

File 1

0:00:00.0

(I'm just gonna talk into this and see if it picks up any background noise or anything. How long have you lived here?)

Uh, since 1965.

(Wow. This is a wonderful area.)

Yeah, I lived in this area. We bought this property and put a house—

0:00:21.9 End file 1.

File 2

0:00:00.0

(OK. All right. This is Diana Dwyer, and I don't know where I am. I'm some place in California. [laughs]

[laughs]

(I'm talking to Blue Milsap on June 28th, 2006. I'm just gonna go through what was on the biographical form. Did you grow up in this area?)

I grew up down in Fortuna, yeah, went through grammar school there and high school, and moved out here in 1965. I still had to—let's see, I went through four years of high school. We lived here, but I went through four years of high school boardin' out down in Fortuna.

(Is your dad a farm worker out here?)

No, my dad worked for Pacific Lumber. He was a mill worker. The reason we kind of moved out here, my mom had asthma real bad, she had to get to this higher climate out of the fog. So that's how we kind of ended up here.

(It's beautiful, a beautiful area.)

Oh, I wouldn't live no place else! [laughs]

([chuckles] Did you come from a big family?)

You know, on my mom's side, there was 13 brothers and sisters, and on my dad's side there was two sisters, two brothers. So yeah.

0:01:16.9

(That's a big family.)

Yeah. And God, I don't know how many cousins [laughs] and all I've got out in the world. [laughs]

(I'm the oldest of eight, so I know I've got tons and tons of relatives somewhere. Did you grow up hunting and fishing—)

I did.

(—trapping?)

I did, I did, you know. My grandfather was a federal trapper, or was a government trapper, and I really don't know how many years he was. He died when I was in the service in 1972, and I never—all I know is, he was a government trapper for a few years. But I grew up ever since I was a kid remembering my dad and my grandfather and uncles huntin' hounds. Seemed like we did it every weekend, some place we went to, somethin' we did. That was the weekend thing, to go hound huntin'. [laughs]

(What kind of dogs did you have?)

Walker hounds.

0:02:20.8

(I hear that the lot from people. I remember hearing her bay, I've heard a couple of them, and it sounds like they are calling from the swamps or something. They've got a real deep song.)

You know, you've got to have a likin' for a hound, I think. They're a lot of trouble, but you just got to learn to work with 'em like you do kids, I guess. [laughs] Lots of patience.

(Yeah, you have to. What did you—when you first learned how to trap, what was the first time you went trapping on your own?)

It was probably out here, it was probably eighth grade or so, I'd say, 10, 12 years old or somethin'. I used to trap a few gray foxes around the house. My mom and dad's place is just up the road here a quarter of a mile, and there wasn't so many houses around here then [chuckles] so I don't know, just seemed like traps like the #1's up there, and I went out and caught gray foxes and sometimes I'd just catch 'em and let 'em go, just to see if I could catch 'em. [laughs]

([chuckles] Just because you can. Did you do anything for commercial for selling furs?)

No, I never did, never did. 'Bout the time I even knew that you could really sell furs, I got this job.

0:03:45.4

(How long have you been working for the Wildlife Service? Well, it was ADC before that.)

ADC, 31 years.

(That's a long time!)

I've got 31 years in, workin' on 32 by March. [laughs]

Yeah. I guess Craig Coolahan gave me my 30 years plaque and said I was one of the elite ones.
[laughs]

[laughs]

Very few of us make it this far, seems like.

(There have been a lot of changes in the program. We've gone up and down. You worked for them when we were part of Fish and Wildlife, didn't you?)

I did, yeah.

(I started in '83.)

Oh, did you? No, I worked [pause] [laughs] yeah, through Wildlife Services, I can't remember all the times—

([chuckles])

—or all the people in agencies we seemed we went through in the last 30 years.

0:04:50.1

(And you've always stayed here in this area?)

I always have, yeah. Well, no, I take that back. I do a lot of special activity work out of the area, but that's helped me. My county's—Trinity County itself is the county I started workin' in, and I worked here for, oh—well, I've worked here forever, I mean, but funding-wise, they only pay for, like, two months out of the year. So Humboldt County funding kept me goin', and then special activity work. So I've worked—the last few years I've been workin' in San Diego on lion projects to make ends meet.

(Do you know what kind of animals are the ones that you have to deal with the most around here?)

Mostly coyotes—

(Yeah?)

— has been most of my work, and then spring of the year I seem to have a few bear calls and a few mountain lion calls. Winter months, catch a few raccoons and skunks.

(That's more—)

Pardon?

(—of an urban thing, a complaint?)

Yeah. Skunks down here at the school, Forest Service, under people's houses. Everybody in Wildlife Service goes through that. [laughs]

([chuckles])

But I think I'm—I've listened to some of the other trappers talk about how much skunk work they do, and I just feel like I'm in heaven—

([laughs])

—because I don't have to do that much.

0:06:23.0

(Do people call you directly? Do you get a call from an office?)

No, I get called directly. This is my office here, and I get called right here, usually if there's a problem and they call Fish and Game, Fish and Game will give 'em my number and have 'em call me, even on skunks, raccoons, whatever the problem is.

(You said your wife goes out with you sometimes?)

She does, yeah.

(It seems like Wildlife Services is a family, family-oriented group of people.)

Oh, yeah, it has been. A lot of times when I'm workin' out of the area, down in LA, San Diego, I'll work 10 days and then come home for five and then go back and work 10 days. My wife works for the school, so when she gets out of the school, she likes that little vacation of coming down and bein' with me, and then she'll ride with me.

