



The Oral History of Gary Young

April 13, 2023

Interview conducted by Libby Herland

San Antonio, TX



Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Gary Young

Date of Interview: April 13, 2023

Location of Interview: San Antonio, TX

Interviewer: Libby Herland

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS): 1993-2017; 24 years

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: Special Agent, Wichita, KS; Special Agent, Cedar City, UT; Senior Resident Agent (SRA), Fairbanks, AK; SRA and Resident Agent in Charge (RAC), San Antonio, TX; Assistant Special Agent in Charge (ASAC), Anchorage, AK; Special Agent in Charge (SAC), Portland, OR

Most Important Projects: oil pit work in Kansas and Texas; Utah prairie dog and desert tortoise endangered species habitat conservation plan (HCP) enforcement in Utah; grizzly bear and wolf endangered species protection in Idaho; subsistence walrus and migratory bird hunting enforcement in Alaska; illegal ivory sale cases; import/export work in Texas and Hawaii; Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) occupation; international wildlife officer training

Colleagues and Mentors: Tom Mason, Manny Medina, Carl Wilson, Danny Marshall, Bob Williams, Marilet Zablan, Kevin Ellis, Corky Robers, Mike Wade, Judy Helfenstein, Stan Pruszenski, Bill Woody, Rich Hannan

Brief Summary of Interview: Gary talks about Boy Scouts, his love of fishing and being outdoors in Texas as a kid with his twin brother. He knew from his high school days that he wanted to be a game warden, and after college and a position with the Travis County (Texas) Sheriff's Office, he was fortunate to get a position with Texas Parks and Wildlife as a boat operator. Gary then became a game warden working in very different environments in two counties. At the age of 35, Gary was hired by the FWS as a Special Agent. His first duty station was in Kansas. Gary talks about his responsibilities and the highlights of his career as he advances through the ranks and works in 4 different regions, ending up as the SAC in Region 1. He worked on endangered species, subsistence harvest, oil pit, import/export work and was the SAC when the Malheur NWR was occupied. Gary highlights the international wildlife officer training he conducted while employed and continues to conduct with conservation officers from around the world.

THE INTERVIEW

LIBBY HERLAND: Hi. This is Libby Herland. I'm the retired representative from the northeast region of the Fish and Wildlife Service on the History Committee. Today is April 13, 2023. I am in San Antonio, Texas at the law enforcement reunion. Today I have the pleasure of doing an oral history interview with Gary Young. His wife, Debbie, is also here with us today for this interview. Gary worked in law enforcement for the Fish and Wildlife Service for 24 years, retiring in 2017. Today we have the pleasure of learning more about Gary and his really interesting career in the Fish and Wildlife Service in law enforcement. Thank you for being here, Gary. I really appreciate you doing this interview.

GARY YOUNG: Well, you're very welcome. Glad to be here.

LIBBY: Let's start with a little bit about your background and where you were born and grew up and any influences that led you to conservation or law enforcement or both.

GARY: Yep. Born and raised in Austin. Grew up there in the '60's when Austin was still relatively small - 250,000 people. I had a twin brother so we spent our childhood days and free time fishing and playing in the creeks and the rivers around Austin. We always had an interest and loved the outdoors and fishing and that led to joining the Boy Scouts. The church we attended had a Boy Scout troop so we joined that. That took us camping, and fishing and hiking; stuff we liked to do. One of our highlights of Boy Scouts was what they called the High Adventure Camp where we took a yellow school bus from Austin, Texas to Ely, Minnesota. We canoed the Boundary Waters north of Minnesota. We canoed out of Ely, Minnesota up into Canada on about a 2-week canoeing trip. That was the highlight of our Boy Scout days. A couple kids from Austin, Texas going all the way to Canada and seeing the crystal clear, pristine Boundary Waters, and water that you could see 50 feet down. We just – I say "we" because so much of my life was influenced by my twin brother. We just enjoyed the outdoors and the fishing aspect. We really loved to fish and camp. Anything that could get us outdoors. I think that's where it started, my fondness for being outside and outdoors.

LIBBY: Right. Just being outside. You went to college. Did you study conservation? What did you study and where did you go to school?

GARY: I did. Actually, I started at Southwest Texas in San Marcos. It's now Texas State University. I wanted to be a game warden. I knew that.

LIBBY: How did you know that?

GARY: When I was still in high school, or just out of high school, I was standing in my front yard and of all things, a game warden drove by in their vehicle. As luck would have it or as fate would have it, I don't know, the next day in the Austin American Statesman was this full-length article about game wardens and what they do in Texas. Everything they wrote about sounded

like *that's something that I would really like to do*. I decided then that's what I was going to be – a game warden.

DEBBIE: I had not heard that.

LIBBY: People always learn things about their significant others in these interviews!

GARY: Also, I'm going down to San Marcos and I said, "I'll be a fish and wildlife management major so I can get a game warden job." At that time, Texas did not require a college degree, just a high school diploma. While I was still in college, they announced the hiring of a new class. At that time, they brought all the applicants to one location on the same day in Temple, Texas, to the National Guard Armory. 1,200 people showed up to be interviewed in one day because that's how many applicants they had for 20 positions. They went alphabetically, so Gary Young - I sat there all day waiting to be interviewed. When I did finally get to interview, they were very direct with me. They said, "If you want to be a Texas game warden, you need to be a criminal justice major because we are law enforcement. We are not biologists." So, I went back to school in San Marcos. That led to a criminal justice degree, Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice.

LIBBY: You didn't get the job that day but it helped set you on the [path] at least to meet those educational requirements.

GARY: Their recommendation was to go back and get your degree and keep applying. It's interesting - the history of Texas, unless your father was a game warden or your uncle was a game warden, you weren't going to get hired as a game warden, unless you knew somebody. I even had my advisor in college tell me, "You need to pick another career because you are never going to get hired as a game warden." I did not get hired that year. I actually graduated from college and went to work for the Travis County Sheriff's Office because I needed a job and Parks and Wildlife was not hiring. Then a position with Parks and Wildlife came open as a boat operator on Galveston Bay, with the law enforcement division. I applied for that and unbeknownst to me, I had some help behind the scenes to get my foot in the door. That's how I got on with Parks and Wildlife, and after a year and a half of boat operating, I got into their next game warden academy in 1984.

LIBBY: Who was that help behind the scenes?

GARY: Well, I also bartended while I was in college. I worked at a bar close to the State Capitol. This couple that I knew that were regulars there, she was actually on the legislative budget board for Texas Parks and Wildlife. I didn't know that. So, when she found out that I applied for that position, she made a phone call to Parks and Wildlife and said, "I'd like to see this guy get hired for the boat operators job." There was like 75 people who applied for that job. It was her phone call. I did not know that at the time. I'm glad I did not. I've since learned that, but that's what got my foot in the door.

LIBBY: That's amazing.

GARY: It was a lucky break.

LIBBY: Did you ever stay in touch with her? Did she know what you ended up doing in your career?

GARY: I didn't really stay in touch with her until I moved back to Texas after I retired. Her husband is also big in Boy Scouts so we have some mutual friends through that. I have sent messages to her and thanked her for getting me the job and getting my foot in the door. I laid out my career, *this is what it led to*. She was happy and excited that she played a part in it.

LIBBY: That's so nice! That's a great story. I know you're married. At what point in your life did you meet Debbie? Was she with you through your whole career?

GARY: No. We met while I was still a state game warden. Debbie worked for the law enforcement division office here in San Antonio.

LIBBY: So, when we get to that part, you can bring in Debbie then, so we know how that fits into your life. So, you were a boat operator. Had you experience operating boats?

GARY: Not a lot. (laughter)

LIBBY: Galveston Bay is kind of a big place.

GARY: The job was to put game wardens on shrimp and oyster boats so they could check them. I'd say I bumped into a few boats pretty hard before I really learned how to operate a boat. But it turned out to be a good skill to have.

LIBBY: Oh, it is a really good skill. Absolutely! So, you did that for a couple of years.

GARY: A year and a half, then the game warden academy.

LIBBY: What did you learn while you were being a boat operator? You are dealing with all these wardens all the time, right? You're learning a lot about the culture and the responsibilities.

GARY: You learn all about what it is to be a game warden, especially in the saltwater duty station where commercial fishing is the big part of the job. You do all the maintenance and upkeep of the boats. The game wardens will call and say, "I need the boat here at this time" and you get the boat and trailer and you meet them at the boat ramp and you go out and work. When you're done, they say, "We'll see you" and you take the boat and clean it. There was a lot of good labor skills that I learned working with boats.

LIBBY: Did you carry a firearm when you were doing that?

GARY: No.

LIBBY: You were just a boat operator.

GARY: Yep. We did wear a uniform but no badge, no gun. It looked similar to a game warden uniform but it was not.

LIBBY: But you learned a lot about how they carried themselves and interacted with the people that they were interacting with. It's always a fine line. You don't want to treat people like they are criminals but anyone could be.

GARY: In commercial fishing, some of them are a different breed and are difficult to deal with. It was interesting to watch all the interactions. The game wardens knew that I had been a deputy sheriff and I had been in law enforcement, so they gave me a little bit of leeway there. They knew I had experience in law enforcement but not as a game warden. It was all a valuable experience. Really a very good experience leading me into the academy. I had an edge once I got to the academy because I had already been working for Parks and Wildlife for a year and a half and these other people had just been hired by them. They didn't know all the ins and outs that I did.

