



The Oral History of Dave Duncan

April 19, 2005

Interview conducted by Dorothe Norton

Duluth, MN

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Dave Duncan

Date of Interview: April 19, 2005

Location of Interview: Duluth, MN

Interviewer: Dorothe Norton

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 24

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: Duluth, MN, Special Agent

Most Important Projects: Timber wolf and Bald Eagle Protection

Colleagues and Mentors: Bob Hodgins, Howard Lovrien, Bill Halsted, Dick (Richard) Dickenson

Brief Summary of Interview: Dave describes his early upbringing in South Dakota. He first started working as a game warden for the State of South Dakota. He took the civil service test and was hired as a special agent in Duluth, Minnesota, where he worked his entire Fish and Wildlife Service career. Dave worked on waterfowl hunting compliance, enforcement of the new Endangered Species Act of 1973 with a focus on bald eagle and timber wolf protection. He also worked undercover and assisted in many special operations. Dave maintained good working relationships with his state counterparts and with tribal police from several Native American reservations.

The Interview:

Dorothe Norton: Today is April 19th, 2005. This interview will be with David Duncan by Dorothe Norton. So, we're going to start, David, by asking you when and where you were born, the date and the place.

Dave Duncan: Okay. I was born December 31st, 1941, back in Faulkton, South Dakota.

Dorothe: What's the name of the town?

Dave: Faulkton.

Dorothe: Oh Foxsen?

Dave: Faulk. F-a-u-l-k-t-o-n. Faulkton.

Dorothe: Okay. South Dakota. Okay. What were your parent's names?

Dave: My dad was Harold Duncan, and he never went by the name Harold. He was always Slim.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: My mother was Gladys Duncan.

Dorothe: And what were their jobs and education?

Dave: Well, my mother did teach school, but I never knew her as a teacher.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: And my dad, he was, we had a small farm, and he was a trucker and a cattle buyer and a little bit of everything. And he never did go to school, I don't think. I think he did a little bootlegging, too. (laughter)

Dorothe: Well, you back in those days, you know. We could all probably tell stories about our parents. Okay. So, where did you spend your early years in Faulkton?

Dave: Well, we actually lived in a small town east of Faulkton. Seneca, South Dakota, S-e-n-e-c-a. That's where I lived and grew up and farmed and went to school. And we went to high school in Faulkton.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: And that's where I met this beautiful lady here, Carol (referring to his wife, who sits in and participates in this interview.) She grew up in Seneca, too.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: Town of about 100 people.

Dorothe: Oh, that's very nice.

Dave: And we had the best baseball team around.

Carol Duncan: Yeah. That's because he was the pitcher!

Dorothe: You were the pitcher? Okay. Yeah. So, did you have any hobbies or books? Is there anything that you'd like to read a lot? Or what did you do the most when you were a kid?

Dave: Just hunting and fishing and playing baseball. I didn't read too much.

Dorothe: Okay. Did your dad teach you how to hunt and fish?

Dave: You know, he wasn't really a hunter or a fisherman, although he did a little of it. But I was always a lot better hunter than he ever was. But I just was interested in hunting. We just - we had BB-guns, and I shot a lot of birds.

Dorothe: Did you have any jobs before you graduated from high school?

Dave: I had lots of jobs. I was always working.

Dorothe: Okay, like a paper boy or working in a grocery store?

Dave: I was a paper boy. I worked in restaurants. I worked in a gas station when I was 13, fixing tires and pumping gas. Five gallons for a dollar.

Dorothe: Well, yeah. (laughter)

Dave: And, then during high school, I did a lot of road construction work, building fence and picking rock and that kind of stuff.

Dorothe: So, you learned how to be ambitious early.

Dave: I always worked.

Dorothe: You weren't a spoiled kid then?

Dave: Wasn't a spoiled kid, no.

Dorothe: So, then you graduated from high school in Faulkton. What year did you graduate?

Dave: 1959.

Dorothe: 1959. And then did you go on to the university from that? Or what did you do after you graduated?

Dave: When I graduated, I went to, one year, to Northern State Teachers College, which has since changed to Northern State University in Aberdeen, South Dakota.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: For one year. And then I - what I always really wanted to do is do something in [the] wildlife field.

Dorothe: Oh, good.

Dave: And so, I transferred to Brookings, South Dakota, into their wildlife management program. And I graduated there three years later, from Brookings [South Dakota State University].

Dorothe: And what was your degree in?

Dave: Wildlife Management.

Dorothe: Wildlife Management. Okay. So, that aspect of your formal education equipped you for the future then.

Dave: Well, just a little sideline there. The day I graduated from college - I had taken the test to be a game warden in South Dakota when I was in college. The day I graduated from college, I stopped at Watertown, South Dakota, which was on my way back from Brookings and interviewed with Bob Hodgins.

Dorothe: Oh, Okay. (laughter)

Dave: Because at that time he was Area Law Enforcement Supervisor in South Dakota.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: And from there, then, about four or five months later, I did get a job as a state game warden. 21 [years old]. Youngest state game warden in South Dakota.

Dorothe: Oh, good. That was very good. So, did you ever serve in the military service?

Dave: No, I did not.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: I got rejected.

Dorothe: You got rejected? Well, I doubt that.

Carol: He had asthma.

Dave: I had asthma pretty bad when I was a kid, and they just - I didn't get it.

