

## **Oral History Cover Sheet**

**Name:** Bryce Shimmon

**Date of Interview:** June 7, 2006

**Location of Interview:** Fridley, Minnesota

**Interviewer:** Dorothe Norton

**Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service:** 1978-2004, 26 years.

**Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held:** Regional Office near Denver.

**Most Important Projects:** Developed payroll systems used by the Fish and Wildlife Service, mapping system for Ecological Services, converting refuges radio systems

**Colleagues and Mentors:** George Kubik, Tom Kerze, Dan Miller, Barbara Milne, Janice Whitney

**Most Important Issues:** Government effectiveness and retirement benefits.

**Brief Summary of Interview:** After recounting his education in South Dakota, he discusses his family, and then talks about his career in Fish and Wildlife Services. He talks about his work with computers, traveling, working on a payroll program, a mapping program, and converting radio systems for refuges.

**Keywords:** employee, history, biography, computers, programs, ecological services, wildlife refuges, payroll

**National Heritage Team of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Oral History Program**

Subject/USFW Retiree: Bryce Shimmon

Date: 06/07/2006

Interviewed by: Dorothe Norton

Dorothe Norton:

Okay, now we'll start again; your date of birth and place?

Bryce Shimmon:

September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1937, at Aberdeen, South Dakota.

Dorothe Norton:

And your parents' names were George and...

Bryce Shimmon:

George and Clara.

Dorothe Norton:

And their jobs?

Bryce Shimmon:

Well, my dad was a salesman and he was in business for himself, and he sold school books to schools in several states, you know, textbooks.

Dorothe Norton:

Oh, that's great, and your mom?

Bryce Shimmon:

She was a school teacher.

Dorothe Norton:

Oh, she was?

Bryce Shimmon:

Yes.

Dorothe Norton:

That's good. Okay, so you spent all of your early years then out in South Dakota?

Bryce Shimmon:

Yes.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you have any hobbies or books or special events? What did you do during those years?

Bryce Shimmon:

I graduated from high school there and a couple of years to the college that's there, and then I went to Mankato and graduated there.

Dorothe Norton:

And so did you ever have a job as a kid, like a paper route or bagging groceries or?

Bryce Shimmon:

Yes, I worked in a grocery store a little bit when I was a kid.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you ever go hunting or fishing?

Bryce Shimmon:

Oh yes, I did a lot of hunting.

Dorothe Norton:

Your dad was a hunter?

Bryce Shimmon:

Yes.

Dorothe Norton:

And he'd take you out and teach you how to do it, huh?

Bryce Shimmon:

Yep, him and his buddy; the guy's name is John Popowski.

Dorothe Norton:

Oh really?

Bryce Shimmon:

John was his buddy; they'd go hunting all the time.

Dorothe Norton:

That's great. Popowski has moved now up to Spearfish.

Bryce Shimmon:

Yes, well that's his kid, the one that you're thinking of. This was...

Dorothe Norton:

Oh, that's right, okay yes, because you're about the same age as John Popowski, aren't you? He might be a little older than you are.

Bryce Shimmon:

Yes.

Dorothe Norton:  
The one we knew.

Bryce Shimmon:  
Yes, he's a little older. He used to be, I'd seen him before, he's been in the regional office.

Dorothe Norton:  
So, you went to high school then in Aberdeen, huh?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Yes.

Dorothe Norton:  
And what year did you graduate?

Bryce Shimmon:  
In '55.

Dorothe Norton:  
And then did you go to the university in Aberdeen, too?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Well, there was a small college there. I went a couple of years there to just take some courses. And then I went to Mankato to get my regular bachelor's degree in math and physics, and music, I got one in music too.

Dorothe Norton:  
Music too? Do you play the piano in there that I saw?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Well, I used to. I don't play that anymore, right now I play the cello.

Dorothe Norton:  
You do! Does Altfather know about you? He could use you in his band. Except the cello, I don't know how it would go when he's plays Ed's tuba.

Bryce Shimmon:  
I don't know.

Dorothe Norton:  
That's good though.