LIBBY: Did you end up going to the academy and then getting a position as a game warden somewhere, or did they hire you as a game warden and then you had to go to the academy?

GARY: They hire you as what's called a game warden cadet. At that time, the academy was in Austin. It started in February of 1984 and did not get out until July. It was about five and a half months back then. You learn all the Parks and Wildlife laws, all the State of Texas laws. You graduate and they send you to your first duty station.

LIBBY: So, that's pretty convenient. Were your folks still living in Austin?

GARY: Yep, mom and dad were still living in Austin.

LIBBY: You could stay at home?

GARY: Well, you stay at the academy.

LIBBY: Oh, you had to stay at the academy. Right.

GARY: They let you out on the weekends. Sometimes, not all the times. It was actually an old warehouse that they converted into an academy. The upstairs was bunkbeds and four military-style sleeping and cohabitating [two to a room], I guess. There was a classroom was downstairs.

LIBBY: That must have been pretty easy for you though, the academy. Wasn't it? I'm thinking because you already had been a deputy sheriff.

GARY: It was hard though because the days were long and a lot of PT, physical training. There was just a lot of studying because we had tests all the time. At the time, it was hard but it was something I really wanted to do, so I didn't mind putting in the hours and the work to do it.

LIBBY: You obviously graduated.

GARY: I graduated.

LIBBY: You were assigned to?

GARY: I went to Nueces County, Corpus Christie. That was my first duty station. I spent about five years there. It was such a great place to start because back then, there was not nearly the people there are in Corpus Christie now. We did a lot of work on the water and enjoyed that. Commercial fishing and shrimping. We didn't have oyster boats down that far south, but commercial shrimping and illegal gill netting were the big items that we worked down there. It was a good place to start. There were other wardens in the county that I worked with when I first started that helped you get used to doing the job and how to do it.

LIBBY: You mostly focused on marine-related things though and not inland work?

GARY: No, there really wasn't much inland work. The only inland work we did would be during the migratory bird season, the dove season. White-winged dove hunting was huge in the valley, down in the McAllen area. All the game wardens in that area, we'd all go to McAllen in September and work with the white-winged dove hunts. It was a huge event with hunters and game wardens and federal wardens everywhere.

LIBBY: Whenever I talk to any agents who worked in Texas or in the south, that's all I hear about. Dove hunting. It's not a big deal where I live.

GARY: In south Texas, we had this huge influx of people from Louisiana that came for that. It was always a game trying to catch the people from Louisiana.

LIBBY: You were there from '84 to '89 roughly, right? And then you took another position?

GARY: Yes. What led to this was Corpus Christie was a great place to work, but around 1988 they passed the Texas Saltwater Stamp Act which brought a lot of money to Texas Parks and Wildlife but it could only be used for enforcement in coastal counties. So, when I got to Corpus Christie in '84, there were four game wardens for the whole county. It was a huge county with a lot of water. When that Saltwater Stamp Act passed, they sent five more to Nueces. All of a sudden, we have 10 game wardens in Nueces County. You get up on a Saturday morning and go to a stop sign, and there would be a game warden on every corner. It was like, *time to go. It's getting a little crowded!* So that's when I moved to Llano County, inland, and worked there until I got hired by the Fish and Wildlife Service. Llano was a – they call it the deer capitol of the world. They've got one of the highest densities of white-tailed deer in any county in Texas. They killed, at that time, usually around 20,000 deer a year out of that county alone.

LIBBY: During the legal hunting season? Wow.

GARY: During the legal hunting season. From October through January, we worked deer camps all day and then we worked poachers and road hunters all night. It was a fun time. It was a busy time, and you got very little sleep. You sat on your hood all night, waiting for somebody to shoot off the road, and then you worked the camps during the day. Then in the summertime, we worked the inland lakes up there for water safety issues. Life jackets, boat registration, things like that. Llano was a really nice place. That's where we met, while I was in Llano County. Debbie and I met there.

LIBBY: You met through work?

GARY: We met through the Texas Game Wardens Association. I was an officer with that group and Debbie – they had a fundraiser here in San Antonio and I was the treasurer so I had to come to that to make sure to get the money from the fundraiser. That's where we met.

DEBBIE: I actually had met, it's not that important, but his twin brother ended up being a game warden also. I don't know how many years after that, after you did. I actually met his twin brother first at a funeral of one of the game wardens in my region. When he showed up at this fundraiser for the Game Wardens Association, and somebody introduced us, I said, "I already met him. We know each other. I met him at Danny [Villalobos, another game warden's] daddy's funeral." He's like, "No, that must have been my twin brother, Larry." I'm like, "Sure."

LIBBY: You must look an awful lot alike.

DEBBIE: I thought he was just being snarky or something. (laughter) No, his twin brother was a game warden too.

LIBBY: Oh, that's funny.

GARY: That was in '92. One thing led to another. We went out a couple times and we ended up getting married in October of '92.

LIBBY: Whoa!

DEBBIE: Yeah. We only dated for 7 months.

GARY: It was quick. Then I applied for the special agent position on a job announcement and got picked up that time for the special agent job. We got married in October of 1992 and in May of '93, I'm going off to FLETC for three months.

LIBBY: Why did you want to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service?

GARY: It just was a job that had appealed to me. Tom Mason was the warden [correction: Special Agent] that I would back up. He came to Corpus when I was still in Corpus Christie. I worked a lot with him. He actually was the one that convinced me or thought it would be a good idea to do that. There were several wardens applying at the time because just the opportunity to work outside of Texas, to work more in-depth investigations, to not wear the uniform where everybody knew – I liked wearing the uniform but it was nice going out to eat with people when you didn't have the uniform. But really it was just the opportunity to work all over the U.S., including Alaska. That was always a dream to go up there. Just those things like that. Texas game warden was a really great job and I really loved doing it, but at a certain point you either try to move up with Texas, and I did a couple of times but I didn't get selected, so it was like, "I'll just throw in my hat for the Fish and Wildlife Service." I got interviewed one time by John Cross. That probably would have been around 1990 or so. I did not get hired. I think John called me and said I was in the top 15 but they only hired 13 or so. Then, when I moved to

Llano, I kind of forgot about it. Then one day, [some] mail showed up and it was from Tom Mason. It was a job announcement. He said, "You've got to apply again." I kind of threw something together real haphazardly and mailed it in, and then that's the year that John Cross came down to interview me and I got hired.

LIBBY: Tom Mason worked for the State? He was a state game warden?

GARY: No, I'm sorry.

LIBBY: Oh, he was Fish and Wildlife Service.

GARY: Yes, he was the Special Agent that came to Corpus Christie while I was there.

LIBBY: Okay.

DEBBIE: Wouldn't you say during that time that Fish and Wildlife agents kind of recruited state game wardens?

GARY: They did.

DEBBIE: I don't know if they do that so much anymore.

LIBBY: I've talked to several agents and have done several interviews. For those folks who were working for state fish and wildlife agencies, many of them had interactions with their Fish and Wildlife Service counterparts. I'm sure they would meet somebody and they saw something special in the state agent, and they would remember that. They had a positive interaction working on cases or something with them. So, it is not surprising.

GARY: Well, I think what it is, and I would do it too after I became an agent is, you work with somebody and say, "Would I want to work with this person more?" That's where you start trying to recruit the ones that you want to see putting in for the job.

LIBBY: You are still relatively young but you've got now about – I'm trying to add up the math here – about 9 years of experience or something. So, you are 29, 30?

GARY: Well, I was 35 when I got hired by the Service. I think I was 24 or so when I started with Parks and Wildlife as a boat operator and became a game warden.

LIBBY: They had a good sense of who you were at that age. Good. So, you get hired by John Cross. What was his position?

GARY: John was the SAC in Albuquerque at the time. Jim Stinebaugh was the SRA here in San Antonio.

LIBBY: He became your boss?

GARY: No. So, I get hired and I go to FLETC (Federal Law Enforcement Training Center) for the two different schools. Criminal Investigator Training School which all Federal agents go through except FBI. They have their own deal. It was a group of 48 people. They're all with different

agencies. Secret Service, ATF, DEA – all thrown there in the Criminal Investigator training. You do that first at FLETC. After that, we went through the Special Agent Basic School (SABS) taught by Fish and Wildlife Service. Started in May and in August we were graduated from FLETC and SABS. My first duty station was in Wichita, Kansas. That's Region 6. Manny Medina was actually my first SRA. Terry Grosz was the SAC there and everybody, if you've ever worked for the Service, knew Terry Grosz or knew of him.

LIBBY: I'm going to have to read some of his books. I know he's written quite a few books.

DEBBIE: We have them all.

LIBBY: Now, is there a lot of truth in those books?

GARY: To me, they're entertaining to read. I don't know. Some of the books were when I was working with him and I read some of those stories and they're pretty accurate. Like I say, I think there's 8 to 10 of them, because he, when he was still alive – Terry's passed away, I don't know if [you knew] he passed away.

LIBBY: I never knew him.

GARY: He was about 6'5", huge person. Rich Grosz – do you know Rich? That's his son. He's an agent up in North Dakota. But he wrote 8 to 10 books. He had a list of agents he would send the book to when it came out and write a note in it. There's a lot of interesting reading. It's entertaining reading. That's the best way to explain it.

