you getting married until you're 24 or 25 if you can. I mean if it happens, it happens. "If you can hold off, right now you need to get your education, whatever your career is going to be and start working toward it." That's when I'm telling Matthew. Travis, he's still in high school. "All you have to do now is get your high school diploma and have fun." That's kind of what I told him. Of course, he's not hunting and fishing like I did, he's doing other stuff, roller blading and stuff and now girls, of course. But I never looked at girls until I was...

Dorothe Norton: Now we'll got to your professional stuff. You said Goody Larson hired you, was that your first professional position?

Richard Tolbers: Yes. I graduated from the University of Minnesota and within a month I started work with the Fish and Wildlife Service and they sent me up to Fergus Falls, me and my first wife.

Dorothe Norton: Was there any special reason that you wanted to work for the Service or was it just that you...

Richard Tolbers: Well, I just loved hunting and fishing. I had my degree in outdoors.

Dorothe Norton: How did you hear about the opening at Fish and Wildlife?

Richard Tolbers: I just went up there. Where's the Fish and Wildlife Service, you know. Goodwin Larson was the personnel officer at the time and I went in there and he asked me some questions; [unclear --- s/l "let's ask for the gun, don't remember that - box..."] , I knew that right away.

Dorothe Norton: The pay and benefits seemed to be okay at the time?

Richard Tolbers: Oh I didn't care about that, I just wanted to get into wildlife. I loved it, that was my training. I was just so happy to get a job with something I loved. In fact, there were two of us in my graduating class in 1970 that got a job right away. One was myself and another guy was the guy who got a job with the DNR. All the rest of them, a lot of them got on eventually with the DNR or something. But I was fortunate, I was the only one that I know that was hired right away. So I was lucky, very fortunate.

Dorothe Norton: Did you have promotion opportunities then during your 24 years?

Richard Tolbers: Oh yeah, always.

Dorothe Norton: What did you start as, a GS7?

Richard Tolbers: I started as a GS5 biotech, I think it was, at Fergus Falls.

Dorothe Norton: Then when you retired, it was?

Richard Tolbers: A GS12.

Dorothe Norton: Very good.

Richard Tolbers: I had a great career.

Dorothe Norton: Did you socialize with any of the people that you worked with? Like if they had a beer party or if they had a luncheon party for somebody?

Richard Tolbers: Yeah, we did some of that, we did all of the time. When I was in refuges especially, like I was six and a half years in refuges we had those kind of things all of the time.

Dorothe Norton: Did you ever play ball on the teams if they had or golf or bowling?

Richard Tolbers: Oh yeah, I've done some of that. I used to go golfing, especially if they had a golfing tournament, I did that a few times. But I'm a more of a loner-type, I'm not into the social stuff, but I did a fair number of that.

Dorothe Norton: Did your career have any affect on your family? Negative or positive? Would you say just you had a job and they knew you went to work.

Richard Tolbers: No, it proved a great career as fast as I was concerned. It paid the bills. I mean, I just loved my job, I even hated to leave. When you work for the Fish and Wildlife you don't want to quit, you just want to keep doing it. You've got to get to the part where you just say, "I'm done, I've shot my wad, this is it. It's time for somebody else to step in and do it."

Dorothe Norton: I hesitated to because...

Richard Tolbers: Just hope you get a big enough check to keep you home.

Dorothe Norton: We got that buy-out bonus in '94. When I filled mine out, I didn't even know if they would approve all of them. I'd gone on vacation, we came back and Shirley Zeliff said, "Guess what, we all got approved!"

Richard Tolbers: It's good, I mean we're making it. Everything is so expensive now, it's kind of scary.

Dorothe Norton: Yeah, the gas prices and the taxes going up all of the time like everything.

Richard Tolbers: I agree.

Dorothe Norton: So when you came to work for us then, did you get any special training to do the job they wanted you to do?

Richard Tolbers: Oh, I got so much training, I have six pages of training that I've taken.

Dorothe Norton: Is that covered in you...?

Richard Tolbers: No, but I've got that somewhere. When I applied for this, I attached it.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is unbelievable in training. I mean, no matter where I've been, I've had like six defensive driving course, I've had everything you can imagine. When I went into Federal Aid, I mean for the first year all I did was watch training courses.