Bryce Shimmon:

Yes, that's what I do.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you go any further than to try and get a master's or a PhD or anything like that?

Bryce Shimmon:

No, I really didn't do anything after I got my bachelor's.

Dorothe Norton:

Who influenced your education and your career track, your dad or your friends or teachers?

Bryce Shimmon:

Well, I had one teacher that helped that I was studying music under, and he kind of helped me along. But I was kind of set to go either into engineering or some theoretical thing.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you go into the Service, United States Service?

Bryce Shimmon:

No, they drafted me but they turned me down, which is probably good thing or I probably wouldn't be here today.

Dorothe Norton:

That's possible, Bryce. I just get so sick of reading about this Iraq stuff.

Bryce Shimmon:

Well, if we don't go in there to win then don't be in there.

Dorothe Norton:

Right.

Bryce Shimmon:

You know, I don't care whether we're liberators or conquerors, if you're going to war, go in there and kill them and get out.

Dorothe Norton:

Yes. Okay, so can you tell me then how and where and when you met your wife?

Bryce Shimmon:

It was at college.

Dorothe Norton:

At college?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Yes, Mankato.

Dorothe Norton:  
Okay.

Bryce Shimmon:  
And we got married after we graduated.

Dorothe Norton:  
Where did you get married?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Actually, down there by Mankato, a little town nearby.

Dorothe Norton:  
Yeah, that's a pretty part of town. I like New Ulm and Mankato and New Prague and all those. Okay, and do you have any children?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Yes, Barbara and Lydia, and they're married.

Dorothe Norton:  
And they live right around here?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Well, Barbara lives in Jackson with her kids and Lydia lives up in Berne up here, a little north of here.

Dorothe Norton:  
What are they doing other than raise children, are they working? Did they go to college?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Lydia's husband runs a contracting outfit, he's in construction and he runs a construction company. And Barbara's husband is an engineering manager at a place called AGCO; it's a huge farm implement, you know, huge. They're headquartered in Jackson.

Dorothe Norton:  
So after you got out of college and all, did you ever think that you wanted to work for the Service? Or what was your first professional position?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Well, I actually wanted to work for industry and I did; I worked for industry for 13 years. That was Univac for 13 years. And after they downsized, I worked for another place called TRW for, I don't know, a few more years. And at that point I decided that I

wanted to go to Hewlett Packard, but that didn't work out. So the Hewlett Packard people told me the Fish and Wildlife Service needed a guy like me, and that's how I got there.

Dorothe Norton:

We were fortunate that they told us this.

Bryce Shimmon:

So that was '78.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you think the pay and benefits were okay when you came to the government?

Bryce Shimmon:

Oh, yes. In fact, that's one main reason I came, and that's probably the best reason of all because I mean you can't beat their retirement system.

Dorothe Norton:

Right.

Bryce Shimmon:

I mean, I don't know about the one that they're making them join now, but the one that I was in and you probably too, the CSRS, is a very good retirement system.

Dorothe Norton:

Yes it is, yes. I'm happy too that I got two of my children to go to government work. Because my daughter, when she married her husband, they lived in Hawaii for 15 months, when she got back she said, "What am I going to do now?" I said, "Well, if nothing else," I said, "look up the OPM, and if you have to take a test, take the test." So, she started as a clerk typist for the IRS 32 years ago and now's she's a 13, and she's head of their labor management department, and my son in the postal service. So it just helps a lot.

So you started then in the regional office, and that's where you spent all of your work?

Bryce Shimmon:

That's where I basically stayed, yes.

Dorothe Norton:

So who was your supervisor when you started?

Bryce Shimmon:

Kubik, you remember him, George Kubik?

Dorothe Norton:

Oh yes. And did you have promotion opportunities then when you started?

Bryce Shimmon:

Well, I did, yes. I got after, I don't know how many years it was, three or four years, I got promoted as we got more and more stuff going on with the computer end. And that was what I was doing.

Dorothe Norton:

Oh yes! And when we got our computers I almost quit! I thought, 'Oh, I don't know if I can learn this stuff!' Now I use it quite a bit. So it's just been fun.