LIBBY: I'll have to look him up. When you went to Wichita, did you know you were going to go there?

GARY: yes.

LIBBY: Were you able to select it? Were you given a choice or were you just told that's where you're going?

GARY: When they call you – Rick Thornton was the SAC of Training – he called and said, "We'd like to offer you a job as a Special Agent trainee and you will be going to Wichita, Kansas. Do you accept it?" You know that before you even go [to FLETC]. Some people [are told] "We're going to send you to New York" and they say, "I don't want the job." So, yes, I did know.

LIBBY: And that was good with you and Debbie?

GARY: Oh, yeah. Very good. So, we get to Wichita. That's my training station. After about 7 or 8 months there, they say, "You're in a training spot. You need to find a full-time spot somewhere." Devil's Lake, North Dakota came open because the agent left, so we were planning to move. Debbie's pregnant now. How far?

DEBBIE: Not now. (laughter)

GARY: No. Debbie was pregnant then. (laughter)

DEBBIE: About four months.

GARY: We start making plans to move to Devil's Lake and then, before we moved, the agent in Wyoming who was from Devil's Lake decided he wanted to move back home. So, he went to Devil's Lake.

DEBBIE: And I went, "Phew!"

GARY: So, now we're looking for a spot and that's when these four contaminants positions, I had mentioned [came open] – one in Cedar City, one in Cody, Wyoming, two in Denver. Danny Marshall was the SRA and he selected me for Cedar City.

LIBBY: That's in Utah?

GARY: Southwest Utah.

LIBBY: This is interesting, these contaminants [positions.] These were positions that were funded with contaminants money?

GARY: It was money that Terry Grosz had received from a line item in the budget and it was specifically designated for contaminants work.

LIBBY: This is 1994. I'm trying to think because I worked in the Fish and Wildlife Service then too. I was in Ecological Services so we had Contaminants. I think at that time there was a big interest in contaminants in the Fish and Wildlife Service, in general. We started developing our contaminants programs, which now I don't think there is any funding for.

GARY: Of course, in Kansas, there was a lot of oil pit work. I did a lot of that there, and migratory bird dove hunting. Moving to Cedar City, there was some contaminants work with gold mines in the southern part of the State with those huge cyanide ponds that killed the birds. There was some of that. But really the majority of the work in Cedar City was endangered species, with Utah prairie dogs and desert tortoises.

LIBBY: Would you mind telling me a little bit about what you did?

GARY: It was a new station so I opened a new office there. The Utah prairie dogs were everywhere around Cedar City and the surrounding area. Of course, they were a threatened species so you could not take the habitat. But there was a lot of development going on in and around Cedar City with residential, commercial, schools, post office. A lot of the work I did was just meeting with developers and landowners and trying to explain what the Endangered Species Act was and how it would impact any activities they wanted to do. One of the big things that I worked on the whole time in Cedar City was – Iron County is where Cedar City was – and they were doing a countywide HCP. Ecological Services [staff] were down in Cedar City all the time. Bob Williams and Marilet Zablan were the biologists. So, they come down, we'd have public meetings and then we'd meet with the County. It took almost my whole time in Cedar City for that Iron County HCP to get issued.

LIBBY: Yes. That's a Habitat Conservation Plan. Were they still relatively new at that time?

GARY: Yes. They were.

LIBBY: People were trying to figure out what that meant.

GARY: We'd tell them they need a 10(A)1b permit and they're like, "What is that?" The other part about Utah prairie dogs was, there was a 4(d) rule that allowed farmers to shoot them on the alfalfa fields. They could only shoot so many, but you never knew how many of them they shot. It was kind of an open-ended way for the farmers to thin out the prairie dogs.

LIBBY: You're doing work talking with these landowners and developers. When you said that, I was kind of thinking *that sounds like what Ecological Services people should be doing*. That's very different from a law enforcement point of view. You are being proactive.

GARY: It was not anything that I anticipated doing. I really didn't have a full understanding of the Endangered Species Act until I moved to Cedar City, but working with Bob and Marilet – we did a lot of "on the ground" work. There was a State biologist there, Ken McDonald with Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, and he had all the historical data on where the prairie dog colonies were, which came out to be very important in some of the cases we made, because you had to prove that they were there before they plowed them under and built a home. We had one case that went to trial. It was on the civil side because you couldn't get the U.S. Attorney to take a criminal case.

LIBBY: Even though it involved endangered species, they wouldn't take it?

GARY: Unless you could give them a dead body, which in one instance we did with desert tortoises. DOJ (Department of Justice) did take it and prosecute that. But with the prairie dogs, when they plow them under, they're under. You don't have any dead carcasses. We did get one case. It went all the way through the administrative judge hearing and we won that case. He appealed and we won that appeal too.

LIBBY: Did that end up changing the way the developers reacted?

GARY: I honestly can say I don't know because I left. One interesting part about that is – there's one golf course in Cedar City and it was infiltrated with prairie dogs. The golf pro hated it because the prairie dogs would dig holes on the fairways and chew up the irrigation stuff.

LIBBY: I understand why they would hate it, but...

GARY: The problem is I was a golfer, and they knew who I was and they never knew when I was going to be out there. It was kind of a deterrent. The year I left, the men's association organized with all the men on the golf course. They all carried pellet guns with them and they almost wiped out the whole population of prairie dogs on the golf course, after I left. They prosecuted them for conspiracy to get together, all these people, and kill the prairie dogs.

LIBBY: I still think there's a lot of people who don't like prairie dogs.

GARY: Well, when the Fish and Wildlife Service killed them by the thousands back in the '60's and then were protecting them in the '70's and the '80's and '90's, it's kind of a hard thing to sell.

LIBBY: It can be. So, prairie dogs. You also worked on desert tortoise. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

GARY: Sure. Cedar City is about 5,000 or 6,000 foot elevation. It's right at the foothills of the mountains, so it's very pretty. They have a good winter, fall and spring. But you go 45 miles south to St. George, it's high desert, and that's where the tortoises were. They had a Washington County HCP in place when I got there that dealt with the tortoises and they had this huge desert tortoise preserve where if they had to relocate tortoises, they would take them and put them there. It was completely fenced - buried fence - so they couldn't get out. I spent time down there. They built this Tuacahn outdoor amphitheater down there. They ran over a tortoise and somebody collected it. That's where the DOJ prosecution came in. I don't remember the exact fines they were fined but this construction road they working on, they had to walk it three times a day to make sure no tortoises were on it. They had all these conditions. I spent time down in St. George working similar cases to what we did with the prairie dogs. Habitat cases basically is what they were. I learned a lot about the Endangered Species Act in my time in Cedar City. It was gorgeous. We loved it. Debbie actually worked for Utah Division of Wildlife Resources when we moved there.

DEBBIE: I was on the State side.

GARY: We walked into the office, when we first got to town and introduced ourselves. Debbie is pregnant and our last name is Young. In this Mormon country, that all added up pretty good. (laughter) They knew that she had worked for Texas Parks and Wildlife and they said, "We have an opening. Would you like it?" It was just meant to be, I guess. We really had a good time.

DEBBIE: He worked waterfowl too.

GARY: Yeah, we did. At one point, there were two agents in Salt Lake City - Roy Brown and Kevin Ellis. I don't remember the exact year, but they both left at the same time. Roy went to Lander, Wyoming and Kevin went to Flagstaff, Arizona. I was left as the only agent in Utah until they split those states and made an SRA position in Salt Lake City when Bob Standish came in. He became my boss. Danny Marshall had been up until then. Bob was very high on waterfowl enforcement so during the waterfowl season, I'd leave Cedar City on Thursday and work waterfowl hunters up at Bear River Refuge on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Come home on Monday. Work prairie dogs on Tuesday and Wednesday. Thursday, turn around and go back to Salt Lake.

LIBBY: Aren't you supposed to get a day off in there? (laughter)

GARY: It was a lot of back and forth but that was really pretty country, working Bear River in that valley up there.

LIBBY: Who was the manager? Do you remember the manager of the refuge at that time? Not to put you on the spot. Did you interact with the refuge manager much? They had refuge officers, didn't they?

GARY: Yep. Claire Caldes was the refuge officer. I remember her because every time we were up there, we would work with her. I just can't recall the manager's name. [Note: It was Al Trout.]

LIBBY: I probably don't know him.

GARY: So that was the Cedar City days. We really enjoyed it. It did get a little old, because it's a small town. After you've been there a while, you go to lunch and people know who you were. Oh, they're serving prairie dog today on the menu.

LIBBY: Ha ha ha. Right.

GARY: Like I never heard that before. (laughter) It got a little old, so we were looking for somewhere else to go.

LIBBY: And where did you end up?

GARY: We ended up, of all places, in Fairbanks, Alaska. I'd been up to Alaska on an undercover hunting detail they brought me up there for just because they needed agents to do it. "I'll go." I liked it so much and I talked to Debbie when I got back. I said, "I'm going to apply for the first job that comes open in Alaska. I'm going to apply for just to show them I'm serious about coming up there." The first job that came open was the SRA vacancy in Fairbanks. I've only got 5 years on as the field agent. I'm going to apply for it just so they know I'm serious. I did apply for it. John Gavitt interviewed me. He was the SAC then. I was actually up on another detail in Galena working on a refuge – moose hunters. He interviewed me over the phone while I was up there. He said it was a really good interview and then the ASAC, Wally Soroka, he called me. He said, "John said you did a really good interview. To be honest with you, you're on the bottom of the list. You have the least amount of time of anybody that's applied but I wanted to interview you anyway." So, I interviewed with Wally.