The Service is unbelievable on training their people and I thank for them. I've just had unbelievable training opportunities. I can't say nothing bad about the Fish and Wildlife Service, I love them, they're just unbelievable. I feel so fortunate to work 36-1/2 years with a company like this that you love so much.

Dorothe Norton: I even assisted Earl Markwell when he was teaching defensive driver training out in the field.

Richard Tolbers: He was a safety officer, I remember that.

Dorothe Norton: Yes. It was so funny, one day we were going down to Lacrosse and he got in the car and then I got in and we're sitting there, and I said, "Oh, did you forget something Earl? Aren't we going to go?" He said, "No, not yet." He's just sitting there and he's not saying or doing anything, and I thought what the hell is the matter? Pretty soon I said, "Oh, I don't have my seatbelt on." I put my seatbelt on and he turned

the ignition and we left! Then he said to me, he said, "Dorothe, one thing you must always do when you get into a car, fasten that seat belt."

Richard Tolbers: The Service was smart. They knew how important it was to have safety be a big thing with our employees because everything that you spend, whether it's an accident, whether it's a car, whatever it is, injuries, that's money that is going for stuff other than the Fish and Wildlife resource. I think most employees agreed with that and understood that and were right, safety has been a big thing. I think that was very good. I don't think anybody resented it, I mean we knew it was a very important part of our job. When I was in Federal Aid in the Regional Office, I mean, "What do you do?" But you're still on a road, driving vehicles and stuff and so it all applies. But it's not like when you're at a field station.

Dorothe Norton: Did you have to do a lot of traveling?

Richard Tolbers: Most of my job, that's all we did. When I was in ES for 20 years that's all I did, was field reviews and this and write up this and send them the corps stuff. Really I did, I reviewed, I field reviewed, you know. The same thing when I was in refuges, I was in the field all of the time.

Dorothe Norton: Any special projects that you were involved in?

Richard Tolbers: Oh many, we had many special projects. I remember going up to Canada, banding ducks, I was on banding detail earlier in my career when I was at Fergus. Me and Rich Joarnt, you know Rich Joarnt? He and I were detailed up to Brooks, Alberta. It was unbelievable. I was in the Service for like a year or two when we got detailed up there, banding everything from mallards to...

Dorothe Norton: You never went to Povungnituk did you?

Richard Tolbers: Where?

Dorothe Norton: Povungnituk.

Richard Tolbers: I never heard of it.

Dorothe Norton: I hadn't either, but our pilot was up there and his plane lost... A sea plane, what do you call it, lost something.

Richard Tolbers: Here's one of my sons. Matthew, this is Dorothe.

Dorothe Norton: Nice to meet you.

Richard Tolbers: This is the mean one. No, he's a sweetheart.

Dorothe Norton: But anyway, he called in to report that I had a call back up there and I had to call back up there and I had to go through about four different operators.

They thought I was making it up. But [Ralph] Von Dane was up there for about two weeks until they got his plane fixed.

How about any major issues? Did you ever have to deal with any of those?

Richard Tolbers: I don't know, not really, most of the things I did I loved, you know what I'm saying? There were some things that maybe they made us do that I thought I was kind of nit-picky, but you'll find that wherever you're go. I never was much for politics and all of that bologna. I was fighting for the resource, not politics. Sometimes the politics would win.

Dorothe Norton: How do you think the Service was perceived, though, by people outside the agency?

Richard Tolbers: I think we're observed very good, I'm proud. Everything I see that the Service is doing with kids, with everything. Special occasions that these refugees have, events, wetland districts that are unbelievable like the refuge celebrations and stuff. I think the Service is really in good light with the public. The problem is identity, that most of them don't know who we are. The ones that do know who we are, I think speak very highly of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dorothe Norton: I had never heard of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Richard Tolbers: Yeah, a lot of people don't. That's right, they don't know who we are.

Dorothe Norton: I had worked for the government out in Washington, D.C., so I had permanent status, and when I saw this ad in the paper for...

Richard Tolbers: Oh, you're the game warden, or something, you know, they don't know. You know what I mean, the state or whatever, most of them don't know.

Dorothe Norton: Well, I think Audrey Berg was the one then who talked to me. I didn't even realize it was government, but it said, 'government reinstatement eligibility,' and I wanted to know what that meant. She said, "Well, did you ever work for the government before?" I said, "Yes." She asked, "What is your status?" I said, "Permanent." She said, "Oh, yes, please come in and talk to us." Because I didn't have to take any test or anything. It's like Davis told me one day, "If you don't know what a bird is, don't tell anybody you don't know." Just say, "Go see somebody," tell them to see me or see Doug. Well, one day one of the agents came in and he had something he didn't know what it was, I said, "Well, it's a bird." Flick told me, I didn't know the difference between a goose and a duck, because I thought they were all just birds!