Dorothe: Yeah, okay.

Dave: But I wasn't really too unhappy, I'll tell you.

Dorothe: Probably not.

Dave: Because Vietnam was in full swing.

Dorothe: Oh, boy. Yeah. Okay, so before we go onto your career after becoming a South Dakota game agent, I want to ask you when and where and how you met your wife.

Dave: Well, we grew up in this small town together.

Dorothe: So, you met each other when you were one and two years old?

Dave: We have pictures in the baby buggy and cribs together.

Dorothe: That's cute, that's really cute.

Dave: Her folks were farmers and a schoolteacher. And of course, everybody there was a farmer, seems like. There wasn't nothing else to do, really. But I was always kind of interested in her, but not, not until I was like a senior in high school we started dating. Wasn't it? (talking to Carol). We dated all through college. And then when I graduated, we got married that June.

Dorothe: In Seneca?

Dave: In Seneca, South Dakota in 1963.

Dorothe: Okay. Yeah. And you have three children.

Dave: Three children, two boys and a girl. Yep.

Dorothe: What are their jobs today and what are they doing?

Dave: Well, the oldest son, he's got a degree. Actually, he's got a degree in airport business management. But he didn't stick with the airport very long, and presently he is managing a Christmas tree farm and selling commercial computers.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: Well, I guess that's it.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: So, he's got two lines of work, actually. And my second son, he got a criminology degree. He always wanted to be a game warden or conservation officer or special agent or something. But anyway, when he graduated, he got a job as a deputy sheriff, and then he did get hired by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources as a conservation officer.

Dorothe: Very good. And then your daughter?

Dave: And my daughter, she was the athlete of the family. She was just a real good athlete playing all sports, but she graduated with a degree in criminology also.

Dorothe: Oh, she did!

Dave: And she worked for the federal prison system for one year.

Dorothe: Oh, for crying out loud.

Dave: And then she decided she had enough of that. And she went back to college and got her master's degree in industrial safety.

Dorothe: Wow.

Dave: And a year or two after that, she got married and ...

Carol: She worked for U.S. Steel.

Dave: Well, yeah, she worked for U.S. Steel for a couple of years.

Dorothe: Here in Duluth?

Dave: In Michigan, and up on the Iron Range up at Hibbing as a safety officer for the steel company. And then she met this guy. Well, she knew this guy all through college, but they got married, and he's a professional hockey player.

Dorothe: Yes.

Dave: And so, they were in the NHL [National Hockey League] for a few years and then he didn't get drafted anymore [because of back injuries]. So now they're over in Germany, playing hockey over in Europe. They play in Germany and Switzerland, and Carol and I've been over there every year.

Dorothe: Oh, that's wonderful.

Dave: So, we've had a good time visiting them.

Dorothe: Okay, well, now we'll go to career. So, you started out as an agent in the City of South, I mean, in the State of South Dakota.

Dave: Right. As a conservation or a game warden. State game warden in South Dakota. Right.

Dorothe: And that was your first professional position.

Dave: Right. In 1963.

Dorothe: And so, then where did you go from there? You started out?

Dave: Well, I was in a real small town in western South Dakota. Buffalo. Was there for three years and then moved to Rapid City, South Dakota, as a state game warden. And about that time, they changed the title in South Dakota to conservation officer. And we were in Rapid City like six years. And then I took a job as an area or a regional, assistant regional supervisor for the Game and Fish Department. And there that encompassed everything in law enforcement and land management and game management and fisheries.

Dorothe: Oh wow!

Dave: And that's what the conservation officers did there. They didn't just do law enforcement. They did it all. And I was an assistant regional supervisor in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: And then I took the federal civil service test at that time thinking that I wanted to be a U.S. game management agent at that time.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: I mean, I got to know the game management agents there very well. Dave Fisher and Howard Lovrien. And I just decided I was going to try and do that. So, I took the federal civil service test and didn't pass it. And then I took it again. I think I took it three times. I'm not exactly sure. But anyway, I finally passed. (laughter)

Dorothe: Oh, that is good, that's good.

Dave: And then you get on a list. And so that's how I got in. And at that time, well, I kind of had a mentor there in Bob Hodgins, because he had been the director in South Dakota. And at that time, it was a non-political position, and then it turned into a political position. And Bob Hodgins left South Dakota and went to work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Minneapolis. And he saw my name on the list and that I had gotten the civil service test and called me and wanted to know if I might be interested. Well, sure. That's what I took the test for.

Dorothe: Well, sure.

Dave: I mean, nothing was planned that way. But it kind of all worked out.

Dorothe: That's good.

Dave: Just because Bob had known me and at that time, I guess he must have done the hiring or the regional supervisors did, rather than going through a process. At that time, also, I knew I was going to Duluth when I got hired.

Dorothe: Because it was vacant.

Dave: Yes. There used to be an agent in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, and it had been vacant for like two or three years. And they decided to move it to Duluth because at that [time], that's just when the Endangered Species Act went into effect in December of 1973 or two. I forget.

Dorothe: Yeah, I forget too. But it was either '72 or '73.

Dave: I think it was '73. But anyway, we got a lot more involved with Customs then rather than of all the duck work. The district office for Customs was in Duluth. I think they wanted us to work closer with Customs. And so, they decided to move the office to Duluth. So, we came to Duluth, Carol and I did.