DEBBIE: Do you remember when we got the call?

GARY: I remember I was home.

DEBBIE: We were home having lunch.

GARY: At home in Cedar City, and it was HR from Alaska. She said, this is HR from Alaska. I don't remember the lady's name. She goes, "Is Gary Young there?" I said, "No, this is his twin brother. Gary's not here right now", 'cause I didn't know what to say. (laughter.) So, I hung up and I waited about an hour. "Yeah, Larry said you called. What's up?" "Well, we'd like to offer you the SRA job in Fairbanks." Oh, cool!

LIBBY: Be careful what you wish for. (laughter)

GARY: We accepted that. How old was Morgan then?

DEBBIE: Three. She was almost four. We moved in December.

GARY: We moved in December of 1998 to Fairbanks.

LIBBY: Oh, December. To Fairbanks?

GARY: Yes. (laughter) We were in for a rude awakening.

LIBBY: In many ways. It's often good to take a job that you kind of swallow, like *oh my god, am I really up for this job* because you know it's going to be a lot harder and tougher and the expectations are going to be [higher]. It's more challenging. High expectations. But that's how you grow, professionally.

GARY: Well, I was fortunate because there were two agents in Fairbanks. Corky Roberts was the pilot. He and I had come on together in '93, at FLETC. So, I knew Corky. He was a great guy.

DEBBIE: He was from Texas, right?

GARY: Yep. And then there was one agent pilot out in Nome. Mike Wade. It was not a huge office and I knew one of them, so it was a start. Corky was very helpful. He had been up there after Oklahoma. He had an initial assignment in Oklahoma and then he went to Fairbanks, so he had been there already for four or five years. He knew about it.

LIBBY: Now you are the SRA. You have different responsibilities and you're in a completely different area. I know, I've never been to Alaska but obviously the challenges of working in Alaska are not like anything else in the United States. You had to deal with all that too. You don't go where you want to go whenever you need to get there.

GARY: It was definitely different for me, but it was a great time. It is challenging working with the native issues – with subsistence hunting. That was a lot of the work we did up there. Corky, being a pilot, we flew to a lot of those places because of course there is no road system so you are either in a boat or on an airplane. We spent a lot of time working walrus hunters out on St. Lawrence Island, where they hunt walrus. That's their lifestyle. They depend on it.

LIBBY: What are you looking for when you say you're "working" walrus hunters?

GARY: Walrus are marine mammals, so the Alaska natives can hunt those for subsistence, but they can't do it in a wasteful manner. So, if they kill a walrus, there was a prescribed amount of meat they had to bring back with the head, because the head was the cash part – the ivory.

LIBBY: So, the subsistence part, the ivory is – I don't know if they can sell it, but they use it for traditional uses, right?

GARY: Back when they used sled dogs for transportation, getting around, they would keep a lot of the meat for the dogs. So, when the sled dogs went away and the four wheelers and snow machines came, they needed money for gas, not for food. The ivory they could sell it – native to

native can sell raw ivory. Now, if they wanted to sell it outside of the native circle group, it would have to be “significantly altered”. That is the term that was used. They would only hunt walrus certain times of the year, when they got close enough to the island and the ice floes were there. We would go when we knew they were hunting. There were walrus harvest monitors from the Marine Mammal [Management Program in the Anchorage Regional Office] in Alaska. They would spend the whole time out there on the island. So, they say *they’re hunting walrus now*. We’d make plans. We’d go out there. They knew we were coming. There’s no secrets. They know you’re coming before you’re there. They would go out in their boats and they would kill the walrus. When they came back in with their harvest, we would check to see if they had enough meat or not. If they didn’t, then we would take the head, which is a very unpopular thing to do.

LIBBY: I bet. How often did that happen?

GARY: How often did we take the heads? Not that often. We tried to be pretty lenient, if we could. But if they come in with just the head, then that was a no brainer. But if they at least made an effort, we would try to be lenient.

LIBBY: People don’t like to eat walrus meat?

GARY: There’s select parts they keep. Usually, it’s called the coke. That’s part of it. They had to keep the coke, and they like the flippers. Some love the internal organs.

LIBBY: Ah, alright.

GARY: It’s quite the sight to see these guys come in with [these] V bottom boats. A walrus is a big animal. We’d stay on the island. We’d usually rent a house from somebody and there was a small hotel there. We’d stay a week or ten days, depending on how much hunting is going on.

LIBBY: What time of year is this?

GARY: Usually in the spring.

LIBBY: It’s still pretty cool.

GARY: The snowpack is still on the island and there’s these ice floes. You can see them. They go out and navigate through all those ice floes to find the walrus. They haul out on the ice to rest and then they shoot them. If they fall off the ice, sometimes they sink, and then they don’t get them. They try to shoot them where they’ll stay on the ice so then they can harvest them.

LIBBY: Is there a limit to the number that they could get?

GARY: No, just as long as they brought in the meat to go with each head. We’d only go out there once a year. The day we got there, we’d have a meeting with the village. We would try to get the elders on board. We’re not here to tell them what to do, we just want to make sure they’re not doing it in a wasteful manner. They understood it. They didn’t agree with it. They didn’t think we really had any place there. Lot of times, as soon as you’d step off a plane and

they would try to charge you a trespass fee. *Your trespassing on our land and you have to pay a fee. "We're not paying a fee."* It was just once a year, but it was a highlight of what we did up there.

LIBBY: Was there someone who helped you learn more about the sensitivity of working with them from a cultural point of view, or did you just get thrown out to do that?

GARY: The agents that had been up there - you learn pretty quickly that you have to be very respectful. If you can get into a discussion with the elders – they're the ones that rule the village – the people in the village look up to the elders and they are usually pretty good about doing what they say. If you can be courteous and polite and professional with the elders, and just say, "This is why we're here. We're just going to do our job. We're not going to overstep anything. We just want to make sure it's done the right way." That usually went a long way.

LIBBY: What other things did you work on when you were in Alaska? You're the SRA. How many people did you have working with you?

GARY: I had one admin person and three agents, the two in Fairbanks and then the one out in Nome. I was really only there two years. It wasn't a long time. They can hunt waterfowl in the spring up there, so we worked spring waterfowl hunters. The big thing on that - there was not much they could do wrong on the spring waterfowl [season] except use lead shot. That was the one big thing we looked for. As far as limits, there were a few protected birds we did not want them shooting, but really the lead shot was the main one. There were no limits. They had to get their food while the birds were coming through.

LIBBY: Oh, so this is also subsistence?

GARY: Yes. The interesting part of the migratory birds is the subsistence was not exclusive to natives. If you lived in what was called a rural area, no matter what your heritage was, you could subsistence hunt waterfowl.

LIBBY: Okay. That's good to know. I didn't know that. That's very interesting.

GARY: The marine mammals - the polar bears and the walrus - were specific to Alaska natives. The waterfowl subsistence, if you were in a rural residence - that was basically anything outside the Anchorage Borough and Fairbanks - was considered rural, once it's on the off-road system. That was the two main things. We spent a lot of time in meetings in the winter and a lot of time in the field in the spring and summer.

LIBBY: That was a dream to go and work and live in Alaska. You probably never thought you'd ever live in Alaska.

GARY: No, I did not.

DEBBIE: We're not done with it yet.

LIBBY: But you were only there for a couple of years.

GARY: Yes, because Jim Stinebaugh, the SRA here in San Antonio, he retired in 2000. We'd only been there two years, but we knew that if we did not apply or at least try to get to San Antonio, that it would be a long time before it became open again.

LIBBY: And you did want to come back to Texas? That was your long-range plan.

GARY: The plan was to move back here and stay here. I applied for it. There were several people that did but was fortunate enough that we got it. We moved back to Texas in 2000, to San Antonio. We built a home. We just thought we were going to be here for the rest of the career.

LIBBY: I know that's not what happens. (laughter)

GARY: No, it did not. Things changed.

LIBBY: But tell me about your time in San Antonio. How long were you here?

GARY: Almost 8 ½ years.

LIBBY: That's a good long time.

GARY: Judy [Helfenstein], the admin person – she was a great person to work with. So now I'm back in Texas where my twin brother is a game warden, so we can work together. I supervised south and west Texas. Of all people, Tom Mason – the guy that got me hired – I'm supervising him. He was in Corpus Christie. I'd talk to him and it was kind of awkward, how it came back around. Tom wanted the job but he said he would only take it if they would move it to Corpus, so they said, "No, it's going to stay in San Antonio." I supervised him and then had the agent up in Austin – Carl [Wilson.] Had a couple of agents here in San Antonio, one in Laredo and then wildlife inspectors in McAllen, Brownsville and Laredo.

LIBBY: You have a pretty good size staff.

GARY: It's a pretty good staff.

LIBBY: It's actually the first time you've worked with a lot of people.

GARY: Yes. It's spread out too, all the way from Brownsville to Corpus. When I first got here, El Paso was not part of the San Antonio district. It fell under Albuquerque. But that would change down the line. It was a big area with a lot of stuff going on, and a lot of agents, and a lot of import/export work on the border.