Did you ever do anything for recreation with the people you worked with?

Bryce Shimmon:

Not really, we really didn't have time. I had the kids at home and stuff like that. We didn't really have a great deal of time.

Dorothe Norton:

Did your career have any direct effect on your family?

Bryce Shimmon:

On my family?

Dorothe Norton:

Of course, you never had to move around. A lot of these are more for people who would be at one refuge and go to another refuge.

Bryce Shimmon:

No, I didn't have any.

Dorothe Norton:

And so as soon as you were eligible for retirement, you retired?

Bryce Shimmon:

Well, yes. Actually, I would have worked a little longer but I decided being that I was there as long as I had been, and I'd already figured out what I was going to get, and figured this was going to be more than adequate. When they told me I had to be out on the road two weeks a month I said, "Like hell, I do!" And that's I figured well, you know.

Dorothe Norton:

And so what date did you retire?

Bryce Shimmon:

November 1st of 2004.

Dorothe Norton:



Oh, okay, that's not too long ago. So when you started working with us then, did you get any special training for the job or did you bring a lot of that with you?

Bryce Shimmon:

I brought all of that stuff with me, yes. There wasn't, you know, there wasn't going to be any training. I mean they didn't even have any computers when I got there.

Dorothe Norton:

So that was your prime area of work was with the computers then, if there were problems and such?

Bryce Shimmon:

Yes, help them set it up and that sort of thing.

Dorothe Norton:

So you just worked the regular 7:30 to 4:00, or regular regional office hours?

Bryce Shimmon:

Yes.

Dorothe Norton:

And so you didn't have to travel much then, except you did go to field stations?

Bryce Shimmon:

Oh yes, I went to field stations and I went to Denver several times. And even Washington a few times to help them with their payroll system because that's what I was involved with for quite awhile.

Dorothe Norton:

Yes, I just was out in Denver over the Memorial Day to visit my son. I talked with Neill Hartman, and I remember him from Chicago, but he lives there. And he said, "Oh, there are so many retirees in the Denver area, more than there are here or in Washington even."

Okay, so you never worked with any animals or anything?

Bryce Shimmon:

No, I'm not a biologist, not at all.

Dorothe Norton:

So were there any major issues that you had to deal with?

Bryce Shimmon:

Well, the usual computer issues and like I said, they had me working on the payroll system. We ended up using the one that I basically programmed all over the country.

Dorothe Norton:  
Well, that's great.

Bryce Shimmon:  
I don't know how long we used it, because shortly after that we kind of changed courses and went into a...

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

Bryce Shimmon:  
That one.

Dorothe Norton:  
And that was one!

Bryce Shimmon:  
Yes, that was one of them. Another one was their mapping projects.

Dorothe Norton:  
Oh, okay, so you worked close with engineering then for that?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Not engineering.

Dorothe Norton:  
Refuges?

Bryce Shimmon:  
It wasn't refuges either. It seemed like it was the ES people; or not ES people, it isn't Endangered Species, it's the other.

Dorothe Norton:  
Ecological Services?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Yes.

Dorothe Norton:  
I know, for a long time too I thought ES was always Endangered Species, until I found out about Ecological Services.

Bryce Shimmon:  
So I did mapping and helped them, you know, took training with that and all of that kind of stuff.

Dorothe Norton:

So George was your first supervisor. Who did you have after that, do you remember?

Bryce Shimmon:

Well, actually, he was my supervisor until he basically retired.

Dorothe Norton:

Oh really?

Bryce Shimmon:

Yes. And then they had Marvin running the group, and they had Barbara Milne running the group. And then at the time I quit, Janice Whitney was running the group, and I think she still is right now. So that was basically how it worked.

Dorothe Norton:

And it didn't bother you to have a female supervisor?

Bryce Shimmon:

No, I didn't care who it was.

Dorothe Norton:

Probably sometimes maybe better than a guy!

Bryce Shimmon:

Yes!

Dorothe Norton:

So, were there any individuals that you were working with that helped shape your career with Fish and Wildlife?