Dorothe: When did you transfer here? 1974?

Dave: '74. Yes. Well, you got hired and then I went to school for what is it, like four months? And at that time, we were in Washington, D.C., at the Treasury Department school. There was no ...

Dorothe: No (unintelligible) then. I mean no FLETC [Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, in Marana, Arizona].

Dave: No FLETC. But we stayed - it was the Gramercy Inn I think it was called - in Washington, D.C., just a few blocks from the White House. Walked six or seven blocks every morning to go to the Treasury building to go to training. Right in the middle of D.C., walking by all the hookers and the panhandlers.

Dorothe: Yeah.

Dave: Every day. There was 30 of us there or more. I don't remember now.

Dorothe: And when you got through the school, you moved here to Duluth.

Dave: Yes, Right.

Dorothe: And your office was downtown, right downtown, four blocks from the hotel with the circle [a rotating restaurant] on top of it.

Dave: The Radisson hotel, right across the street. Yep, it was U.S. Federal building there. Real nice office. Big window, looking out over the lake. All by myself, for many years. A biologist did move in with me for a while in my office.

Dorothe: Oh, okay.

Dave: He was. Well, what the heck was he? Lance Kuester. But, at that time, they were doing animal damage control - agents.

Dorothe: What was his name?

Dave: Lance Kuester.

Dorothe: Oh, Lance, sure. Okay.

Dave: Right. The big, tall Lance. I think half of their time was supposed to have been spent on animal control and half of it on wildlife management activities. He was here for like, six or seven years. We were in the same office, and then he transferred down to St. Cloud or something. So, then I was alone again.

Dorothe: Okay. So, when you came to work for Fish and Wildlife, what were the pay and benefits like compared to what you were getting in South Dakota. Was there a difference?

Dave: Yes. That's kind of one reason why I wanted to leave South Dakota. They weren't paying nothing.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: But, you know, I can't remember the salary. [Note: the starting salary was \$385 a month.]

Dorothe: Okay, well, I don't need to know that.

Dave: But I know it was, it was ...

Carol: About three times more than what you were making.

Dave: At least twice of what South Dakota was paying. South Dakota didn't pay anything. Well, I don't even know.

Dorothe: So then when you came with this, did you have promotion opportunities, 'cause you must have started at what a GS-7?

Dave: Yes, I started at a G-7, although a lot of the agents were starting at 9's. But I did start at a 7. I guess it was just because of the way I was hired on this civil service exam.

Dorothe: Oh, that could be.

Dave: Rather than - I forget what it was. If you ...

Dorothe: Some agents probably came from a state – well, you came from a state though too.

Dave: If you came from, I mean, they had different ways of hiring. They could hire you from a state agency or another agency, and those people started at 9's. But if you were on the civil service exam, you could start at a 5/7 or whatever. I started as a 7.

Dorothe: Yeah.

Dave: But with premium pay and stuff, it was a pretty good deal. I thought so anyway.

Dorothe: Okay. And so, did you ever socialize - of course, you worked up here by yourself, so you didn't work with any people to socialize with?

Dave: Well, I worked really close with a lot of state [conservation] officers.

Dorothe: So that's good.

Dave: Got to be good friends with lots of them and knew just about every Minnesota CO [conservation officer] I would say, until they got to hiring so many new ones again, and ...

Dorothe: Things changed.

Dave: Oh, yeah.

Dorothe: Yeah. So, since your career was right here in Duluth, the career didn't have any negative effects on your family? Or did it have an effect on them?

Dave: Well, you asked about promotions, too. And, you know, when we started working here, they said that you'll never be in a station more than seven years. That was kind of a policy.

Dorothe: That was what they told me too.

Dave: And then about six years down the road, they ran out of money and decided it cost too much money to move people. So, they weren't moving them as much. And yes, I could have moved different places, I can recall.

Dorothe: That was usually how they got their promotions.

Dave: Yes. You had to really move to get promoted. Anyway, I would have definitely, because I was Fish and Wildlife Service in Duluth. The only one here.

Dorothe: Yes.

Dave: And so, if I had wanted a promotion, which I just - we just kind of liked it here, and the kids were active and got involved in stuff. We just decided we were going to stay in Duluth, which we did for 26 years, I guess, or whatever.

Dorothe: When you retired, you were a GS-12.

Dave: GS-12, but I never made it to the top (laughter).

Dorothe: And you retired - do you remember the day?

Dave: It was a 9, I think. GS-12 step 9 or something. What day?

Dorothe: Or what year?

Dave: Well, I'm thinking it was '98. Wasn't it? 12/31. You know, that's something maybe we're going to have check on, Dorothe. The year. Yeah, but my birthday was 12/31 and it was mandatory retirement. 57.

Dorothe: Okay and then you were born in '41 so it was '98.

Dave: Okay. That's what I'm thinking.

Dorothe: Okay. So then when you did start with us, you did receive the training you were mentioning in D.C? Was that just basic training? Was it like what was expected of conservation officers?

Dave: Yes. That was what we did. We had - I forget now if it was two months or ten weeks - of federal law enforcement training. It was all general law enforcement training - the federal court system, search and seizure and arrests. But it was all the basic law enforcement stuff. And then, after we completed that, then the Fish and Wildlife Service special agents put on a school on fish and wildlife law enforcement. And some of the old timers you're very familiar with taught that. And I'm just trying to think now. Gus Bondy was one of them. Howard Lovrien taught also. I remember. And who was the picture taking guy? I kind of remember him.