LIBBY: Want to tell me a little bit about that?

GARY: The border was a busy place back then. It's busy now. With the inspectors, it's non-stop. They made a lot of seizures, a lot of wildlife products, a lot of commercial products back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico. I had not had much experience with import/export, so I spent a lot of time working with the wildlife inspectors on the border. We did a lot of cross-training with Customs to explain our laws to Customs, so they would help us. We only had one

inspector in Laredo, one in Brownsville, and one in McAllen. There's a lot of smaller ports in between all those and they have to cover all of them. They couldn't be at them all the time. So, Customs knew what to look for – boots or skins, or a lot of iguana meat and a lot of iguanas that would come. People would smuggle them because they eat them. Cook them on a stick and eat them.

LIBBY: Wow. They smuggle live animals in so they can eat them?

GARY: They weren't live. They were dead.

LIBBY: Oh, they were dead.

GARY: They would hide them in ice chests.

LIBBY: Oh! What about live animals? Is that what is considered trafficking, when it's a live animal?

GARY: Yes. Lots of reptiles, snakes, we would find.

LIBBY: To sell in stores in the United States?

GARY: Yes. They'd be smuggled in. The biggest thing – I don't what you would call it - we had was somebody smuggled an elephant from Texas to Mexico. It went the other way. The joke was "How do you smuggle an elephant across the border without somebody seeing it?" It's not that they didn't see it, but you can get things into Mexico if you pay the right person. That turned into a case and we actually prosecuted somebody for illegally exporting Bennie the Elephant from Texas to Mexico. (laughter) Lots of that and then lots of dove work in the Valley during the September months.

DEBBIE: Did you have much Lacey Act stuff?

GARY: Not too much. Well, all the import/export – anything was a Lacey Act, if it were imported or exported illegally. A lot of oil pit work out in west Texas.

LIBBY: Tell me a little bit about that oil pit work.

GARY: Usually we would approach it by – we would just set up a detail with all the agents. We'd bring in agents from all over because there was contaminants money then. We talked about that. Contaminants would say, *we have this much money*, so we'd pull in agents from Texas and the adjoining states. We'd bring in 15 or 20 agents and we'd go to a county. We had all the maps. We would each pick an area and physically go and pull up to each oil well that had an open pit by it and see if there's any birds in it. Then we would collect the birds. There were dead birds often, and we would collect those. Usually, the standard procedure was, if it was the first violation for the company, we'd write them a letter and make them aware. At that time, the state law, the Railroad Commission which oversees oil and gas in Texas – make sense of that, I don't know – but there was a Railroad Commission state law that said those pits had to be netted to keep birds out. So, if they weren't netted and we had a dead bird, then it was a

Migratory Bird Treaty Act violation, because it was a violation of a state law not to be netted, and the bird died. Usually, the first time was a letter informing them they had to cover the pits, and then if there was a subsequent finding of a dead bird, we would issue them a citation.

LIBBY: When did the Service and people in general become aware of these oil pits being a problem? You're in there and it's in the 2000's. Didn't we already know this was a problem for years going on? Or, not that long?

GARY: It was. When I first came on in '93, not to back up, but that was considered high priority work back then. So, people were aware of it.

LIBBY: They just weren't complying.

GARY: No. I don't think they thought it was an issue. Rob Lee, as he talked about yesterday, was one of the really early pioneers of the oil pit work. It was considered high priority work back then. That was something we spent a lot of time on and a lot of effort trying to clean up those oil sites.

LIBBY: What kind of birds – were they all species, or was it songbirds mostly?

GARY: No. All. I can remember everything from blue herons to – the sad part is, or the back side of that story is, sometimes you couldn't identify what the bird was so we would have to go to the Forensics Lab. They did not like, and I would not have liked either, because these are oil covered carcasses that have rotted. They have rotten flesh covered in oil and we're asking them to identify the bird.

LIBBY: This is up in Ashland.

GARY: Pepper Trail [the lab's forensic ornithologist] was not a fan. He understood why we had to do it. It was a nasty job. They would have to clean the feather enough to find out [the bird's identity.] I can remember blue herons because of the bills and stuff like that, but some of the smaller birds, some of them weren't that big when you pulled them out of there. You could tell it was a bird. I got a lot of pictures from the oil pit days. You can just see them spread out. They're looking for water. They see the reflection and they land and then they're gone. They're not going to get out.

LIBBY: It's so sad.

GARY: It is. And we'd find snakes, lizards – non-target species just looking for water got caught in that. It is sad, because a lot of birds died.

LIBBY: I had never heard about the oil pits until this meeting. Obviously, it was a huge problem.

DEBBIE: And an easy solution, right?

GARY: Well, it's not easy, because those nets – some of those pits might be as big as this room. Might be 20 or 30 yards wide and 30 yards long. You put a net up and then the wind comes and blows it away or it rains or whatever. It's a lot of maintenance.

LIBBY: Would the net right on the surface or was in above it like six inches or something?

GARY: Above it. It was just like a fish net. They would stretch it out. You're talking thousands of oil pits, little pits. Thousands of sites all over Texas.

LIBBY: Maybe some companies thought paying the fine was easier and cheaper in the long run?

GARY: Most of them, *We'll take our chances*. We wrote a lot of tickets, prosecuted a lot of companies. I think we did clean up a lot of it, but there's still a lot of it out there.

LIBBY: I know that SRAs work a lot of hours, but you're also doing all the administrative stuff, right? You're hiring people and doing all the performance evaluations and all that and having meetings with your SACs and whatever. Were you in the field a little bit less than you would have been before?

GARY: Less time in the field. Yep. More time reading case reports. A lot of time sitting there at the desk, reading the reports. Performance evaluations were always a burden.

LIBBY: My least favorite part of the job.

GARY: The good part is I had good people working for me so it was always good to do their evaluations, but it was a lot of work. I just tried to get through it.

DEBBIE: I remember case reports too, especially in San Antonio. They had to be written in such a way. Sort of like being an instructor.

GARY: Yeah. You'd have to correct their reports and clarify but most people did a pretty good job, I think.

LIBBY: Because those case reports could end up being used in a court case, right? You had an important role to train the agents who worked for you and bring them up to a certain standard if they weren't already there.

GARY: Right. Two major things happened while I was in San Antonio. One was, during our first conversation about OPM (Office of Personnel Management) changing our job series – when I got hired, we were GS-1812 wildlife – and then OPM converted us to GS-1811 which are all federal agents. We talked about how many game wardens we would hire and try to get hired. We lost that opportunity when that change happened because they could no longer compete with the other Federal agents. Anybody that asks us now, or asked then, *how do I get on with you guys*, well either get a refuge officer job, a wildlife inspector officer job, or get on with another Federal agency, 'cause that's the way you're going to do it. We can't hardly pick up state game wardens anymore. The other significant thing was, I believe it was Mollie Beattie but it might have been Jamie Clark - it was one of those two Service directors - that elevated

the Chief of Law Enforcement to the Directorate level. Up until that time we were under Refuges. That gave us direct line authority to the Chief of Law Enforcement. There was a little bit of confusion. Some people thought we were leaving the Fish and Wildlife Service. The Regional Directors are like *We're never going to get to talk to you guys again*. None of that was true.

LIBBY: That's probably the concern now. I didn't know that Law Enforcement had been under Refuges.

GARY: Yep. On the org chart way down under Refuges was the Office of Law Enforcement.

LIBBY: I didn't realize that.

GARY: I'm pretty sure it was Mollie Beattie but it could have been Jamie Clark because Mollie Beattie was just Director for a very short time and then she passed away in '96, and then Jamie Clark [became Director.] It was right at that time that that happened, so it might have been Jamie Clark. It was a change for the Office of Law Enforcement but not really how we did business. We still continued to brief RD's (Regional Directors) on investigations and worked closely with all the other divisions.

LIBBY: What would the title be of the person who was in the Regional Office in charge? Was that the SAC?

GARY: Yes. They were also called Assistant Regional Directors of Law Enforcement, but the SAC is the Regional Office person.

LIBBY: Now. But before when it was under Refuges?

GARY: It was still the SAC. The only title change came with the 1812 to 1811. Then the SRAs, the Senior Resident Agents, we became RACs – Resident Agent in Charge.

LIBBY: That happened when you were in San Antonio.

GARY: San Antonio.

LIBBY: And that's the way it is now, still?

GARY: Yes.

DEBBIE: It is? I thought it was the SRA.

GARY: No. That's the way it is.

LIBBY: So, in ten years or fifteen years when there is an LE reunion, you are going to have these people standing up saying *I was the RAC*.

GARY: They started out as SRAs and became RACs. It's the same position, just a different title.

LIBBY: Good. I'm looking at my notes from when we talked. Now, this is going back, but you said when you were in Special Agent Basic School, you were the first class to get computers.
(laughter)

GARY: Oh, yes. We were.

LIBBY: It's kind of funny, all these different things that happen. You don't think about it, but it is kind of interesting. Hard to imagine doing your job without a computer.

GARY: None of us knew – while a couple of us, Carl Wilson for one, knew about computers, but most of us did not. They were little, probably 10 inches by 12 inches and the screen was probably 5 by 7 and it was black and white. We were the first class to get them and we were proud about that.