(That's cool. Have you done any work for the research center?)

0:07:26.7

Just testing baits and stuff, yeah.

(What kind of baits? Was is coyote attractants?)

Yeah, it was coyote attraction, the stuff there for Sherm Bloom. It's been a few years since I've done any of that. Now that they've—Proposition 4 took the traps away from California, don't have no need for baits, attractants.

(Do you do snare work now?)

I do.

(Yeah?)

We still can use snares, but trouble with most of my ranches is, fences are so old that—

(—they won't hold it?)

Yeah, there's not many holds, coyote crawl holds in 'em. But I find a few here and there that I can use still.

0:08:11.2

(What's the most challenging thing about what you're doing, for trapping the most?)

The most challenging?

(Yeah.)

I think the bear and lion work. I just—that's what's kept me goin' over the years [chuckles] —

([laughs])

— just waitin' for them calls to come in. I get to work my hounds, so—and then this time of year, spring of the year, we've got—coyotes have got pups, so that's fun work there, I should say, you know, and really get out and try to get some numbers put down. [laughs]

(Do you go out on horseback?)

No—

(Or ATV? Or just?)

— no. Everything—I don't even have an ATV. I do all my work on foot, all my bear and lion work. I run along with them dogs—

([chuckles] Oh, God!)

—as much as I can any more. [chuckles]

([chuckles])

Used to be I could [laughs] get up and go, but I think I got up and went. [laughs]

([laughs] How many dogs do you have?)

I have 10.

(Ten, wow!)

Yeah, I have 10, and always pickin' up pups here and there. I raise all my own hounds, pretty much. Or if I pick up a pup from somebody else, it's usually out of dogs I give them, yeah. I've

got dogs—some of my strain of dogs are in Oregon on lion work up there for ADC and Wildlife Services. I've had 'em in Nevada and around, and then up and down California here.

(Do you have to train them? Do they pretty much pick it up from the other dogs?)

It's pretty much what they do, all the younger pups just kind of work into the program from workin' with older dogs, and I just take 'em—sometimes it's havin' enough work to get 'em started.

0:10:05.7

(The number of calls haven't—have they increased?)

I really don't think so. I think it's about the same. Some years it seems more calls than others, but you just never know what's gonna happen. Here a month ago I caught seven mountain lions in about a two-week span, and I haven't had no calls since. So you know, it just comes in spurts.

(Do you do anything with—you don't do anything with rodents, you're a big—)

I don't, no.

(—big animal—)

Nothin' with that. I've worked on some projects down in San Diego, the least tern projects, I worked with birds and stuff.

(The latest thing right now is wildlife disease and everybody's running around gearing up for that. Have you been approached to work on trapping work at all?)

Yeah, we've been to some meetings and talked about this, what would take place if this gets fired up. We're kind of aware of it and tryin' to figure out how we as teams get out and approach a project.

(They just had a big meeting at the Research Center and some training for a lot of people, swabbing ducks and all kind of things. It's a whole new thing for some people, they're used to dealing with big animals, and having to switch over to that.)

Yeah, it'd interesting. I don't know if actually they—you know, I'm sure if it was an outbreak that I would be called in to help and then we'd see what happens. [laughs]

(Hopefully it won't show up here.)

Yeah, that's what I'm kind of hopin', to.

0:11:53.2

(What do you like most about your work?)

Uh, oh, I can't say just bein' my own boss—

([chuckles])

— but you know, Jayce [Jerrald] Comfort, who is my boss, and sometimes I don't talk to him for a couple weeks or somethin', just gettin' out and gettin' my work done every day, not really havin' anybody tell me what to do, I guess. [laughs] I don't know how to put it, you know[chuckles].

([chuckles] So you like being out for a couple of days at a time, three or four days at a time?)

Yeah, I do. I used to like that campin' out for 10 days at a time, and then, like I say, my wife would come down. Got five grandkids, they really work on me, they're always callin', "When you comin' home?" This type of stuff. You know, it got a little tougher once all the kids is around.

(What's the least thing you dislike about your work?)

Aw, the least thing? I don't know, talkin' with people. [laughs] I don't know. [laughs]

(You mean, like, PR stuff, having to do that, the paperwork?)

Paperwork, this computer stuff.

([chuckles])

I think all my bosses looked at me when this come up that we're—

(The MIS?)

Yeah, the MIS come up [laughs] and they just didn't know what was gonna happen—

([chuckles])

— with me and the MIS. But thank God my wife kind of does computer work for me, so it helps me out, or I probably would be retired, tell you the truth.

0:13:39.7

(I think I've heard that from other people, too. They said, "This is what's gonna push me over the edge, having to do all that.")

Yeah.

(Lot of changes.)

It is, you know. It started out, I wrote—when I started in '75, I wrote little notes on a piece of paper each week or every day of what I did and stuff, and then end of the week mailed 'em to my supervisor. That's just the way it was [chuckles], you know. We got a little bit more sophisticated as it went on, and then on the MIS there, we had the little bubble forms, and I got along fine with that. [chuckles]

[chuckles]

I could figure it out, I could do the bubbles. When it got into the computer stuff, it just—I'm lost. I really am.

(You're not alone. [chuckles] There's a lot of people like that.)

[laughs]

(Being out there, have you run into any people who have challenged you for trapping?)

Oh, yeah.

(Or have you had to do any political things like that where people who are anti-trapping have confronted you?)