Bryce Shimmon:

Well, not really. We were in administration, and you know how they are, we were serving all the rest of the divisions. So I don't know, Kerze, you don't remember Tom Kerze do you? He was the assistant regional director. But I don't know, he... Not really, I mean to answer that question, I think I pretty much shaped it myself.

Dorothe Norton:

Well, it's interesting. Tom came to this May 9th meeting we had. And I've never seen Tom talk as much as he did there, just real friendly with everybody and, "How are you?" and "what have you been doing?" So I said, "Tom," I said, "I've written you a couple of notes asking if I can come and interview you." But he said, "Well, I tried to send you an email, but it didn't go through." So anyway, he let me come out and I interviewed him last week and he seemed like a different guy, you know, I always thought that he was kind of a very private person because around the regional offices...

Bryce Shimmon:

You know how it is. I mean everybody is on administration's tail for whatever reason. I mean, after they get out of there then they can relax. The last project I did basically before I retired was I was involved in converting all of refuges radio systems, and I worked directly for Denver for that. That was kind of a special project. And we did the whole region and a few others because after I finished this region, they wanted me to do a few others. You know, help out some other regions. So we did that as much as we could until the refuges said, "We're not going to pay for this anymore." So that was it.

Dorothe Norton:

Well, we always just depended so much on people like you. If something would happen, well, call Bryce or the other fellow that helped too with the minor problems, Marcus?

Bryce Shimmon:

Yes, he moved to Mississippi or something.

Dorothe Norton:

And I know I just told them one thing when they took... I said, "Don't take my typewriter away from me; I don't know if I'll ever be able to learn the computer." And now I enjoy it. But, you know, what I find with kids today, I've got so many nieces and nephews all graduating, hardly any of them can write decent and they do everything on the computer, everything. But that's okay.

Bryce Shimmon:

Yeah, well, I'm not sure that I'm surprised. Thought that people are..., it seems to be that writing has gotten deteriorated in general. They can't even spell. I mean if you've got a computer you could sure as run the spell check. But that surprises me; all the billboards that are misspelled and all the words in articles and stuff.

Dorothe Norton:

Do you remember who the regional director was when you started?

Bryce Shimmon:

A guy by the name of Hemphill.

Dorothe Norton:

Okay, and then who after that? Do you remember?

Bryce Shimmon:

Oh shoot, was it Nelson? I don't remember.

Dorothe Norton:

Okay. I was going to write those all down so I have them.

Bryce Shimmon:

Who's the other guy, who was the deputy regional director?

Dorothe Norton:  
Sam Marler?

Bryce Shimmon:  
No, it was a different guy. They didn't like him much, but he seemed like a nice guy to me. I bought a shotgun from him. Hemphill didn't like him either. I forget his name, I just can't remember.

Dorothe Norton:  
Do you think that changes in the administration generally affected the work that we were doing, changes as far as democrats or republicans?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Not really, I don't think they did. I mean there isn't a nickel's worth of difference between them anyway. One preaches one sort of doctrine and the other one preaches a more conservative doctrine. And the country keeps going in the same general path. So I don't think there's been much difference. I mean, wish there had been, we wouldn't be in the mess we're in today. I believe if they would have opened up wherever the oil reserves are, let them get them. But that stuff is way beyond us, it's way beyond our government. This is worldwide; this is new world order stuff. The people that handle the pull up strings of our leaders, they control that stuff.

Dorothe Norton:  
So, in your opinion, all the time you worked for us, who did you feel were a couple of the individuals who helped shape the service to what it is today?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Well, in Washington or here?

Dorothe Norton:  
Well, either or. In the regional office did you ever think there was anybody who'd helped get it where it is today?

Bryce Shimmon:  
I don't know about our regional. I'm not an expert on any of the politicians, the big guys in Washington, the directors you know. The last few I really paid no attention to at all because I thought they were mostly figureheads anyway. I thought the Secretary of Interior Watts, I kind of liked him. That was under Reagan for awhile, I don't know who else they had in there but I kind of thought he did alright. Then there was Clark, I thought she had a real personality. I don't know how she ever got in there, but it's all politics anyway.