LIBBY: I bet you were excited. And then you said cell phones arrived when you were in Cedar City.

GARY: Yep. Up until then, we did not have cell phones.

LIBBY: You used to use radios?

GARY: Radios and then just hard phone lines. The first portable email we got were the Blackberrys.

LIBBY: Oh yeah. I remember those.

GARY: Then we went to smart phones. Prior to that, it was radios and just hard-line telephones.

LIBBY: So, you are in San Antonio for the rest of your career. At least, that's what you think.

GARY: That's what we planned. Then in 2009, we got a new SAC in Albuquerque. I would just say my first performance plan with him didn't go well, and I didn't think I would enjoy the rest of my career working for this person. There was an announcement for the ASAC job in Anchorage. Of course, I didn't have any Washington, DC time. Historically, unless you have your two-year time in DC, you weren't going to go above a RAC. So, I applied for the ASAC job. I may have been the only one who applied. I'm not sure. But Benny Perez was the Chief of Law Enforcement at that time, and he said, "I'll approve hiring him for the ASAC, but just tell him he won't go any higher than the ASAC." *That's fine with me, because we are coming up here to stay.* So, we moved in 2009 to Anchorage. Then I got indoctrinated into the regional office life, working in the Regional Office. I had a good SAC, Stan Pruszenski, who was a good SAC to work for. He taught me a whole lot. I think it was a good move. It was hard on our daughter because she was in school here in Texas. When we moved, she was going from middle school to high school, so she started her high school years in Anchorage. It was tough on her, to get to a brand-new place and get into high school.

LIBBY: And so different.

DEBBIE: And from a little town to – well Anchorage was small too but Castroville was what, 1,800 people?

LIBBY: Completely different environment.

DEBBIE: We thought it would be great.

LIBBY: Well, she survived though, right?

GARY: She did. She liked it so much she's living there now.

DEBBIE: She's moved back there three times since we left.

GARY: This last time she bought something, so she's staying.

LIBBY: Good for her. In Anchorage? How about that.

GARY: I was in the Regional Office, and a lot of the same issues. Subsistence lifestyle, walrus and polar bear subsistence hunting. I just worked it from the Regional Office. I supervised the two RACs – one in Anchorage and one in Fairbanks. It was still supervision, still reading a lot of reports. More meetings in the Regional Office. We had to meet with Marine Mammals, we had to meet with Migratory Birds, we had to meet with Inland Fisheries, all these different divisions. So, a lot of meetings that I got used to. It was a good job and we had really good people working there. It was a lot of the same issues. Like I say, we would go to St. Lawrence Island and work the walrus hunters and we would spend time in the YK Delta, the Yukon Delta, working subsistence bird hunters. There were a few times we had some issues in the villages where they were upset with us about tickets we had written. One instance, we were on St. Lawrence Island and we actually had to seize the head because they didn't bring any meat in with it. The guy we took it from, he just sat up on the - I call it the beach but it's ice-covered, it slopes down to the water – he just sat there until all the other boats came in. Then, he went and said something to them. There's like 20 of them, and they're all really agitated and standing above us, waving their guns. It was me and Steve Tuttle and Wally Soroka. Steve's here [at the LE get together.] We thought that could have gotten really bad, really fast. They managed to calm down, and we took the head and went to our house. Stayed there a few more days and left after the hunting stopped. So, we ran into stuff like that. We had one issue with the bird hunters where somebody had violated the law and we needed to deliver a ticket to the person in the village. When the plane landed, the whole village was at the runway to meet us. They weren't going to let us into the village. We found the self-identified mayor and talked to him and said, "Look, we don't want to be here and cause trouble. Just deliver this ticket to this person and have him pay it." And they did. They weren't happy for us to be there.

LIBBY: You had to put a lot of trust in that person to do that. Well, I guess you would have come back if he didn't pay the ticket.

GARY: I said, "If you don't want us back here, just have him pay the ticket." And they did. One of the big things we tried, this term "significantly altered", it sounds simple. They can hunt sea

otters, they can hunt polar bear, they can hunt the walrus and the ivory, but they can't sell it unless it is "significantly altered." Trying to define what "significantly altered" is, is not an easy thing to do. You try to define it by – as simple as it sounds, it's not. Walrus ivory, okay, it's got to be carved into a figurine or something like that. But what if they just scrimshaw on the outside and it can be rubbed off really easily? The big one was the sea otters. They loved to make these full-size, king-sized bed covers with sea otter hides, but the hides weren't altered. They were sewed together making a blanket but there was no altering of it. They could very easily be cut on the stitching and sold as the hide. That was an issue the whole time I was there. We were trying to come up with a definition of "significantly altered" that we could tell so they could sell these products. As easy as it sounds, we never accomplished it, or it wasn't when I left.

DEBBIE: Just say you have to make a hat or a coat.

GARY: That sounds right but they make these poncho-type coats that you can throw over yourself, but they're just hides.

LIBBY: And they couldn't sell the hides? They had to be "significantly altered"? Interesting.

GARY: Native to native, you could sell the hides or if they were a registered tannery which it has to have a license; they could sell those. But if they wanted to sell to just a normal person or a tourist in town or in Anchorage, the ivory or the pelt or the hide had to be "significantly altered." You get, all the time, people standing on the corner with a walrus head, trying to sell it. You can't do that.

LIBBY: Wow. I know lots of times with the laws, it sounds so easy and then when you start to really try to tease it out, especially when you're looking at it from a law enforcement point of view, it's not so straightforward.

GARY: No, it's not. By the way, we worked waterfowl all the way up to Barrow, the tip of Alaska. Spectacled eiders and stuff. It was really interesting. Alaska is a unique place to work. There are a lot of challenges. But it was enjoyable, and you can't beat the scenery.

DEBBIE: In your stories, like when you say "village", people will have an idea of what that means in Alaska but it really is nothing.

LIBBY: It's a handful of houses, right?

GARY: Often times we would sleep in the library of the school. We would bring sleeping bags, because there was nowhere to stay. If we go out there for a meeting or go out there to work, you either rent a room from somebody or if there happens to be a hotel there because of oil production, you might get a room there. We were at Savoonga which is on St. Lawrence Island. They had arranged for us to sleep in the mayor's office. (laughter). So, we have our sleeping bag and our cot, and it's during the day so the office is still open.

DEBBIE: That's the story I like.

GARY: So, the mayor's sitting behind his desk and we're just kind of standing around. The phone would ring and he would just sit there, and this lady - from way down the hall - would come walking from down the hall and pick up the phone. *Mayor's office*, and hand it to him. (laughter) That happened three or four times. He was not going to answer that phone, but that lady from down the hall would. (laughter) Yeah, we'd sleep in some interesting places.

LIBBY: When we were talking on the phone earlier, you mentioned Savoonga so I tried to find it because I wanted to know how to spell it. I'd never heard of St. Lawrence Island. I look and see where it is. When you're on, I guess it's the west end of the island, you're practically in Russia. Can you see Russia?

GARY: You can see Russia. On a clear day, you can see at least the ice floes coming from it.

LIBBY: Did you ever have any interactions with any Russian hunters or any members of the Russian government when you were there?

GARY: We never did. Now some of the hunters that left St. Lawrence Island would sometimes encounter people from Russia, but we never did on the island.

LIBBY: If they had come into the United States waters to hunt, would that have been a violation? Well, they would have needed a permit or something. I don't know how that would work.

GARY: I don't know really know how Russia regulated their hunters. I suspect it wouldn't have been a big deal. They probably all hunted those waters for years. We never went out on the water. We just waited for them to come in. We never ran into any. But yeah, you could actually, on a clear day, see over the horizon. It wasn't [more than] 60 miles or something.

LIBBY: It looks like it's pretty close.

GARY: Yeah, it is.

LIBBY: That wasn't your last duty station, and I want to come back to some other stuff that you did when you were in San Antonio, but we're going to come back to that – your international training work. I want to come back and talk about that. But let's finish up with your work in Portland, and then we'll catch up on those other little things you did that weren't necessarily directly related to your duty station.

DEBBIE: I know I'm butting in a lot.

LIBBY: That's alright.

DEBBIE: Well back when he said he never went to Washington, DC. He thought about it a few times and I don't know, maybe you did apply at some point, but that was the thing. An almost unwritten rule, you almost had to go before you moved up. But he did so many other things. Anytime there was some kind of a program to be a part of, or whatever, he was always volunteering. Like, you did some time in DC.

GARY: I'd do details, yes.

DEBBIE: Details in DC and then the work-swap things.

GARY: Part of ALDP.

LIBBY: Oh, ALDP. You were in ALDP? Advance Leadership Development Program.

GARY: I actually went through ALDP while I was in Anchorage. That was during that time period. The other thing that happened is that Benny Perez retired and Bill Woody became the new chief. The Portland SAC job came open and Woody was up visiting in Alaska and he said, "You should apply for that job." I explained to him that I don't have Washington time. He's like, "No. It doesn't matter. Benny's gone." Woody had a different perspective on that. There was three or four people that applied but I ended up getting that, and then moving to Portland in 2012.

LIBBY: Okay. So, in 2012, you're in Portland, and I see you retired in 2017, so you were there for five years.

DEBBIE: As the SAC.

LIBBY: As the SAC. That's a big promotion.