I've run—you know, probably not like PETA or anything like that, but I just—like, on my bear and lion work, I've run into people out there. Somebody would have a problem and my dogs would cross onto their property and the people over there would go—the people there would just [sound of door opening and closing] go, "We really don't want the bear killed," somethin' like that. That's more or less what I run into than anything.

0:15:17.5

(They just want you to move?)

Well, they didn't want me to kill it on their property. How can I try to put that? [chuckles] They just prefer—they think the bear's cute and it's fine that it's eatin' other people's stuff. [laughs]

(They think it's fine until it gets on their back patio.)

Yeah, until it gets onto theirs. I've had people it's that way. I've had people that didn't want me on their property and they always said, "Unless somethin' happens, and then we'll give you a call," you know.

(What's the funniest thing you've ever—can you give a couple of funny stories, things you—)

Oh, let's see.

(—situations?)

0:16:00.4

I've probably got some dandies. I don't know.

(Just think about it. How do you set up your traps? Do you do a trap line and come back the next day?)

You know, when we could trap here, yeah, that's what I did. I'd put a trap line out, and I think then we had to check 'em every third day. You know, and I used the horse a little bit back then, but nowadays I don't.

(Do you have any favorite lures or anything that you used?)

You know, I used to get a bait from Ron Thompson, used to get it in for the state, and it was a mass #6. Offhand, I don't know who made it, if it was somethin' that come from the Research Center. It seemed to work real well out here for the M44s and stuff. And then, like, on my trap lines, all I ever used is urine scent baits. Here—the old trapper that started me out, Steve Matthes, would take these urine—[sounds of door opening and closing] we'd get urines from dogs or out of the coyotes, but we'd add a little—he'd always add a little somethin' like lion urine or some bobcat urine into it. He had other little ingredients that we used. And it really worked well here. That seemed to be the best lure for coyotes that you could get, was urine sets. Didn't use much else.

0:17:45.7

(Do you have any—are any of your dogs really especially good at catching lions or tracking anything?)

Yeah, I've had some dandies through the years. [laughs]

([chuckles])

That's probably got how I got a lot of my lion work, I guess, you know, workin' for Fish and Game on special projects, I had dogs that was real exceptional. Probably my very best dog I got killed six months ago by a tom lion that was killin' house cats and dogs in the neighborhood, and I very seldom ever have one dog get out on its own, but I had three of 'em start backwards on the track, and she got out the right way. And it only took me 10 minutes to get the other dogs turned around, but still she caught up with the lion and it killed her before I could—

(I'm sorry.)

—the other dogs got there. They just got there and treed the lion. It's a heck of a deal. I've lost three or four dogs through the years that way.

(Somebody showed me a velcro vest that they had for their dog, a Kevlar vest that they put on their dogs.)

For hog huntin'.

(I think that'd be kind of heavy to carry around.)

It—I've never used none of that, and I've worked on quite a few pig projects, but some of our guys that—them dogs are catch dogs. What they do, they run in there, grab them pigs by the butt, and them pigs set down and they spin around—

([chuckles] Oh, God!)

—and they hook them dogs. The dogs I've always worked is dogs that never touched a hog but stayed back from here 10 feet—

(Smart.)

—from 'em, barked at 'em, the pigs just stand there. The whole bunch would stand and look at you instead of dogs catchin' one pig [chuckles].

(That's smarter. When you could use traps, what was your favorite trap to use?)

0:19:38.0

You mean, like, the #3 trap?

(Yeah. Did you ever modify your traps at all? Did you just do 'em right out of the box?)

I got 'em right out of the box. There wasn't nothin' I really did to 'em. First thing, before I ever used 'em, I boiled 'em and got 'em cleaned up and tried to get all the human scent or whatever was on the trap off of it. But to take it and modify it, I never did nothin' no different to it, you know. I—like, maybe on the pans, I always like to use a little redwood stick underneath my pans that, for a tension device. A lot of people use springs, but I like the little redwood chips there, they seem to snap quick and they really work well.

(Good. Have your trapping techniques changed over the years, have you had to modify things?)

Yeah, you know, some of the traps I see—well, California, we don't see much, but they've kind of been workin' with a foot snare now, and I've seen 'em at our state meetings. I never have used one, but they're pretty big and bulky, but they do work. Out here, I never, I don't have a lot of sheep in my district, so my trappin' that way is probably a little better off than some of these other guys that's in real bad sheep country and really need to catch a coyote.

(I guess this surprised me that you've got a lot of coyotes here. I guess I just expected it would be all bear work and lions.)

0:21:28.0

Uh, I wished it was! [laughs]

([chuckles] That surprised me.)

But you know, I still—I've got two counties I pretty much work here, all Trinity and all Humboldt. I think in Humboldt—the only sheep I've really got in Trinity County is 4H sheep. The biggest pen of them might be a half a dozen, you know. But on the coast—or in Humboldt side, I've got about four ranches of sheep. But the biggest ranch may be 100 head, and the other ones are maybe 30 head to 'em. So they're not very big. They've got pretty good fences around them sheep, so if a coyote gets in there, it's usually I can put a neck snare in there and capture him.

(One of the trappers I talked to last month was talking about a wolf that had gotten into a turkey farm and killed 300 birds in one night.)

Wow.

(It really went at it.)

Did he catch it?

(Yeah—)

Did he?

(— he said it took him a couple of days, but he finally caught it, 'cause ____.)

Yeah, you know, and I have no poultry that I have to worry about, you know. And a lot of my bear and lion work's just kind of the back yard sheep and goats that people tether out a goat in a briar patch, you know, and next thing you know it chomped.