Richard Tolbers: Well, the Service improved in that. I think we realized that that was a problem. They've done a lot, they've made them wear the uniform, a consistent uniform, consistent patches for certain occasions, and I think that helped. We have become more aware of who we are. Because when they see it they know we are and they

say, "We like them people." I think the Service is a lot better recognized and identified now then they used to be when I started out.

Dorothe Norton: When I started too, everybody thought it was the DNR.

Richard Tolbers: Yeah, I agree, nobody knew who we were.

Dorothe Norton: You've mentioned some of your supervisors, did you mention them all?

Richard Tolbers: I thought I did, I tried to. Well, I started out with Joe Scott and I think it was Bob Welford next. It seems to me there was another, oh I know, Rick Berry. Rick Berry was also an ES, one of my supervisors and I think he was even before Bob Welford. After Joe it was Rick Berry and then it was Bob Welford and then it was Lynn Lewis, I think. I hope I'm not missing anybody. Then, like I said, I went to the regional office and Brad Johnson, he was my supervisor in Federal Aid for about eight of the nine years I was there in the regional office. The last year it was Bob Braem.

Dorothe Norton: Is Lynn Gillum still working in there?

Richard Tolbers: Lynn is still there, yeah.

Dorothe Norton: She started in law enforcement in St. Paul.

Richard Tolbers: I will say one thing about Federal Aid [Division]. I loved refuges, I loved ES, but Federal Aid was one them odd ball programs, kind of like ES. Nobody really knew but your refuges, that's the big thing you know, nobody understands what is Federal Aid. But after being in Federal Aid for almost ten years in the regional office, it's one of the most important programs the Fish and Wildlife Service has and I think they realize it. It doesn't get the recognition it deserves. It may not be right there with refuges, but I think it's so close. For what it does for the resource, I don't know how you can compare it with anything. I mean it's just... All of the dollars that's coming down from the states, I mean excise tax on guns, fishing. Everything is going back to the states to buy land, to manage the land, the research, everything you can imagine. The states get the money from all of that stuff through the federal aid program. It's a tremendous program that I hope we have it forever for the Fish and Wildlife. I was proud to be in Federal Aid.

Dorothe Norton: Were there any special individuals who helped shape your career with the Fish and Wildlife? Or maybe you were such a good worker they just wanted you to stay with them!

Richard Tolbers: The one who sticks out the most is Bud Fuchs, who just retired, and he was my most immediate supervisor. He was the head of the Division of Fish and Wildlife for Federal Aid, Branch Chief. Bud and I were very close, and he was just an exceptional employee and mentor. He's been the one person I kind of respected so much in the last ten years in that program, what he's done. The other ones, I don't know, I guess I had, they were all great. When I was in ES Gary Wegge to Nick Walsh to Paul, I mean

they're all just sweethearts, you know what I mean? There wasn't one that stood out above the others, they were just all great people, concerned about the resource, and that's what they did, go out for the resource.

Dorothe Norton: Do you know any individuals who helped shape the Service? In our region or in other regions or people you've heard about that helped shape the Service to what it is today? It's very updated from when I started. People like Harvey Nelson, Art Hawkins?

Richard Tolbers: I don't know, I don't get into that. You were a higher level than I dealt with.

Dorothe Norton: I found one thing, the higher up they were, the more decent they were as far as certain individuals who were concerned. If they had problems with them...

Richard Tolbers: All I know is what's done at the field levels is what gets done. I was going out to some farm to meet with some guy who wants to drain 360 acres of wetland. You've got 20 farmers standing there with you and can't understand why I had a problem with his project. That's standing up for the resource. I did that for 20 years, I denied the project, I told him why wetlands are important, why it is around wetlands. The same thing with the flood plains. To me, that's the people in the Fish and Wildlife Service that makes us what we are. It's the one in the fields that are out there doing the things on the ground every day for the resource and standing up for it.

Dorothe Norton: What was the highpoint in your career? A special award or special project that you've...?