GARY: The thing is, when I talked to them and I moved, I said, "I'm 55. Why would you move me to Portland when the mandatory retirement age is 57? You're going to move me to Portland for 2 years?" *Well, we'll put in for an extension when that time comes.* So, long story short, I got the extension to work past 57. They actually gave me a year and then two years, which is a total of three, which is the most they can give you. That's what allowed me to work five years there, otherwise it would have been two.

LIBBY: And that's how you were able to get a little bit more time working for the Fish and Wildlife Service because you were 35 when you first started. That's kind of late to start working for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

GARY: It is.

LIBBY: Or to be a federal agent, to work for the Federal government, I guess.

GARY: Back then, the mandatory [retirement] age was 55. So, you had to get hired by then, or else you weren't going to have the years. Then they bumped it to 57. So then I moved to Portland, the regional office in Portland, Oregon. At that time, Region 8 had been created, so Region 1 was just, at that time, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Hawaii, and the Pacific Islands, Guam and America Samoa. I had a pretty good size staff, probably 45 or so people between admin, agents and inspectors. Once again, regional office setting. A lot of meetings, a lot of report reading and a lot of paperwork.

LIBBY: Who was the regional director when you were there?

GARY: Robyn Thorson. Robyn was there and was there when I left.

LIBBY: She retired.

GARY: Rich Hannan was the deputy regional director. Rich had been the ARD of Budget and Finance in Anchorage when I was in Anchorage. He moved down to Portland. It was comfortable moving to Portland because Rich and I knew each other pretty well. So, it was comfortable moving there.

LIBBY: Your daughter - is she still in school now though? Is she a senior when you moved or had she graduated in Anchorage?

GARY: No. She finished high school in Portland.

LIBBY: She had to switch schools again as a teenager. That's hard.

GARY: That was not easy either.

DEBBIE: If you read this someday, Morgan, *we're sorry*.

LIBBY: They're sorry – you hear that? (laughter) Very sorry.

GARY: Yeah, she had to do that. She was still in school.

LIBBY: It can also teach you a lot of resiliency. Some good things can come out of that.

GARY: I had really good agents in all those states and they worked some really good cases. Of course, we had grizzly bear and wolf issues in Idaho. They were kind of sensitive issues.

LIBBY: Do you want to tell me more about that?

(At this point, Libby realizes the audio recorder has stopped working but she has a backup on her iPhone so the conversation continues. The discussion about that is not transcribed here.)

GARY: The issues with the grizzly bears in Idaho is of course, they're protected and can't be hunted. But you have, every now and then, either hunters would kill one and try to cover it up or ranchers protecting their livestock would kill one. In Idaho, the State did not want to prosecute any of those people so it was usually left to us to do that. It was just a sensitive issue and we tried to approach it as best we could.

LIBBY: It probably still is a sensitive issue, right?

GARY: It is. I think that and the wolves. The states have passed some rule changes where they can actually hunt the wolves now. I don't know that for sure but I think that's eased a little bit, but the bears are still expanding and growing in population, so more encounters with more folks.

LIBBY: I think wolves were taken off the endangered species list.

GARY: Could have been.

LIBBY: I may be wrong.

GARY: It was such a variety of work between Oregon, Washington and Idaho. Then you've got Hawaii which is a completely different ballpark. A lot of import/export work in Hawaii and a lot of endangered species work with all the birds in Hawaii. Back into the endangered species world! It was a good move of course careerwise and, like we talked about, tough on the daughter but it allowed me to work three years longer and still get more time with the Service. And the chance to be a SAC was a huge opportunity.

LIBBY: That's not an SES position, is it? Is it a 15?

GARY: Yes, a GS-15. I enjoyed working with all the other programs. We had our share of endangered species work and migratory bird work. We had eagles. Any migratory birds – golden [eagles], Bald Eagle Protection Act, all the laws we enforced happened in Region 1.

LIBBY: I've never talked to anybody from Hawaii so I don't know anything about the issues there. I know there's obviously a lot of endangered species in Hawaii.

GARY: A lot of endangered species.

LIBBY: What are the import/export [issues]? Is that like things coming in from the Pacific, Asia, and that type of thing?

GARY: A lot of stuff coming in really from all over the world. Honolulu is a port of entry so it has to come through there. We had a really good staff of inspectors there, right at the airport. Before I left, they got a K-9 so they had a dog. Just anything – shell products, tropical fish, you name it, it was coming through. Leather products from Asia or whatever. I'm trying to think of some of the stuff we would get. Reptiles were coming through. A lot of tropical fish coming through. It was a busy place. They had a lot of seizures there.

LIBBY: What would be the issue with tropical fish? Is it bringing in fish that don't belong in this habitat and being released or was it because, again, you're depleting the populations of native fish?

GARY: I think a lot of times they were legal imports. They just had to be inspected. There was also a method they were using where they could smuggle drugs in with fish. It would almost be smuggled in liquid form, and they had some drying process where they could render the drug from it. The inspectors knew what to look for – it just looked different when you looked at the water and the fish. Why it didn't hurt the fish, I don't know. That was stuff they looked for. A lot of the stuff that came in was actually legal, they just had to be inspected because it was a commercial import. The one thing that a lot of seizures, they sold these really expensive handbags at the shops in Honolulu. I cannot remember the brand name, but they were thousands of dollars. They were made from CITES-protected species. If the person bought it in Honolulu and they were from Japan, say, they couldn't export it out of the U.S. without a CITES permit. Unless the store did that, which they never did, they would lose that handbag when they went to the airport. It would be seized. They'd lose it. We're talking several thousand

dollars for these handbags. That was one of the interesting outgoing products that we had seizures from.

LIBBY: That would be really difficult to deal with. People who have that much money to buy pocketbooks that cost thousands of dollars – are not going to go [quietly.]

DEBBIE: Yves Saint. Laurent. Chanel. Gucci.

GARY: There are a lot of endangered birds there that we did a lot of work with. One of the most controversial were the shearwaters. During their mating and migration seasons, it was very important that as much lighting could be shut down as possible at night, because – like on a football stadium, if they played games at night with those lights – the shearwaters would come to those lights. They'd get confused and circle, and [exhausted, they would fall from sky]. They would end up on the roads and get run over. So, we were having this battle with Hawaii and not having football games at night because they were killing a lot of birds. That wasn't a popular thing.

LIBBY: I'd almost think that by now - we're talking about not that long ago - you would think that people would be more receptive to making some accommodations for wildlife. Wow. So, you were in there for 5 years and then you retired. Why did you decide to retire? Oh, yeah, 'cause you were running out of time and extensions.

GARY: I was running out of time. I could have worked till November of 2017, but the Malheur refuge takeover had happened in January of 2016.

LIBBY: Let's talk about that. Well, whatever you can talk about it. I don't know if there is a limit on what you can say.

GARY: Everybody knows what happened. This group led by Ammon Bundy just occupied the refuge – armed individuals in January. Within a day, the FBI had stood up this huge command center in an old high school in Burns, Oregon in Eastern Oregon. Snipers on every corner of the building. Huge command center with newsfeeds on every channel with news. I led the effort from the Office of Law Enforcement. Refuge law enforcement had their own presence there at the command center. We had briefings every day on that. We had an agent in the command center the whole time. FBI had the lead on it so we were just kind of sitting there. The refuge officer from that refuge had the expertise about what was on the refuge and where, so he was a huge asset to the FBI. Basically, we would sit in the command center every day. FBI was developing information and we would have briefings every day on where we're at. When is this ever going to end? We were trying to tell them to leave. They were there illegally.

DEBBIE: They just took up residence.

GARY: They were. They were living there. They were using everything on the refuge. They were using the equipment. They were building roads. They were tearing things up. They were renaming things. This is all in protest over two ranchers being sentenced to jail for an illegal

burn. But what was never told is that the illegal burn was an effort to cover up a large poaching incident. They were trying to burn all the carcasses. When they sent the Hammonds back to jail, that's what got everybody riled up. How they decided to take over the refuge, I don't know if it was just spur of the moment or they had planned it all along, because they had planned this rally in support of the Hammonds, and then this splinter group broke off and went straight to Malheur. Nobody was there. It was the weekend. Broke in, or rumor was they had a key. We never confirmed that. They got in and occupied it, and nobody else was going in. They had armed people everywhere. They weren't going to let anybody in.

DEBBIE: Wasn't there a ranch, BLM land?

GARY: The Hammonds? I don't know.

LIBBY: They did have grazing permits on BLM land but I don't know specifically if they had some of their own land.

GARY: I think it was their own land.

LIBBY: I think some of the Bundys though had grazing permits also.

GARY: I was getting towards the end of my career and that was just a stressful scenario for everybody. It ended in February. That's when they had the shootout at the roadblock. When that one individual was shot and killed, all the other ones on the refuge fled. They all left, and they left everything behind. It ended – the standoff – in February, but then the documentation of all the damage, collecting all the personal items, most of that was handled by the refuge but we did have our share of processing the evidence, of trying to get reports written and convincing the FBI. We had said from Day One, I met with the U.S. Attorney out at the command center saying, "When you guys press charges, you need to include the Fish and Wildlife violations as lesser violations, because those are a guarantee." They didn't do that, and then these guys get found "not guilty", which was unbelievable.

LIBBY: Unbelievable.