([laughs] Comped.)

[laughs]

(Lamb chops or whatever.)

0:22:59.1

Another thing I've had a lot of little problems with up in this area is people with their pet dogs out walkin' and lions killin' them dogs right in front of people. I've probably caught a half a dozen lions in the last four or five years that way.

(We just had a child attacked in Boulder County outside of Denver. He was walking holding his father's hand—)

Really?

(— in a park and a mountain lion grabbed him. He survived it, but it was that close to urban. And it was an adult with him.)

Wow. Yeah, I've seen some weird pictures here in California of around parks, people takin' pictures of the family standin' there and off under the brush there's a lion and they never even knew it till they got the picture back and developed 'em.

(Oh, God, that's creepy! [chuckles])

It's creepy. I went to Sporning (?) here, right up here within four-tenths of a mile within my house here, there's a dead deer buried by a mountain lion. The schoolteacher seen it yesterday morning. [chuckles] Like I said, it's just four-tenths of a mile from where we're at right now. And I've got five grandkids out here, so it makes me worried. [chuckles]

(They're so silent.)

It's probably like winnin' the lotto. You've got 10 million chance of that happenin', but it always worried you.

(That's scary. Speaking of your grandkids, have any of them gone out trapping with you?)

Yes. The two oldest boys have. I have, my oldest grandson is Little Blue, he's 10. He's been with me probably for the last four years. He goes a few times every year with me on bear, lion, or coyote work. They all just—he loves to go, you know.

(What do you think trapping's gonna be like in the next 20 or 30 years? Do you think it's still gonna be around?)

0:25:07.6

I think it will be. Somebody's gonna have to—these predators ain't gonna go away, so somethin' gonna have to be done. I think it'll still be there. I hope it's Wildlife Services and not all private people [chuckles].

(Have you—in 30 years you've been in Wildlife Services, what have you seen change over the years in the way the agency's been?)

Well, from when I started, we had seven trappers in Humboldt County, and there was two here in Trinity. [noise of dog tail thumping on floor] Now! [laughs].

(His tail! [laughs])

Are we still on?

([laughs] Yes.)

I've seen us go from nine trappers where I'm workin' now down to—there's two of us left, you know. That's the big decline in Wildlife Services that I didn't like to see. Now we're strung out too much. Some places I'm goin' to, takes me two and a half hours to get there. Before my day ever starts, there's five hours of an eight-hour day.

(God.)

So usually them are 10- or 12-hour days now [pause].

(I don't know if it's a combination of the money or we just can't hire enough people to do the work.)

It's counties can't come up with the money no more. This county was a real—Trinity County and Humboldt County both were big-time timber counties that got a lot of timber tax money back into 'em, so there was a lot of money here into the counties. But as you can see, we're out of trees. [laughs]

[chuckles]

They said the loggers killed off all the trees and there's nothin' left.

(I think there's plenty of trees of there! [chuckles])

I think we got plenty of trees. We need to be harvesting them before we have a big fire and they all just burn up. [laughs]

([chuckles] Jeez.)

But that's what happened—I think these counties just don't have a money to put into these programs.

(That's what I hear from a lot of people. What do you think the biggest challenges are gonna be facing people like you in the future?)

You mean trapping?

(Yeah. If you were hiring your son in your job, what would you tell him?)

I think I'd tell him to see maybe if he could get a job with CDF or Forest Service [chuckles]—

([chuckles])

—or learn to be a golfer. [laughs]

(That's good money. [laughs])

0:28:07.7

You know, I'd just love to see any part of my family go on and do what I'm doin', but I don't think it would probably be a good, safe job to be into right now. I don't like to think that, but you know, from what I've seen over the 30 years, we're sure goin' downhill. And I just hate to see it. [laughs]

(When you're been out hiking or doing anything, have you ever had any dangerous situations? Has anybody ever taken a bite out of you?)

No, you know, really, there hasn't been. You mean when I wasn't working?

(No, when you were working.)

Working? Oh, I've been in some interesting places with bear on the ground fightin' my dogs, they wouldn't go up a tree and you have to kill 'em on the ground, yeah. I've had—the thing your dog does, if your dogs know you're there and the bear's chasin' 'em, which they'll do, your dogs automatically run to you. [laughs]

([chuckles] Oh, God!)

So I've had to kill a few bear real close to me that made me set down afterwards and wonder what I was doin' there. [laughs]

([laughs])

And I've been bit by coyotes, just around the traps, just not bein' very smart I guess is all you could say, just gotten nipped, got too close trying to do things I shouldn't have been doin' at that time. Never had a problem with any mountain lions. I've seen some that—I've had to kill mountain lions on the ground that wouldn't go up a tree, so you're gettin' in there pretty close. They're chasin' the dogs, catchin' them and stuff.

(How do you know you've got the right animal that's causing the damage?)

I start all my mountain lions off dead kills, so that way there's—California's laws are, you start—or if you have a mountain lion problem or a bear problem that killed stock, you start 'em off the carcass, is what we do. And if the carcass is too old to start off of, we just don't take out through the woods huntin' 'em, we just wait and see if they have another kill and start from that.

0:30:33.3

(Does the state give people—compensate them, farmers and stuff? They do that in Colorado.)

Oh, do they? No, here they don't. We write up a dollar value and turn it in to the state, just for they can keep up on how much damage is bein' done by mountain lions or bear.