Dorothe: Chuck Nixon?

Dave: Yep, I think he did. But anyway, we had – it was either four or five weeks of specialized Fish and Wildlife Service law enforcement.

Dorothe: And also, firearms training.

Dave: We did that also in the basic course. Yep, we had firearms training.

Dorothe: So, then what hours did you work? You didn't work 8 to 5 every day, I'm sure.

Dave: Well, no. I worked lots of hours. I never even ever thought of the clock really. Even when I was a state game warden, I probably worked 60, 70 hours a week and didn't, and only got paid 40. They didn't have any overtime in South Dakota either. And you were expected to work weekends and holidays unless it was Christmas or something. And that was kind of nice going to the Feds too, because they'd pay you on holidays. Although we worked lots more hours than the premium paid covered, but I mean I didn't care. I thought it was wonderful just to be able to go out and work and do whatever.

Dorothe: So, what did you do every day? What were your day-to-day duties?

Dave: Well, another reason they moved - they brought the station to Duluth - because right then the new Endangered Species Act completely protected the timber wolf or the gray wolf. And Northern Minnesota was the only place there was any in the United States. And at that time, they figured there was like 400 of them, maybe, in Minnesota. And so, a lot of my activities involved timber wolf protection. And it was kind of tough because not too many people like timber wolves, whether it was farmers and ranchers or deer hunters, 'cause they'd been killing them for years and paying [correction: getting] a bounty. In fact, even after they were protected, the State of Minnesota paid a few bounties. I can remember after they had been protected for like six months, because the law wasn't really clear, and they still thought they could do it. I think they were paying \$50 bounty for wolves. And then there was a lot of eagles up here too, or quite a few in comparison to the rest of the United States, just because of all our lakes and waters. And of course, I was supposed to cover part of Wisconsin also just because I was closer here, which I did, I covered kind of the north ...

Dorothe: northwestern ...

Dave: ...part of it - was up to Bayfield Ashland. I did a lot of work over in that area involving whatever. And commercial fishing on Lake Superior. We got involved in that. Of course, duck hunting in Minnesota was always the best, although recently it hasn't been worth a hoot. And then canvasbacks came into play real heavy too where there was only got to be like 400,000 canvasbacks in the world. And most of them ended up in Minnesota, during their migration right down the Mississippi River. And so, we spent lots of days and hours and weeks just patrolling the Mississippi River for canvasbacks because my boss, Howard Lovrien, he was really

into the ducks. He thought that's what the Fish and Wildlife Service should be – ducks - rather than protecting wolves.

Dorothe: When you started, though, Bill Halstead was your supervisor?

Dave: Yes, Bill Halstead had just been here. He had come from Washington. They reorganized just as I got hired. And that's when we became special agents, too. Before that, they were U.S. game management agents. And while I was in training, that all changed. We became special agents, just law enforcement. And everybody had to throw their name in the pot, I guess, to get selected as an SRA [Senior Resident Agent]. Halstead did that. He came from Washington somewhere. Washington State.

Dorothe: Oh, yeah, that's right.

Dave: Yakima? I forget. But he was kind of like a fish out of water, too, because you know, he liked that northwest part of the country, and here he was in Minnesota. Although he was good. I started with him, and he was here like a year or so. And then he went back out to Washington or someplace. And then Howard Lovrien came in here. I knew Howard from South Dakota. We weren't good buddies or friends. I mean, we were friends, but we got to be real good friends when he came to Minnesota.

Dorothe: When Howard retired, who was the next boss you had?

Dave: Hmm.

Dorothe: Could that have been Kevin Adams? No. Kevin wasn't the SRA here. After Howard, I don't remember who did come here.

Dave: Well, I think it was Kevin.

Dorothe: Was he the SRA here?

Dave: I think Kevin was the SRA.

Dorothe: Okay.

Carol: I guess you're right. For just a while.

Dorothe: And then when he left, who was your boss when you retired? Was Kevin still here then?

Carol: Dick.

Dave: Dick Dickinson

Dorothe: Oh, Dickinson. Yes. Okay.

Dave: You can't forget Dick.

Dorothe: Oh, I know who they all were. Okay.

Dave: I'm pretty sure it was. I'm sure it was Kevin Adams and then Dickinson, I think. What's his name - in Madison? Dick's partner there for a while in Madison? He came in here and was thinking about being the supervisor. Who was, who was that guy?

Dorothe: I don't know.

Dave: In Madison. Yeah, you do.

Dorothe: I probably do, but I can't think.

Dave: You know him well. He got a divorce when he was over in Madison. Then he went to Washington, D.C. Black-haired young man. I think he, oh, I forget. [Note: His name was Ernie.]

Dorothe: Well, that's okay. You'll think of it tomorrow.

Dave: But anyway, he didn't take, he might have been the SRA for a while, but I don't think he ever kept it, or he decided he didn't want to leave Madison or something.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: But then Kevin Adams came in here, and he was the boss.

Dorothe: And now he is THE boss.

Dave: Now he is THE [Chief, Office of Law Enforcement in headquarters] ...

Dave: Then where did he go from here?

Dorothe: Washington, D.C.

Dave: Not as the Chief, did he? No.

Carol: Well, he went out to (unintelligible).