Richard Tolbers: I love Fergus Falls the best as far as the location. It was just unbelievable, the hunting and fishing, starting out in the Fish and Wildlife Service. Ecological; Sherburne was just a great place, great people, and I loved it, we just had a ball there. Everywhere I've been I've loved it. In Ecological Services, no matter where we were, I was doing things that I loved every day. A lot of field trips, but working with people, all who were dedicated and concerned for the resource. When I went to Federal Aid it was just a tremendous program with Brad Johnson being the RD [Regional Director] and especially Bud Fuchs, just a sweetheart. I had Minnesota and Iowa, and it was just two great states. All of the things that that program did for the resource and for the state programs is unbelievable.

Dorothe Norton: Did you ever feel that there was a low point during your career?

Richard Tolbers: I used to get down a lot of times; I used to go in and talk to somebody and complain. Usually it was something political from Washington or something that would make me mad and stuff, but that's just part of the job and part of living in a bureaucratic society.

Dorothe Norton: What was the most humorous experience you could remember?

Richard Tolbers: Humorous? Where are you getting these questions [laugh]? Did you make these up Dorothe?

Dorothe Norton: No, no, they gave these to me.

Richard Tolbers: Oh, they gave you those.

I don't know, my whole career has been a ball! I hated to leave, I mean it, it really has! It's just, you get to the point where when you get older, it's harder to do things and stuff, and I just realize that I'd been in nearly 36-1/2, and with my military it was almost 40. If I would have worked six more months to get my 40 year in and I said, "It just ain't worth it, life's too short, I don't need it, let somebody else row the boat. Get out of here Tolbers."

Dorothe Norton: Six weeks after I retired I woke up one Monday morning and I thought, 'What am I going to do now, I don't have a job, I don't have my friends. I'll never see anybody, my friends are still working.' I started to cry and I thought, 'Oh, why did I do this, why did I retire?'

Richard Tolbers: Hey, I'm shooting bucks, I'm loving it!

Dorothe Norton: My daughter talked to me for awhile and she said, "Mom, find a part-time job."

Richard Tolbers: Well, that's what you're doing this. This is great you know, this is what you needed.

Dorothe Norton: I enjoy it. I don't need the money because of retirement, it's fine.

Do you tell others about your career, like if you move into a different place or anything or you meet people?

Richard Tolbers: No, I'm a loner. I'm here with my family and hopefully we can survive. But it's been pretty good.

Dorothe Norton: Where do you see the Service heading in the next decade? Do you think it's getting ahead?

Richard Tolbers: I don't know, I saw some things in Federal Aid coming down the tube I didn't like. That's another reason, I think, I got out. Just it's hard times, things are changing and it's going to affect everybody in the Fish and Wildlife Service and it's going to be the same old thing. Congress is going to expect us to show what we do, that's why they're going through all of this stuff. It's to document what you are doing and why and how much it costs, and I think we're just going to see more and more of that. I don't know, I'm more old school I guess. I'm more, 'Get in your pickup at Sherburne and drive around at night and put in 15-hours days and don't ask for any money because you love it. Now you can't do that. Now they took my truck away from me and if you work any more

than this they're going to have pay you overtime. It just kind of went, as far as I'm concerned, it was a disappointment to me.

Dorothe Norton: They have a whole different budget system these four years now.

Richard Tolbers: That's what happened, they keep changing it. The Service has no control over this, it's just happening. They're trying to live with it. But it's kind of frustrating for some of the employees, you know what I mean?

Dorothe Norton: I was just happy when I heard about what they're having to do now for this budget furlough, the four year thing, I thought, 'Boy am I'm glad I'm out of there.'

Richard Tolbers: Oh yeah, they've got a new performance thing now. They've got some things that were coming down in Federal Aid that I really didn't like that I thought was just ridiculous. For us trying to document some of the things we were doing in Federal Aid. They're going to throw them out and they're changing how the grants process now. They don't only have to do grant agreements anymore, they don't even grant agreements anymore, now they're saying you just need to do get a grant proposal. Stuff like that. It's little stuff to most people, but us within the program it just didn't sound right. Things were working good.

Dorothe Norton: While you were working all of those years, did you feel the changes in an administration affected our work as far as the financial end of it?

Richard Tolbers: They were always trying to make it thinner, leaner, better, you know, you can only do so much with so much out of a turnip. I'd just soon have the turnip doing what a turnip is supposed to do, not be doing 50% of your job on something that isn't doing nothing for the resource. That's my thinking, okay, and that's the part I didn't like.