(Do people argue with you and say, "This was killed by a bear," and it obviously died of old age or something? [chuckles])

Yeah, yeah, I've seen some weird things there that they've got depredation permits for. And a lot of times I'll even go with the Fish and Game people when they go out and issue the permits. They'll ask me what I think of the situation, and I'll tell 'em if I think it's a bear or lion or if it's bogus. And a lot of it is, I've seen horses in barbed wire pens that's raked on the side, but it's from barbed wire. People say, "Mountain lions scratched that horse," and that's not what happened. And I've been out—I've had Fish and Game people issue permits to people—the landowners maybe say they thought a mountain lion had killed a sheep or whatever and it'd actually be a bear. But working with Fish and Game, we'd take care of that. There's not a problem with just—it's just—they never noticed the right signs when it was killed or what happened.

0:32:16.6

(Do you have good working relations with Fish and Wildlife, Forest Service, BLM people? I don't know what else is out there?)

Yeah, do, really do. We used to—when I first started trappin' here, they had cattle allotments in Trinity County, open range, and when we first started trappin' here, these Forest Service allotments was some of the stuff I dealt with. But since then, Forest Service won't let us trap on their property, on these areas, so that's been dropped. But I have good relationships with 'em that

way. And really, I've never had no dealings with BLM at all. It's been pretty good. And Fish and Game's been real good to work with.

(That's good. Other people have had problems with them. It depends on the area.)

Well, you know, startin' out, it was bad, when the mountain lions first started here. I guess the first mountain lion I ever killed for Wildlife Services, I believe it was 1980, and I was way out on a ranch. The people had called, and I caught the lion and killed it and left it right where it was, went back—'cause California was real—it's still real touchy on mountain lion work. The next day Fish and Game come out and, you know, looked at the situation and said it was all right. But it's somethin' you don't want to do, kill without a depredation permit. But now, the workin' relationships with these guys are really good, the Fish and Game people, 'cause they realize that we probably have about as much knowledge as they do on what's goin' on out here in the wild.

(Have you had to work with any—on the invasive species projects, protecting and threatening endangered—the least tern?)

The lease tern, yeah, I worked with that down in San Diego.

(What were you doing down there?)

Me and Maynard Small were working together. We started the least tern projects in southern California, probably back in 1985 or so—

(Was this Camp Pendleton?)

Yeah, we were at Camp Pendleton and Coronado Island off of San Diego. I think we was probably—worked four or five different little projects down there over a couple of years. Workin' down there, their chicks' numbers doubled, and then they just started hirin' our people for special activity work down there. Now it's a big thing, and the bird's just skyrocketed.

0:35:09.2

And then I worked down by Barton Bridge in San Francisco, I was trying to think what it was.

(Was it foxes?)

Pardon?

(Was it foxes?)

We was catching the red foxes out of there, they was killin' a bird there, I was trying to think, the plover?

(Plover?)

Plover?

(Maybe, I don't know.)

I think that's right. I worked that project there for a little bit, catchin' red fox. That's the only time that I've got to work that. That's been one of the good things about special activity, is gettin' to do some little things that if you didn't get called in there, you'd have never got to do it in your lifetime.

0:35:53.0

(That was supposed to be a big PR thing for Wildlife Services because they worked with the Audubon Society and they finally got them all to agree that they had to go in and do trapping.)

Oh, is that right?

(They got them to agree, to finally admit, yes, we hve to do this to save the birds. It was a big deal. I think the guy, I'm trying to remember what his name was, got a big award for that.)

Oh, did he really?

(Yeah, I can't remember what his name was.)

Yeah, down when I worked the least tern project down there, the people were so happy, they sent me a couple little wooden least terns—

(Oh, neat.)

—for doin' that work down there. [laughs] It was good. We trapped coyotes in around there. It seemed like everything was killin' the chicks there, great blue herrings—

(Ravens?)

—possums, ravens. The ravens was a big problem.

0:36:50.1

(The Research Center did some work out there with the ravens. They had a couple of ravens that could identify our truck when it would go out there—

[laughs]

(—and they would dive-bomb the guys that got out of the truck.)

[laughs]

(They caught them and tagged them and released them, and they never forgave them for that.)

Is that right? [laughs] I think raven is probably the hardest thing to—if you want to have to go hunt on special one, that would probably be a chore, it really would. I just got done—and I don't have this done, but one of the schools down in southern Humboldt here, Eldersburg School, it's only got five or six kids, but it's got a school bus there, and the ravens come in there every afternoon and pull the wiper blades off the school bus. [laughs]

([laughs] Jeez.)

And all the rubber around the windows, and they just set there and pull it out. So I got called to go down there and see if I could get these birds out of there, but it just seemed the wrong time of the year. They'd just start nesting.

(Cause they were busy.)

I don't know when's a good time to go back and look for 'em.

0:38:01.2

(The vultures now are starting to get on those houses and pulling off the roofs and eating the roofs.)

Are they really?

(Yeah, down in Florida especially, they have a lot of problems with vultures.)

Yeah, I've [chuckles] never had to do no vulture work. [laughs]

(Let's see, I went through all these questions pretty good [pause])

Well, I hope I—I hope there's—

(You did fine.)

[chuckles]

(You've been doin' great.)

[chuckles] Well, I'll try—

(Were you ever in a situation where you thought it was a funny thing happened to you, or scared you?)

Let's see [chuckles] funny things that's happened. [chuckles]

([chuckles] That you can talk about.)

Like I say, there have probably been some good ones.

([chuckles])

Offhand, I just can't think what in the world [chuckles] had happened. [pause]

(What about people you've worked with over the years? Is there anybody in particular that you learned from in the Service that you really—?)