Dave: You know, I can't remember. Daggone it.

Carol: Shephardsville? (unintelligible)

Dorothe: So, with all the work that you were doing out here with the wolves and everything else, how do you feel that the Service was perceived by people outside of our agency, when they knew what we were trying to do?

Dave: Well, I think Minnesota DNR law enforcement liked federal law enforcement. I got along really good with them. They never hesitated to call me and get me involved in stuff. If they needed assistance on something, I'd worked the interstate part of it. But yet they helped me a tremendous amount, too, as far as going around finding people I had to interview or talk to about killing a wolf or eagles or eagles' nests. That was kind of a problem, too - were people cutting down eagles' nests.

Dorothe: The newspapers keep pretty well up to date with things and keep them published in the paper as to what was happening with some of the eagle problems and the eagle violations, that type of thing? Was it publicized?

Dave: Oh, yeah. I think they liked the controversy, especially the wolf business. I mean, there were times when the timber wolves were being dumped off at U.S. Federal buildings around the area, like at the post offices. I can think of probably four or five different things where people - where it would be a dead wolf found at the Grand Marie Post Office on the front steps. And so, the newspapers would get right into that and pictures and talking about it. The wolf issue was not a popular issue. They didn't think there'd ever be any deer because of the timber wolves.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: For one thing. So, the sportsmen weren't really in favor of protecting wolves. And of course, the farmers and ranchers, because at that time, they were totally protected, too. It was not legal for a farmer to shoot a wolf that was killing his sheep. And then after that, it did come into play where we hired federal trappers to go out and kill wolves that were doing damage to livestock. And then we started paying money also. If a wolf killed a calf, the farmer could get the fair market value up to, like, \$400. And I don't know what it is now. I think it's more now, but there was a fund set up to do that. I think Fish and Wildlife was - I mean, the Forest Service was kind of big up here because of the Boundary Waters Canoe area. There was a lot of resentment in that line because the Forest Service had made that a wilderness area and kept motors out. And so, the federal government wasn't too well perceived because of that in a lot of areas. But even that has changed over time. But Fish and Wildlife Service, it just wasn't real big here so that people knew about it other than the protection of the wolf and eagles and that kind of stuff. But eagles were protected by state law, too. So were timber wolves, but you'd never know it, right?

Dorothe: Yeah. So, you think that they perceived this us as being favorable?

Dave: I think so, yeah.

Dorothe: That's good. So, any special projects you were involved in or major issues that you had to deal with? Major issues probably had to do with the timber wolves.

Dave: Well, timber wolf was always a major issue. In fact, when I retired, I mean, the timber wolf came from like 400 animals and the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Endangered Species Act, kept saying that - they set a quota like when you reached like I forget now if it was 2,000 or 2,500 wolves and keep that population for a period of five years, along with neighboring states having a population of 300 for five years - we were going to delist it. That's what we kept telling everybody. I know we did. Well, hell, that happened before I retired. Minnesota had more wolves than that. Wisconsin had plenty of wolves. Michigan had plenty of wolves. And they're still not delisted. They've still got the same protection they always had. In fact, some judge in

Oregon just recently said that Wisconsin and Michigan could not kill wolves or any other state like Montana or Wyoming because of the Endangered Species Act. So, I don't know where we're at for sure, but they're still totally protected as an endangered species. But Minnesota, they're a threatened species and so they can kill a few. But that was always a big issue.

Dorothe: Did you ever feel that there was a major impediment to your job or your career?

Dave: No, I don't think so.

Dorothe: Okay, that's good.

Dave: I always had good bosses and good people to work for and good people to work with.

Dorothe: Do you remember who was the Regional Director when you started?

Dave: I think it was Harvey.

Dorothe: Harvey K. Nelson?

Dave: Was it?

Dorothe: It probably was.

Dorothe: I'm going to make myself a list because I can't always remember who was when.
(laughter)

Dave: You know. Wait a minute. I'm not sure it was. No, but Harvey was there a good many years.

Dorothe: Wasn't Bob Burwell, was it? I think Bob.

Dave: You know, I don't, I didn't know him if it was.

Dorothe: Okay. Bob was Regional Director when I started, but I think he may have retired by the time you started. And I don't think - Harvey didn't follow right after Bob Burwell - but I don't remember who did. Oh no, that's not that important. Who was President of the United States when you started? (laughter) 1972. Who was president?

Dave: Well, I was a ...

Carol: Carter?

Dorothe: Would that have been - oh, God. '72.

Dave: I don't know.

Dorothe: Wouldn't have been Nixon, would it?

Dave: I think it was Nixon.

Carol: Was he in for eight years?

Dave: Because I can remember.

Carol: Nixon was there in Rapid City.

Dave: I know it. That's right. And then after that, it was Ford.

Carol: Might have been Ford.

Dorothe: Yeah. Okay.

Dave: I'll bet it was.

Dorothe: Do you think the changes in the administrations affected our work?

Dave: You mean Presidential?

Dorothe: Yes.

Dave: Oh, I don't know. I don't think it affected my work any.

Dorothe: No, I don't.

Dave: I mean, I protected the ducks and the wolves, and nothing really ever changed in that regard, I don't think.

Dorothe: So. Now we're getting close to the end here. I want to know, what was the high point of your career, that you felt was the high point?

Dave: Oh geez, you should have warned me a little here.