Dorothe Norton: Okay, well now I don't have anymore questions, so you can just tell me whatever you want to tell me. Tell me what you're going to give me to put with the tape and whatever you want to do.

Richard Tolbers: I just appreciate your coming out, I didn't know that you were even doing this, that the Service was doing this. I knew they had this memorial thing at the National Training Center for people that have been killed and stuff.

Dorothe Norton: Have you been to the Training Center?

Richard Tolbers: Yes, yes. I've been there three times I think for training.

Dorothe Norton: It's a beautiful place.

Richard Tolbers: Oh, it's unbelievable.

Dorothe Norton: It's just like a sanctuary.

Richard Tolbers: It is unbelievable, yeah, I just loved it.

Dorothe Norton: The lady who owned that land could have gotten three times more money from the Japanese. They wanted to buy it because they wanted to put a factory there and she didn't want that.

Richard Tolbers: When I went there I said, "The Fish and Wildlife Service deserves this place, we deserve this!" I mean, it's unbelievable. We deserve it.

Dorothe Norton: They brought her over to the meeting, that first one when I went there, and she talked to us and told us the history.

Richard Tolbers: It's so well run, it's got a reputation now, I think Congress would even come out there half the time and enjoy it. It's been good for everybody.

Dorothe Norton: Different government agencies send people there too for some training.

Richard Tolbers: No doubt about it, no doubt about. All of the resource agencies, as a place where they can go, and we needed that. I think it's tremendous and every penny that's spent there is well worth it.

Dorothe Norton: You don't hear any airplanes and it's just kind of by itself, but it's just wonderful.

Richard Tolbers: And Robin, she was here the last, Robin Thorson, the last year or two and I really loved her, she's just a sweetheart. Really impressed with that lady. All of our people have been good. Our directors just let the people do the job, get the money down to wherever it is to get the job done. As long as everybody is fighting for that, that's all you can do. You're not going to get everything, but you get the best you can for the people in the field. As long as we keep doing that, the resource will be here. That's what we care about, that's why we're here. If we're not going to do that, let's go home. That's what I said when they started changing the laws, executive words and saying, 'A wetland is not a wetland,' and all of this stuff. Taking away all of the regulations, weakening 404. I got to the point and said, "What am I even doing here?" Why pay me if we can't stop the destruction of these things, we might as well just go home. That's the frustration I had the last five years I was in ES.

Dorothe Norton: Well, I mentioned that I do want to get a hold of Bud and do an interview him. Anybody else you feel that I should interview?

Richard Tolbers: Bud for sure. When I retired I got plaques and stuff, everybody was giving me all of this stuff, it's unbelievable. It was just a wonderful career.

Dorothe Norton: Did you have a luncheon?

Richard Tolbers: Oh yeah, we had two of them.

Dorothe Norton: I didn't see anything. If my sister, she works in law enforcement now, she's the assistant to my old position.

Richard Tolbers: Mine only went out to a select few, I didn't want everybody coming, I just wanted some of the select few to come and so I pretty much decided who was going to come.

Dorothe Norton: Okay, but she sends me a notice she thinks it's somebody that I know.

Richard Tolbers: I went to Bud's, he had his a month ago, that was great. He's retired, I'm thinking you're going to be doing him?

Dorothe Norton: Yes.

Richard Tolbers: That's good. No, it's just time for me to call it quits and now I can chase mom around the house and play my computer games, shoot bucks! I'm happy. The biggest thing is trying to keep my kids in line. But it's tough for kids nowadays, everything is so expensive and we worry about that.

Dorothe Norton: Well, you will start getting a quarterly newspaper. As a matter of fact, one will be coming out here now before the end of August. Jerry Grover, he's the one that keeps all of the email addresses. So if you ever change carrier or anything, be sure you let me know and I will let him know.

Richard Tolbers: I miss getting that, what do they call it, what's the Fish and Wildlife bulletin that they come out with every two months or three months?

Dorothe Norton: Oh, the one that comes from Washington with the directors picture on it?

Richard Tolbers: Yeah, I used to put it on my computer every time. I miss seeing that. It probably is on the internet, if I go to the site I'm sure I can get it, I just haven't done that. But I did miss reading that,

Dorothe Norton: I will say this about the director we have now, David Hall, he is a very hardworking and honest man. He's been to a couple of our law enforcement meetings, he's come special just to see and meet some of the agents.