I did, yeah. I've work—workin' from the day I started, Steve Matthes, which was a lion hunter in the state of California, started me out in this trappin' job, and he really showed me the right way to set down and set a coyote trap. Just gettin' started out right that way, and then workin' these special projects in southern California, workin' with Maynard Small was just—I'll tell you, that guy, he's a best of the best in my book. If you need to learn somethin', or if you need to know somethin', he's the guy you call to find out. And down—another special project I worked in southern California was San Clemente Island out there, it's a Navy-owned island. I was called in there to eradicate all the pigs and all—

(Wow.)

—the goats off this island. The Navy had been flyin' this with helicopters and killin' all they could kill out of the helicopters, what my job was, when it come down to the end, was, when they couldn't find no more, they took me down there and put me in there with dogs on this island. To my knowledge [chuckles] —

([chuckles] Oh, God.)

—there's never been a hog back on it. I even killed the mule deer—

([chuckles] Oh, God.)

—on the island. They said [chuckles] that there was no deer there, and I killed a mule deer on the island. [pause] That was really challenging. I never worked anything as tough as that island down there. On the one side it went 2,000 foot, plumb just dropped right off to the ocean, and the other side, it just went right off into the ocean. It was 22 miles long.

(Good Lord! So you just camped out there?)

I walked every inch of it. [chuckles]

(Jeez, God.)

The last two pigs I killed on that island were in captivity, there's a Navy station on it. When the naval commander got hold of me and wanted to know if I had everything killed on it, I said, "There's two pigs in captivity, and he says, "Kill 'em." I killed 'em, butchered 'em for the people. That was the end of the pig project. But the goats, they used Judas goats out there [chuckles] and come in and then we followed them goats around with trackin' stuff and we finally killed all the goats off the island and then let them Judas goats to in there for a couple of years, and then we went back through and killed all of them, retrieved the collars to make sure there was no goats left. Some of that was the highlight of my stuff in ADC.

0:42:08.9

I worked with Craig Coolahan out on that island, and I worked with Craig right here in Humboldt County, we kind of grew up in this trapping stuff together and worked all my 30 years, I don't think Craig's got 30 years in.

([Can not understand the sentence.])

But I mean, we worked together for all this time, and then a lot of other work together, hound work, bear, lions. I got a pretty funny one that happened to me. Craig would laugh about it.

One time we had a bear down in Hopland Field Station that was killing sheep. Me [chuckles] and Craig, that was Craig's district. I had the hounds and we went in and started this pair and he went over and went in a big rock pile down [chuckles] in there. So me and Craig, we was wonderin' how we was gonna kill, get this bear out and kill him. And I told Craig, he had a rifle and I had a rifle, I said, "I'll go over there and stick my gun down this hole and shoot, and when the bear comes out, you shoot him."

([chuckles])

Well, I run over and shot and I went to load my gun and the casing come out and jammed my gun—

(Jeez.)

—and the bear was followin' me right out through there [chuckles]—

([chuckles])

—and I was tryin' to run away from the bear when Craig killed him.

([laughs])

It was just—it was pretty funny, I guess. [laughs]

([laughs])

Craig got a good laugh out of it.

There have been little things that went through the ADC that's just been great for me. I don't think there was a job ever made [chuckles] better for anybody or anything I could have done. It's been—I wouldn't have done nothin' else [chuckles] I don't think. [laughs]

(You've done a lot.)

It's been fun. I just don't know how many more years I'll be here. [laughs]

0:44:09.6

(I think the work will continue to be here.)

Oh, the work'll—yeah, absolutely. I don't think the work will ever go away. I really think somebody's got to do somethin'. It's just too bad they couldn't get more money out of some of these counties and have more trappers. Trinity County is fine here. Somebody could probably, if they was funded for six months here, part-time work or whatever, they would get over good, but

Humboldt County needs more trappers in it. Jayce [Jerrald] Comfort on the coast now, he just—he's—that's all he does is skunk work and possums, raccoons. It's just—to me it'd be a horrible job. [chuckles] I wouldn't want to do it.

(Pest control operator or something.)

Yeah, you know, just gettin' out doin' the special projects, huntin' bear and lion. A lot of people think that's all I really do is hunt bear and lion. When I tell 'em I still got to catch skunks and raccoons—

([chuckles])

—and whatever and coyotes—

0:45:20.0

(Have you ever had an animal you couldn't catch?)

Yeah. Yeah. I definitely have had animals I couldn't catch. I've had coyotes that I couldn't catch, and there's bear I couldn't catch, and there's lions I couldn't catch. Maybe—I think of this: maybe some place down the line, I caught 'em some place else and never knew it. [laughs]

([laughs])

You know [pause] some of this lion work's real touchy, where I've got to—it's in around the cities and stuff. And that's another thing I do, is a lot of mountain lion work I catch mountain lion for these special projects where they can collar these mountain lions and study 'em in different areas of California, especially down in southern California.

(They're doing that for wolves right now in Minnesota, they're getting a census count.)

Are they?

(Yeah. That's what Bock Follis was doing, he was working with Department of Natural Resources tagging—)

Oh, I'll be darned.

(—tagging—)

They catch them with a soft-jawed trap?

(Yeah, he puts it up usually around the fence line. He knows where they walk. He'll come in, he just kind of studies it for a day or so and puts it down, and usually he can catch them.)

I'll be darned.

(Unless they're very smart. If they get caught once, that's it. Or they came close to a trap once, they're never gonna catch 'em. They're very smart.) [sound outside.]