GARY: Unbelievable. In my opinion, and I know it's on this recording, but I think it was the FBI that lost that case. They did not do a good job of proving what they needed to prove. So, I dealt with that, and then it just seemed like a good time. I had gone into the third year of my extension and was just ready to hang it up, I guess.

LIBBY: At some point, NCTC may want to do an oral history about the Malheur occupation. Whether it's through a panel or through individual interviews with people, you'd be probably someone they would want to talk to since you were the SAC at that time. Even if you feel like your role was not the major role, you still had an important role and you have a really important perspective. So, that could happen. I think we had talked to some folks in the region. I don't know if it was Robyn. It wasn't me having the conversations. Mark Madison, our

historian. I think the feeling was that it was still a little too early to do that. Sometimes it's better to wait and let some time go by. But it's been, well, it will be 7 years this year.

GARY: Yeah. 2016.

LIBBY: So, that could happen sometime. So, you retired and I know you are still doing some great work, but I wanted to maybe touch on a couple of things. We have a little bit of time.

DEBBIE: What about Africa?

LIBBY: Well, that's what I wanted to talk about. Based on our conversation earlier, I have the international training you did in Botswana and Brazil. Maybe we talk about that? Then, in Indonesia, a trafficking investigation. Maybe there is something else you want to talk about, just briefly.

GARY: We still do these international opportunities in Africa. They're based out of Gaborone, Botswana. There's an international law enforcement academy there. Its pronounced "ha-ba-rone" I think, actually. It's basically a 2 ½ week course that we teach these officers from other countries. We teach them crime scene investigation, photography, report writing. It's just a basic 101 course on how to conduct an investigation. They have so very little resources. Anything that we help share with them - how we do things or provide to them - is always beneficial. It's really a great thing to take part in. So, both the Africa and the Brazil international trips were associated with that program where we teach this basic 101 on wildlife crime investigation.

LIBBY: Does somebody in Washington set those programs up and you were asked to be an instructor?

GARY: They are organized by Washington and then they'll put out an email asking *who's interested in going?* I was lucky to get selected for those two.

LIBBY: I bet that was an honor and very exciting!

GARY: It was a once in a lifetime trip to go to Africa and see the elephants and giraffes and the rhinos walking around. Brazil was such a neat place too. Going there and seeing the wildlife in Brazil and just seeing that country. Amazing.

LIBBY: Do you want to talk about the Indonesia trafficking investigation?

GARY: That was one that was kind of unique. I was the SAC in Portland. We had a really good agent in Wilsonville. Wilsonville is just south of Portland. It's the RAC office. I think he's still there. He's a really good agent. He had been dealing with these two guys from Indonesia. They were shipping illegal items to him. Endangered items – skulls, pelts, whatever. They would say, "This is what we have" and he would buy it. They would ship it to him, illegally, of course. It's a commercial shipment coming through. They were pretty big traffickers selling a lot of items. They had a website on how to contact them. They were selling a lot of endangered species

stuff, so the agent convinced them that he was this big dealer in Portland. He actually convinced them to fly to Portland to meet him so he could show the shop to them. So, we set up a fake store and a warehouse with all these items they had sent to him, plus a bunch more we had taken out of our evidence room. It looked like a big collection of parts. We actually paid to fly them from Indonesia to Portland. We picked them up at the airport and took them and showed them all that. They had brought stuff smuggled with them that we wanted to buy – more stuff. When that transaction happened and we bought that stuff, we arrested them. They went straight to jail where they stayed. You have to work through the State Department and the consulates and all that when you arrest a foreign national. That was a big surprise to them, when they came and saw the storefront and thought they had a free trip to the U.S. It wasn't. It was a one-way ticket. They eventually got out and got back home. It was a good case by that agent.

LIBBY: I love all these undercover cases. They're all [fascinating.]

GARY: Another one that happened while I was the SAC there was, we had an ivory trafficking case in Hawaii. We knew this person in Hawaii was having ivory carved and selling it as crafts carved by Hawaiian natives. Well, where was he getting the ivory? We didn't know. So, we had an undercover refuge officer from Alaska travel to Hawaii. He was an Alaska native, so he looked the part. He approached this guy and said, "I'm Alaska native. I have this ivory I can get. Do you want it?" We ended up selling raw ivory to this retail dealer in Hawaii. He can't buy it legally. What he does, he ships it to the Philippines and has it carved in different figures or something and brings it back and sells it in his shops in Hawaii. All of it is illegal - the raw [ivory] sent to the Philippines, carved, come back and sold. We were working this case with National Marine Fisheries [Service]. We had this huge takedown in Hawaii where we went to all his shops in Honolulu and seized all the ivory and went to his warehouse and seized all the ivory there. It just happened that while we were doing that search warrant that day, the carvers from the Philippines happened to be in town. So, they both got arrested. They went to jail. Fortunate for us; they were there. That was another big case. It was not concluded by the time I left. I don't know what the outcome was on it.

LIBBY: That's a big case. Then, when you tell it, you're talking about in really just a few sentences, but it must have been a tremendous amount of work to put all that together, especially when you are dealing with other agencies too.

GARY: The logistics are everything, and documenting everything. We had these microtags that we had to tag the walrus ivory with. You had to have a special light to see it, so we could prove that it was the ivory that we sold. We had a chain of custody of where it went [to prove] that actually it was our ivory because it had these microtags in it. So, huge logistics. And then just the takedown itself, we had to bring in about 20 agents and inspectors to Hawaii to do the takedown.

LIBBY: You're bringing people in and they don't even know the area. It's complicated. Although, *Geez, sorry honey, I have to go to Hawaii for work.*

DEBBIE: Yeah, I heard that plenty.

GARY: It wasn't bad supervising Hawaii. You had to go at least once or twice a year just to visit. It was a benefit, no doubt. Good cases.

LIBBY: Is there anything else you want to talk about in your Fish and Wildlife Service career? We covered a lot.

GARY: We did. You could talk forever about stories. I think this kind of sums it up. It was a great career. When you get to spend time in several different regions and work all over the West and Alaska and internationally and still working as part of these International Conservation Chiefs Academy, it's just great. Great people, great career. It seemed like it went really fast.

LIBBY: Tell me about the work you are doing with the International Conservation Chiefs Academy.

GARY: The Bureau of International Affairs, Law Enforcement and Narcotics – INL – they actually fund it. They have this pot of money because the tie between wildlife trafficking and drug trafficking – they're organized crime now. They are so interconnected. The mission of these ICCAs is to build a global network of wildlife people that know each other. This May we are going to be bringing in people from all over Africa. In September it's going to be people from all over Asia. These countries, they don't often talk or know each other. You get them all together in one room and they meet each other and then they have a network they can reach out to. It's produced cases already. Somebody in Zambia hears about some ivory being illegally shipped to the Philippines. They alert those folks, make a phone call now and it's seized. That's the basis. People come to those academies thinking we are going to teach them all these great law enforcement techniques. That's not what it's about. There's two principles we teach. Adaptive challenges - where they bring a challenge they are facing at home and they go through a peer consultation with these people. It's a very structured process. It only lasts an hour, where they present their challenge, we ask questions, and then we offer them ways to deal with it. A lot of times, it's ways they hadn't thought about and they leave with new ideas on how to face the challenge. That's the first part. The second half is called "Systems Thinking". Basically, everything you do is structured around a system, and the system produces the results it gets. Systems thinking involves dealing with everything. Everything that you do involves a system. It's people, these different factions, these people you deal with - this group or this group, and how it all intertwines. I'm really oversimplifying it because you spend a whole week talking about "systems thinking" and how the way we were born and raised influences how we think, and then how somebody else is born and raised and how they think, and this group thinks this way and how all that intertwines. It's a very complex topic. We spend a lot of time going through it. They learn those two principles – the adaptive challenges and peer consultation and systems thinking. They take that back and apply it, where they're from. But at the same time, they're

making contacts with all these other officers from all over Africa or all over Asia or whatever. Then we have follow up Zoom calls with all the alumni where everybody can come in and say hi.

LIBBY: There must be language barriers or does everybody speak English?

GARY: No, usually the African countries, they all speak English, even if it is broken English sometimes. We'll bring in interpreters for the other ones. Like [when] we do South America, we bring in Portuguese for Brazil and Spanish. It's a whole system of interpreters. It works.

LIBBY: How long have these been going on, these academies?

GARY: The first one was in 2016. I did the first one while I was still the SAC, still working. They continued on, and then Covid hit, so we had about 1 ½ to 2 years where we did them by Zoom. Last October was the first in-person one we did. We have two planned for this year – May and September.

LIBBY: They are always at NCTC?

GARY: They are when they are in person.

LIBBY: In person. That must be so exciting for these folks to come.

GARY: Yeah. They step off the jet in Washington, DC. We take them on a field trip to Washington, DC and they walk the Mall. It's a fun time. We meet a lot of interesting people.

LIBBY: That's really great. So, I hope you're playing some golf.

GARY: Yep. I play. We both play. Golf. Fish.

LIBBY: Well, is there anything else you want to add?

GARY: I don't think so. I appreciate your time and what you do. You listen to a lot of people.

LIBBY: I have to say it all kind of runs together when I'm doing so many in a row but it's fascinating. I really appreciate you being here. Debbie, it was nice to meet you as well. And that's a wrap!

GARY: Perfect. Thanks, Libby.