Dorothe: Did you ever get a special award for anything, or did you ever feel good about a certain case that you just felt so good about?

Dave: Well.

Dorothe: Like when you were first hired. Was it a special treat, did you feel like, when you went to this training to become a special agent?

Dave: Well, I mean, I think I had a lot of high points.

Dorothe: Good.

Dave: Just good things.

Carol: He loved his job.

Dave: When I was a state game warden, I got picked as the Wildlife Officer of the Year. First one they ever had in South Dakota. I got that award.

Dorothe: Oh, good.

Carol: All of 26 at the time.

Dorothe: South Dakota. Yeah.

Dave: Yeah. And then in my work and with the Fish and Wildlife Service, I did get some awards - step increases for doing a good job.

Dorothe: That's not a highlight.

Dave: No, it's not a highlight.

Dorothe: Didn't you even once in a while have your picture in the paper? Well, something about the wolves?

Carol: Oh, That's what she's trying to get at, Dave.

Dave: Well. What do you mean? I don't know. The paper here kind of liked me, I think.

Dorothe: Well, that's good because you were doing a good job, or they wouldn't have ...

Dave: And when I was - I wasn't retired yet - but I did get a whole full-page write up once in the paper about what I was doing.

Dorothe: That's good.

Dave: With pictures.

Carol: They always had to go after Dave, though, because Dave was always very under ... I think, most of our friends didn't even know what he did.

Dorothe: Did you ever feel that you had a low point? Oh, let's keep on the high points.

Dave: Well, let's just keep going here. I did work with a lot of Indian reservations here, too. And I think I always worked really well with them. I mean, I caused them some problems, I know. But yet they always seemed to like me, and they'd work with me and help me. And in fact, this last big deal at Red Lake. I mean, I knew that officer they got killed. He'd help me over there when I was working. And I did a lot of work on the Red Lake Indian Reservation, and they were always so helpful. I mean, I'd just go to the police station and they'd either ride with me or I'd ride with them, and we'd go find the people that I wanted to talk too. And Leech Lake was always good, and I helped in their training activities. And I worked close with the Indians. That's for sure.

Dorothe: That's very good.

Dave: And throughout my career, we had, you know, it wasn't always me, but we had numerous undercover operations that I was involved in that were really... I really enjoyed them, and they did a lot of good. And we had that one big case here in Duluth where Mesaba fur company...

Dorothe: Yes.

Dave: ...Where we bought and sold furs for three years [in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan].

Dorothe: Yes.

Dave: I mean, I didn't do that, but yet I had a big part in it just because I was here, and I helped do a lot of it. But I wasn't the main person or nothing.

Dorothe: But you weren't the undercover agent doing it. [Note: A special agent living in Duluth ran the fur shop.]

Dave: No. But we had a good time doing it. I don't know. Oh, then when I did retire, I did get this fancy award. Or did I get that - I got that after I retired. Where Dickinson brought this up.

Carol: Oh, that's right.

Dave: What is the award they give for? What is it?

Carol: It's in a box downstairs.

Dave: I got the plaque somewhere.

Dave: Okay.

Carol: We're going to have it in the new garage.

Dave: This big meritorious service [award].

Dorothe: Good.

Dave: And Dickinson brought that in.

Carol: Above and beyond the call of duty.

Dave: And after I had retired, I worked heavily in the Minnesota TIP program. Turn In Poachers. We had a banquet every year. And one year, Dickinson decided to come to the banquet. This was probably a year after I retired.

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: And at the banquet he ...

Dorothe: ... presented you with this award.

Dave: ...presented me this award.

Dorothe: Well, I bet you felt pretty good.

Dave: Get a standing ovation from the 200 people that are there. That was kind of neat.

Dorothe: I will have to tell you Dave, that all the years you worked up here, I never heard anything bad against your position or you personally. Another, I mean, people - a lot of people

commented though about how good it was with the wolves, what you were doing and things. I knew you were working. I mean, sometimes I had some questions about a few (laughter), but I won't mention any names. But when you were the only one here, you had a lot to do.

Dave: Well, the thing about the wolf is, I mean, even the game wardens didn't really like them. And but yet.

Carol: They called them Duncan dogs.

Dave: Yeah. Duncan dogs.

Dorothe: Yeah.

Dave: But they'd call up and tell me there's somebody found a dead wolf. And so, I'd go and investigate it. And they, they always knew if they called me, it was going to get investigated. So, I'm not saying they always called me, but yet every wolf that was found dead got investigated somehow.

Dorothe: Yeah.

Dave: And as a result, I'd have, like 50 or 100 cases on the books for unsolved wolf killings, you know? And I know I just kind of overwhelmed me. I think is when Dickinson comes, he says, "We're getting rid of all these damn things. We can't do nothing about them anyway."

Dorothe: Did David Mech ever work with you at all when he started?

Dave: Oh yeah. He was here long before I was.

Dorothe: Yes.

Dave: But yeah, I worked with David, and he was always very receptive to us also.

Dorothe: That's good.

Dave: In fact, here again, I think it was because I was receptive to them too, maybe, you know. I mean, I wasn't high handed or acted like I was going to catch everybody in the world and prosecute them.

Dorothe: He worked for us for a few years.

Dave: Oh, yeah. He, uh, he worked really close with me. In fact, I helped him a number of times, catching people that had killed his radio-collared wolves.

Dorothe: Uh huh.