0:46:53.6

You know our—I looked at that rig and I forgot what I was gonna say! [chuckles]

([chuckles])

These coyotes are the same here. You know, probably the worst things is, a lot of these ranchers just let people on the weekends come out and call coyotes on some of these ranches. A lot of these coyotes I've seen at a distance, snuck up on the rock and watch 'em, and hit the predator to call, and them things turned around and run the other way. [laughs]

([laughs])

They're so educated, they know what's goin' on. So a lot of work gets tough that way. [laughs]

(Amateurs running around?)

Yeah, you know? And I realize a lot of people like to do that, but jeez, they should—I don't know how they get the coyotes so educated. I think they just do stupid things, and they might be callin' with the wind blowin' to their back, you know, and just not be in the right places, gettin' up, leavin' too quick, walkin' where they can see 'em. There's somethin' that's educated a lot of coyotes to where we can't handle them. [chuckles]

(They're very neophobic. What do they call it? Anything that's different they're paranoid about it. They must be nervous wrecks out there walkin' around, so paranoid about everything.)

[laughs]

([laughs])

Oh, jeez.

(Do you still like to go hunting and fishing on your own, even though you do it for a living?)

Oh, sure, absolutely. You know, once I retire, and I hope I can, I know some of our other trappers has done it, is, I'll do volunteer work, you know, especially bear and lion work around here, especially if it's helps Jayce or our outfit out. I wish there was some way would Wildlife Services that I could retire and still be able to work, just like I said, do bear and lion work.

(You can be a retired annuitant. That's what they do at the Research Center. People retire on Friday and show back up for work on Monday. [laughs])

Do they? (laughs)

([laughs])

[laughs] Just like nothing's changed!

(They never go away.)

The thing about it, the price of gas, I'd need somebody's rig to get around. I can't—

(I couldn't believe how high the gas is up here. It's unbelievable.)

0:49:21.0

What's fuel in Colorado?

(\$2.79.)

You're kiddin' me. Oh, my goodness.

(You're so close to—you think the coast, the refineries are nearer to you than they are to me.)

I don't think we have a refinery in California.

(Oh, OK, that's why, then.)

But see, California's got to have so much different additive put into it that they say that's why we're so high on prices. But \$2.79, I can't even remember. [laughs] Yeah, I think five years ago we might have got fuel for \$2.79.

0:49:59.1

(They gave you the truck and you just work out of your house like that?)

I do.

(You get paid for mileage and everything?)

No, I don't get paid for mileage, I just—I'm just—an eight-hour work day is what I get paid for. I've got a GSA pickup and the gas card to fill it.

(Ok, so you do it that way. I didn't know how it worked.)

Oh, yeah, yeah, that's how it works. It's so nice. When I first started, we used our own pickups and got paid a certain mileage.

(Mileage?)

I'm really glad it went this way. [laughs]

([Cannot understand a sentence] Do you get together with the other—some of the states have state meetings and get together with other trappers, go to trapper meetings?)

Yeah, probably twice a year we have district meetings. Usually it's the north district and Sacramento district, get together and do our, do whatever and then—I think it's every three to

five years we have a state meeting and we get together. It's really good to see everybody in the state.

0:51:15.5

(We're gonna have a big—a meeting for Wildlife Services people, all the state directors, I think, and all the research people, I don't know who else, they're all coming together, and I think it's gonna be in Colorado at the Rocky Mountain National Park.)

Oh, I'll be darned.

(Yeah, we did that about five or six years ago, they did one, and it was great. We were sitting in these cabins listen to people talking and you look out and here are these elk looking back in the window at you.)

[laughs]

(This guy was sitting next to me said, "How much do you think that would weigh dressed out?" [laughs]) I don't know!

Don't have a clue! [laughs]

("Don't shoot it, please don't shoot it!")

Do you or your husband hunt?

(My husband did. The last time he went hunting he shot a moose, and he swore up and down that he would never shoot another one unless it was standing in the back of a pickup truck.)

[laughs]

(He shot it, and it fell down a ravine, so he had to kind of rappel down and chop it up and bring it out piece by piece. It just pitched over down off the rocks—

Oh, jeez.

—and he said never again, unless it's standing in the back of the pickup.)

Was he all by himself?

(Yes, yeah.)

Oh, jeez.

(His brother had gone off on his own. But he finally came back and said it was typical of his brother, he showed up after all the work had been done. To haul it out.)

0:52:32.8

Me and my son got drawn for elk huntin' here in California, first time we've ever drawn for an elk hunt in California, and it's hard to get drawn. It's in September. We both can't wait. We've been tryin' ever since they got preference points together to help you be able to get into these hunts, you know. And we finally got drawn, so we're goin' to Marble Mountains, it's a wilderness area further north. It ought to really be fun.

(That'll be nice, to go out there. I hope you get something.)

Yeah. I killed an elk or two out in Oregon, just gettin' invited up to a ranch. You know, you just drive around in a rig and shoot elk. To me, that's—

(That's not hunting.)

I love to eat the meat, but yet still, that ain't huntin'.

(I have some elk chili in my freezer still, left over from last year, and I prefer moose over all of it.)

Do you really?

(I like the taste of it better than I do venison.)

I'll be darned.

0:53:33.6

(Oh, let's ask you what do you do with the animals that you kill? Do you have to turn them in?)

You know, the mountain lions and the—we do, unless I have—a lot of my work I have Fish and Game people go with me, and we'll necropsy 'em right on the spot and then we don't have to bring 'em in. But if they're in somebody's back yard where we figure anybody out of the public can find 'em, we'll take 'em out of there. Otherwise, if we're in a big canyon, we just leave 'em.