Dorothe Norton:  
Yeah, you bet, a lot of it is.

Bryce Shimmon:  
All of it is.

Dorothe Norton:  
And I've had some interesting interviews with many different people. And Goody Larson was saying when he got to be the head of personnel in Region 3, he didn't know anything about personnel and Audrey Burke taught him everything he needed to know.

Bryce Shimmon:  
Who was the guy?

Dorothe Norton:  
Goodman Larson; so you don't know him because he was...

Bryce Shimmon:  
The guy who was in charge of personnel was Miller, a fellow by the name of Dan Miller. Which I thought was kind of... He was there for quite awhile but...

Dorothe Norton:  
Did nothing.

Bryce Shimmon:  
I didn't get along with him that much either.

Dorothe Norton:  
He lives just a block away from me, but I haven't told him yet where I live. But he won't even answer any of my notes.

Bryce Shimmon:  
He's still around?

Dorothe Norton:  
Oh yeah. Whenever I drive by, if he's out in the yard or anything, I'm coming from a different you know, and when I go by his corner I just kind of beep and keep going.

Well, did you have a high point in your career? I bet you did.

Bryce Shimmon:  
Well yes, I enjoyed working and writing the payroll system for them and also doing all the radio systems for them. That was pretty good, I enjoyed that.

Dorothe Norton:  
Did you get an award for any of that work? I'll bet you did.

Bryce Shimmon:

I don't know I might have gotten something. I really just filed them. I never paid any attention to them. I got Civil Servant of the Year from Kerze once. I don't know when that was anymore. I've got to find it; I think I've got it.

Dorothe Norton:  
It's framed?

Bryce Shimmon:  
Yes, they gave me something. I don't know where it is. Like I say, I was...

Dorothe Norton:  
So busy with everything else you didn't have time to think about those things. Did you ever feel there was a low point in your career, though?

Bryce Shimmon:  
I don't think so, I basically enjoyed it all. I was not then, and I still am not one that kisses somebody's hind end because of politics. I don't support most of the so-called "diversity program" because it's politically correct bullshit in my opinion.

Dorothe Norton:  
Were you ever faced with a dangerous or frightening experience?

Bryce Shimmon:  
No, not that I know of, not at all.

Dorothe Norton:  
How about a humorous experience? Did anything ever happen that you remember a lot and say, "Oh god, remember when this happened?"

Bryce Shimmon:  
No, nothing out of the ordinary. In my opinion I worked pretty hard and I got paid well for what I did and was happy about it.

Dorothe Norton:  
So what do you like to tell others about your career? If you've got a new neighbor or something, after you talk awhile and, "Where did you work?" What do you like to tell them? You'd tell them what you did, but then for the company you did it for.

Bryce Shimmon:  
I would tell them the government is a good place to work if you can stand all of the nonsense that goes along with it, the politically correct junk. And if you can see through all of that and not get afoul of it, you can be fine. I would recommend it.

Dorothe Norton:  
What were some of the changes that you observed in the Service, like in the personnel and the environment?

Bryce Shimmon:

Well, I noticed that as the regional directors moved on and on, they tended to reorganize and reorganize and reorganize. And it seems like we spent a lot of money and a lot of time doing that. And that part you just sort of just went along with it.

Dorothe Norton:

Unnecessary?

Bryce Shimmon:

Yes, I thought it was totally unnecessary. And then they changed the direction here, like group names and all of that stuff. I'm not real sure if anything substantive ever changed, you know, we still have the same basic three or four groups. I know probably one positive thing that happened is that they did merge all of the IT people into one group finally, at long last. It took them 20 years, maybe more than that. But I guess, and I don't think it's any better now, but all of the various divisions would always argue with all the other divisions. They want to do things their way. And I don't know whoever resolved that, I don't think it's resolved. As long as the work gets done, I guess.

Dorothe Norton:

So what are your thoughts on the future? Like where do you think the Service will be heading in the next decade?