Richard Tolbers: They just announced him not too soon before I left. I knew who he was, I just never met him or anything, so that's good to hear.

Dorothe Norton: A very, very nice honest man.

Richard Tolbers: Well that's great, that's good to hear.

Dorothe Norton: Well, I will be happy to send those along with the tape. Mark Madison is quite a nice fellow. I never knew he was a doctor, he's got a doctor degree, he's a PhD and I said, "Gee, can I still call you Mark?" He said, "Yes." It's just interesting because they can gather some things from here too.

Richard Tolbers: Sure, well that was one of the specific duties I did when I was in Refuges, they had one when I was in Ecological Services and Federal Aid.

Dorothe Norton: This new almanac they're talking about now, they have talked before about possibly writing a book with having a couple of authors work with them and just picking through the things out of different ones. But otherwise this would be, say in ten years or so if you're kids are off traveling and they go to the Training Center they could say, "Did you ever have a guy named Dick Tolbers that worked?" "Yep."

Richard Tolbers: They could look me up! That is unbelievable, unbelievable. I appreciate that, that's nice.

Dorothe Norton: They have a lot of confiscated things too. Did they have them when you were out there? They just started putting them in there a couple three, four, five years ago.

Richard Tolbers: They had some kind of historian, they had hired a historian to pull together a lot of the history of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Maybe that's what you're talking about, and I forget the guys name but I read that, they're doing that kind of stuff.

Dorothe Norton: Yeah, I forgot his name too, but I know what you are talking about.

Richard Tolbers: I knew about the memorial thing, but I wasn't aware of this. This is really nice, I appreciate that. Now where would they go to find this? They would have to go the internet or something?

Dorothe Norton: I guess, I don't know.

Richard Tolbers: I mean how would my son go to see this.

Dorothe Norton: If he knew that you worked for Fish and Wildlife and if he was ever in that area, he probably...

Richard Tolbers: But where would this tape or whatever?

Dorothe Norton: It goes into the archives at the Training Center.

Richard Tolbers: Oh, so they would have to contact there. Oh, okay. Could they do that electronically?

Dorothe Norton: No.

Richard Tolbers: They couldn't go on the internet and somehow go to Shepherdstown and get into the thing of the retirees and click on something and listen to my tape, they couldn't do that?

Dorothe Norton: Maybe at the center they can, I don't know.

Richard Tolbers: I bet they can, it's amazing what ... NCTC, the capabilities there is unbelievable, so it wouldn't surprise if they could. They probably would never do that. But if they were wondering what their old man did or this interview, they could probably do that someday if they knew where to go to get it. They probably wouldn't know that. It's nice of the Service to do that. It reflects on the agency that I worked for my whole and I love so much, and this is just the way they are. You don't see this with other companies and stuff, they don't do this. That's why we're so special.

Dorothe Norton: When the Postal Service moved into the Federal Building, we lost a few people because their pay scale was a little higher and they were just clerical types.

Richard Tolbers: That's another reason why I'm proud of the Service. They do these things that is beyond what an agent has to do for their employees. It's not only training and things they're kind of required to do, which they do better than anybody else, but stuff like this. It's just an example of how they care about their employees. They love their employees, they realize what their employees. Their employees give their life for the Service, I mean they really do. Their breath, everything, I mean that's all they think about. I used to more when I was in refuges because I could do more. It got to the point where you can't do that much. But I put in many hours of overtime that I didn't get paid for and didn't think a thing about it. As a matter of fact, I was disappointed when they wouldn't let you do it. When I got out of refuges I didn't even have that opportunity anymore. It's a very special organization and I'm just proud to have been a part of it for 36 years, 36-1/2 years.

Dorothe Norton: Well, I always said that we had good people in personnel because they always hired such special people who were willing to do the work and not looking all of the time for another job and another agency higher up or something.

Richard Tolbers: That's right, that's exactly right. We're not in it for the money. We're in here for the resource, we care about the resource. We love our job and what we stand for and what we do and that's it. How many people have a job that they love as much as we do, you know. That's the way I looked at it. We are so lucky to have the opportunity. Maybe I did have a BS degree in wildlife, and I worked hard get that, but I still felt so fortunate to be able to be hired by the Fish and Wildlife because it meant so much to me.

Dorothe Norton: Thank you very much and glad to meet and I will hopefully see you