(Ok.)

Pretty much all the bear get left unless we catch 'em in a culvert trap or somethin'. What do you do with a 300-pound bear? [laughs]

(That's true. [chuckles])

But when I first started catchin' mountain lions and it really got hot and heavy in the '90s here, the mountain lions just exploded, and everyone had to come out, Fish and Game, all the freezers, everything was full of mountain lions. And then they found out all they could do with 'em was find a place to dump 'em.

0:54:43.3

(They have an incinerator at the Research Center, and I guess they use that.)

Oh, do they?

(Yeah, they have that. It's a big deal—I've been getting taxidermied animals, all the different critters we've been working with, slowly getting some different animals stuffed. I'm having a brown tree snake done right now.)

Oh, really?

(They have it wrapped around the tree and put it in the library, but I think I'd better put a sign saying, "Dead snake. Do not hit" —)

[laughs]

(—or something like that. [chuckles])

[laughs]

(I've got a cormorant and a nutria and we're having a coyote done and a vulture, a couple of things. We were told that we shouldn't have stuffed animals around, but the visitors we have are just fascinated by them. They just really want to see them.)

I'll be darned.

(I was just curious what you did with the others. We're looking for a feral pig. [chuckles])

Oh, are you really? [laughs]

([laughs])

Well, we've got some pigs, some big ones here, actually, and some of the projects I've worked, I've killed some monster boar pigs.

(Texas—)

I did.

(—is having a big boom in feral pigs right now, they're having a problem with them. I'm just trying—what else? What are your other hobbies?)

My hobbies? You know, I used to be rodeo.

(Oh, God!)

I rode bulls in my younger days. Probably that and huntin' and fishin', you know. I had to—I got an 18-foot bay runner here. We was down last weekend catchin' salmon—

(Oh, jeez.)

—out of Eureka in the ocean. [pause] You can tell I like to buck-tail hunt (?). [laughs] And hunt them dogs in bear season. I really get a kick out of that, 'cause all the family loves to go, all the kids. We just see how many bear we can catch. We don't kill very many, we just love to go catch 'em.

(Catch 'em?)

[chuckles] Look at them. We grab the dogs and go see if we can catch any, just somethin' to do, train dogs. It's probably kind of weird to a lot of people, but it's something to do.

0:57:00.0

I've got a few bulls I buck, I take to rodeos and stuff like that, just for somethin' else to do. Me and the wife, we go to the ocean, go abalone-ing, stuff like that. Go down there, take the grandkids, spend the weekend—

(That's fun.)

—catch fish with a net in the waves. Just hunt and fishing.

(It's a beautiful area. Do you have anything you would have done differently? Any regrets about your career?)

Well, wish I could have won the lotto and still had this job. [laughs]

(You didn't have any desire to move anywhere else—)

I wouldn't.

(—go up the food chain, become district supervisor and move up, you didn't want to do that?)

No, no. I don't—probably ask some of my supervisors [chuckles] and they'd say, "No, he wouldn't make [chuckles—

([laughs])

—a good candidate for supervisor." You know, there's been times that this county and Humboldt had real bad budget cuts and stuff, and I've been told a few times, "You're probably gonna have to move or lose your job." I said, "Oh, I ain't movin'." And I'm still here after 31 years. And I don't think I would have. I think what helped me out a lot, especially with my supervisors is, I'll, if one of these other supervisors in the state needs help on anything, I'll go help 'em for a certain amount of time, especially on special projects. I think that's what's helped me get through all these years, just bein' able, willing to go do that work. There's some of these guys that they said, "We need you down south to do this," "Nay, I ain't doin' that."

(No, don't want to do that.)

But it never has been a problem with me, and my wife's been real good. She hasn't gotten real mean with me for takin' off. [laughs] She's been wonderin' when I'm comin' back a few times.

That's the fun of this job, it's been just goin' and doin' the work. What's really been good is, a lot of the work I have done is, I got it done—I got it done with, I got somethin' accomplished. I just didn't go down there and waste somebody's time. [chuckles] I've seen some of that through the years, that I thought people were wastin' time.

0:59:36.8

I've done pig projects down here in these state parks that once you'd come down and take 20 pigs out of there in, let's say, a month, which don't mean nothin', because two old sows can have 10-20 pigs [chuckles] and I'd get a couple of my dogs killed over in that time, which happened last year. To me it's a waste of time to do this. Why should I go down—I ain't gonna say why should I go down there and get my dogs killed for 20 hogs which ain't gonna be—it's not doin' nothin'.

(Be replaced immediately.)

If they was gonna stay after the project, I don't think they could ever eliminate 'em, but put somebody in there part-time and keep them hogs down in numbers. But you know, in my younger days I thrived on gettin' out there and doin' stuff like that. Nowadays I think about it. [laughs]

([laughs] You choose what you want to do.)

Yeah.

(Well, that's all the questions.)

Is it?

Unless there's anything else you want to talk about.)

Oh, God, I don't know. [laughs]

(See, you talked. You said you didn't know what you'd talk—)

It's been great talkin' to you, it really has been,

(I enjoyed it.)

I thought it was gonna be tougher, that's all I can say. [laughs]

([chuckles] I can ask you some tough questions, but I don't think you'd want to do 'em. [chuckles])

[chuckles] No, nope, it's been great talkin' to you. Like you said, what we talked about just makes me think back a few days. [laughs]

(That's what, let me turn this off.)

1:01:11.0 End file 2. End