Dorothe: Yeah, because he lived right out there in the woods with them for a while.

Dave: Well, up in Ely, right? And I can remember one case, too, where they were stealing his traps all the time.

Dorothe: Oh.

Dave: And so, he put a radio transmitter in one of his traps once, and it got stolen. And then they put the airplane up and they found the signal where it was coming from, this guy in Isabella, and he called me and we went to his house and along with some state officers, or at least one. I forget now. But anyway, we got the trap, and we arrested the guy, and I don't remember. But yeah, we always, I worked always close with Dave Mech. He was very good, and he was a just plain old rough trapper type guy.

Dorothe: Yeah, I know. And he'd be in the Regional Office, and he'd be walking. He'd always be walking pretty fast.

Dave: Oh yeah.

Dorothe: He kind of looking down and just, you could tell - he was just thinking of thousands of things at the time. You'd say, "Hi, Dave," and well, he'd just keep walking, you know? He was very good. I like what he's done up with Ely. I like that museum. I guess that the wolves just had puppies or something.

Dave: Oh, I don't know.

Dorothe: Cubs or whatever you call them? What do you call them?

Dave: Yeah, they are pups or cubs. I think they call them cubs, but they're pups. As far as low points in my career - I don't know.

Dorothe: Well.

Dave: Other than when people [bashed the FWS for protecting wolves.]

Dorothe: Meritorious award though that was a good high point.

Dave: That was a high point. Yeah.

Dorothe: Even though you had already retired.

Dave: I had already retired but that was very nice.

Carol: I think the low point was when you retired.

Dave: Well, yeah, I mean, I, I mean, I tell you, I was ready to retire, though. I mean, it didn't bother me that I had to retire. I wouldn't have retired, I don't think.

Dorothe: No, probably not.

Dave: If I didn't have to. But yet I just knew it was time and I had to do it. I didn't ever think about retiring when I was 55 though, like a lot of them are doing now. Or even 50.

Dorothe: Yes, yeah.

Dave: But I just knew at 57, I was done and that's just the way it was.

Dorothe: Well, so you never had a low point you said, though?

Dave: Well, I probably did, but I can't [recall].

Dorothe: How about a dangerous or frightening experience while you were working? You had some of that, didn't you?

Dave: Well, I had a few of them, I guess. And I'd say they mainly involved wolves or something where people that you knew just hated us and hated the wolves, and I had to get involved in investigating them. Yeah. There were times there that I really wasn't too enthused about what I was going to do. But I never was shot at, and I never had to shoot anybody. And those are highlights, I guess. I can't even really say that it came close to something like that. But I think a part of it also is, because we served lots of search warrants and went places that were probably dangerous, but I always felt that we were well trained, and we didn't do things alone if there were situations like that. We went in with plenty of people. We just didn't have the problems that you might have if somebody tried to beat you up because you're all alone or two guys or something. We'd sometimes get criticized in the paper because the newspaper would say, "Ten people went to this pop and mom shop and seized all their taxidermy stuff." But we never had a problem. You know, if there'd have been two people there, we might have had a real problem in trying to do that search and seizure.

Dorothe: Right.

Dave: Because, but when we did it the way it should be done and you always talked like, I mean, people there that they were going to sue you and do this and that. We did get sued once I recall on - what was it - Operation Falcon or something. But nothing ever come of it. I mean, it got dismissed in the end.

Dorothe: Right.

Dave: Anyway, that I was involved in it.

Dorothe: Well did you ever have a very humorous experience in your time up here, that you still laugh about. (laughter) See?

Carol: Well, I'm thinking about the feather thing up at the mall.

Dave: Oh.

Dorothe: Maybe that's a local thing.

Dave: Well, one of my cases here involved Indians, again, selling feathers ...

Dorothe: Okay.

Dave: ... which, according to our law, is totally illegal. Even Indians can't sell migratory bird feathers. But one Christmas we had this shop opened up in the mall and they were selling dream catchers that had, I forget what they were now, migratory bird feathers. Anyway. I don't know if there was eagle. I don't think they were eagle. I think they were hawks and stuff. And so, I went in there and, alone, and told this guy that this was illegal, and I was going to seize all this stuff. And he just got really uptight and said I wasn't going to do nothing. And so, I called the Duluth Police Department to come and help me. And before they got there, I was walking out in front of the door, just kind of watching, making sure they weren't hiding stuff or taking stuff. And people that I knew saw me there. And that turned in to be quite a kind of a funny thing. That really did hit the papers about how the Fish and Wildlife Service took this guy's feathers. And so that part of it was kind of funny I guess, because of people I knew, knew what I was doing.

Carol: Some of my girlfriends thought it was funny, making a move on this poor guy.

Dave: But kind of the ending part of that is the Indians won that case because treaty right, the judge ruled that the treaty gave the Indians the right to sell or barter feathers - do their old, the way they used to do things. It was in the Eighth Circuit again, which did have problems with migratory bird stuff. And at that time, we decided not to appeal that case. And so, we did lose that case. They had the right to. We had to give them back the stuff they had, and they didn't get charged with selling the feathers. But it didn't really bother me because I did, I still think I did a lot of good because they stopped selling feathers, too, because the Indians knew they weren't supposed to do it. And that kind of brought everything to a head in this area because there's lots of Indians around and they all heard about those cases. The reservations were on my side, really. They did not want people to sell feathers because it was part of their heritage and they were supposed to be used for cultural activities, not for commercial activities. And so, they - the reservations themselves - said, "Hey, you're not supposed to be commercializing. These are cultural things. We do not want you to commercialize these." And I think as a result of that case, even though we lost, we probably won because I don't think there was near as much commercialization as there used to be in feathers.