Bryce Shimmon:

Well, it depends on, I suppose, on how this country fares. If the way things are in this country right now, I'm not an optimist to be honest with you. The government seems to be making a lot of mistakes at the highest levels. As far as the Fish and Wildlife Service goes, I mean there was talk the last five or seven years about merging it with Park Service and then setting up the refuges as their own agency. But that hasn't happened yet, and I don't think it should.

Dorothe Norton:

I don't think it should, either.

Bryce Shimmon:

And then there was the other thing that was bandied about, and that was making the refuges part of the Park Service and turning the Fish and Wildlife Service over to some other agency. I don't know, I can't remember all of that, I mean it's all talk. But I think if the Department of Interior stays, I think the Fish and Wildlife Service will always be there.

Dorothe Norton:

So many people, like when I started had never heard of the Fish and Wildlife Service.



And when I tell people where I was working they'd say, "Oh, the DNR." You probably heard the same thing, right?

Bryce Shimmon:

Yeah, everybody thinks the DNR is the Fish and Wildlife Service. It's not; DNR has nothing to do with us.

Dorothe Norton:

No, it's not, we were pretty small and we still are.

Bryce Shimmon:

Cooperative agreements and stuff, that's about it. They understand when you tell them that the National Wildlife Refuges, that's the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dorothe Norton:

Well, that's about all the questions that I have. Do you have anything you'd just like to talk in general about? Did you enjoy your job?

Bryce Shimmon:

Oh yeah, I enjoyed my job. The only thing I wasn't interested in doing was traveling, and since I didn't want to travel that much, it probably limited some of my opportunities but that's fine. I've always been a believer that I'm not going to sacrifice my family on the altar of my career. I've always believed that. And I have not done that because I do not believe in leaving my wife home to raise the kids while I'm out galavanting to wherever all the time. I don't see how they justify the amount of travel that they do, I mean, there's always a big travel budget. And so like I say, I don't know how they justify that stuff.

And the other thing is I didn't want to travel. I probably wouldn't have minded it so much, but having to fly wherever you're going and go through the bullshit at the airport. I'm old enough to know what the people went through during the German years, Hitler's years, and after that. And you walk into the airport, and as far as I'm concerned you can check your civil rights at the door, because you do what they tell you or they will arrest you. The very first trip I took, I decided to go on one to see how I liked it and there were a whole bunch of field stations, they tore my luggage apart. They took everything out, threw it all in a big bin, sorted it through, asked me what it was all about, even questioned the fact that I had a bible, and then handed it back to me and said, "Here, here you go, you can repack." I said, "How much stuff did you erase out of my camera and out of my little handheld computer?" I figured they'd probably send the gun squads up to me for that question. But she was pretty nice, she said, "Oh, we don't take anything away and we don't leave anything."

Dorothe Norton:

I know the Denver airport is just a mess; it's worse than our airport is.

Bryce Shimmon:

So that's why I didn't want to travel. And I made the right decision because I haven't

been on any trips since I retired, and I probably won't go if I have to fly. Wait a minute, I was on one, I had to go because my sister passed away and we were trying to get down there for the funeral. So we went to Florida but that wasn't too bad. After the 9-11 thing, it got pretty rough.

Dorothe Norton:

Is there anybody you think that we should be interviewing that I haven't done yet?  
Anybody you think specially would be somebody that?

Bryce Shimmon:

I don't know; did you talk to Merlin Bittner?

Dorothe Norton:

Yes, I've done Merlin.

Bryce Shimmon

And Mullins, John Mullins?

Dorothe Norton:

Yes, and John Ramsour too. You're not involved in their fishing? They go down to Kansas to fish once a year, don't they?

Bryce Shimmon:

I don't know, I'm not really involved in that. I haven't been retired long enough to know what these guys do.

Dorothe Norton:

Well, you'll be invited to whatever they have. I know the contracting fellows still have stayed pretty close. That's fine. I worked in law enforcement 33 years, so it's just like an extended family to me.

Well, I want to thank you for your time, Bryce, and I'm sorry that I was a little late getting here.

Bryce Shimmon:

No problem, no problem.

Dorothe Norton:

Thank you very much.