Dorothe: That's good.

Dave: Yep.

Carol: Tell her about the wolves along the driveway.

Dave: Oh.

Carol: Our kids growing up with that.

Dave: Well, yeah. Whenever there's a game warden that'd find a dead wolf or something, they'd call me and turn it over to me because they didn't really want anything to do with it. In fact, the State more or less told, them they're not going to prosecute any wolf cases. And if there's going to be wolf prosecutions, it's going to be in federal court. And so, I'd go pick up

these dead timber wolves. I can recall one winter I'd have like five or six dead wolves laying out in my backyard.

Carol: He'd lean them up against the snow fence.

Dave: And they'd freeze solid. I just kind of set them along the driveway. I mean, I'm off of the road. Nobody sees them or nothing, but they'd be sitting along the driveway. The kids would have friends over, and these wolves were standing all over the place. (laughter) The neighbors' dogs would come over and they'd be sniffing them. Yeah. Go out to Duncan's and see how many wolves he's got in his yard. So yeah, that I don't know what else is humorous. But then Howard Lovrien, he was always a humorous guy. He was a wonderful boss. He always kind of kept things going. I can remember this - what? Carl? Is it Carl Malden or?

Dorothe: Carl Madsen?

Dave: No.

Dorothe: Malden?

Dave: No. He was an agent, and he was in, he went to Washington as a something in law enforcement there. Was it Malden?

Dorothe: There is a Malden.

Dave: Anyway, when he first got hired, he came down to the Mississippi River. For a month or more, we'd work in the Mississippi River for canvasbacks. We'd get all the new guys to come down there and train with us. And we'd rent a cabin down there, and we'd all stay in this cabin.

Dorothe: Over by Wabasha, wasn't it?

Dave: Yep. And this, I think it was Carl Malden, if I remember his name. But anyway, we'd work in a sport boat, which is like a big canoe. And Howard was telling me this. He had to take a whiz and he'd just tell his partner and Carl was in the boat, I guess, and "I'm going to take a whiz." And so, he pulled down his waders. And evidently Carl was always looking the other way, which you would - you wouldn't watch him anyway. But anyway, he says, "The next thing I know, Carl says, "I got to take a whiz, Howard." Howard said, "Go ahead." And Howard says, "The next thing I knew, here he's, we are out in the middle of the river," and he says, "He's climbing out of the boat." (laughter) Howard says, "What are you doing?" He says, "Well, I'm getting out of the boat, take a leak." Howard says, "You can't get out of the boat. We are in the middle of the river!" (laughter)

Dorothe: Another humorous experience.

Dave: And he says, "Well, you did, didn't you? Carl said, or Howard, "No, I didn't get out of the boat. I just took a leak over the edge. We're in ten feet of water!" (laughter)

Dorothe: Well, we're just about done.

Dave: Well, anyway, that I don't know, but Howard had a lot of good experiences.

Dorothe: Oh yeah.

Dave: He was fun.

Dorothe: Where do you think the service is heading in the next decade or so? Do you think it's still going to be on a positive note, or do you think it's going to decline in any way or ...?

Dave: Oh, geez. Well. I sure don't hear much about it, I know.

Dorothe: Uh huh.

Dave: So, I don't know if that's good or bad, but I don't think it's going to be as near as people oriented as it used to be, as far as hands on stuff. I don't know if it's going to get better or worse in my eyes.

Dorothe: Well. But at least we had a good crew when we were there.

Dave: Oh yeah, I had a wonderful career. But, you know, when I first started, I wanted to quit.

Dorothe: You did? Why was that?

Dave: I just didn't like it. I left South Dakota, and I enjoyed my job in South Dakota. And I came here and all of a sudden, I was all alone. I was ready to go back to South Dakota. And here again, Hodgins, kind of talked me into it.

Dorothe: I was going to say, who talked you out of it?

Dave: He says, "You got to give it a year or more." I think I had only been on six months and half of that, been training. And Carol had these little babies, and I'd left her alone for three or four months. And so, "Okay, I'll do it." And then once I got into it, I enjoyed the traveling. I enjoyed the training. I enjoyed getting together with everybody. And I mean, that's what I kind of miss - is getting to go places, I guess.

Dorothe: Okay, you'll be able to come to the law enforcement ones now.

Dave: Right.

Dorothe: You can come to the other one [FWS Retirees Reunions], because it used to be that there was just two- or three-weeks difference than ours. But now they're changing. They're having theirs in the fall and we are having ours in the spring. And it's just wonderful to see people you haven't seen for so long and just remember different things and talk about different ones that you both knew.

Dave: Yeah, well, I might have to get into this a little more.

Dorothe: I am looking forward to having you guys come to the meeting now.

Dave: Well, we're looking forward to it also.

Dorothe: Okay. All right. Well, David, thank you so much for doing this tonight. You did a good job.

Dave: Okay, Dorothy. Thank you.

Dorothe: Thank you.

Key words: endangered species, game wardens, hunting, law enforcement, Native Americans, rare species