

File 1

00:00

(Today is August 23rd. I'm here for an oral history interview with Shorty Shoemaker. Or actually Jerald is your given name. Could your spell your last name for me?)

S-h-o-e-m-a-k-e-r.

(OK. I'm gonna start out with asking you about your educational background, where you went to school.)

I went to Carthage High School and graduated from there in 1959.

(Where did you grow up?)

I grew up at Carthage, was raised on a farm, and was on the farm from the time I was born until I was twenty-six years old, when I took the job with Wildlife Services.

(Did you grow up hunting and fishing?)

Well, I suppose when I was about seven, eight years old I started trapping muskrat, mink, and then when I got a little bit older I started trapping fox, because there was a lot of fox in South Dakota. I always loved trapping, and I loved to hunt pheasants and ducks, geese and whatever. I just—it's something I love to do. I also enjoyed fishing too, at that time.

(Was there someone in your family that you learned trapping and hunting from?)

No, not really. Dad and Mom, they always wondered where in the world I got to be such a hunter and fisherman. I realized later now that I—on my mother's side, Grandpa Pearson, he was a trapper, an old-time trapper.

(Did he live near you?)

Well, he lived, oh, probably fifteen miles south, but by the time I was ten years old, I think, he had passed away. So he didn't really teach me anything. I guess I more or less learned most of it on my own. 'Cause Dad, he was too busy farmin' and truckin' to do any huntin'.

02:51

(Tell me about your work history as a trapper. You said that at twenty-six you got hired.)

OK, I started in Nebraska in 1968. I worked there for two years. I had turned a job down in South Dakota three different times before I started working. They wanted me to be a gunner to begin with and then they wanted me to move to two different locations. I had about a hundred head of stock cows and two hundred head of feeder pigs, and I just couldn't leave them and go to work. So I told 'em later that fall I would be available to take a job. Well, then they called in August, and that's when I went to work, the 1st of August, in Nebraska.

And in while in Nebraska, it was mainly turkey growers and a few sheep growers I worked for. I also worked on the USDA Meat and Animal Research Center at Hastings. Most of my work was

trapping, use of M44s, some strychnine bait at that time, did a little bit of calling of coyotes. One of the more memorable experiences that I had down there was, I was workin' on a turkey grower's place and I was looking for coyote tracks and I seen these little footprints going down through a dirt trail. I realized that it was some child's footprints. So I went back to the house and the mother then realized that her son was missing. So we went out and followed the footprints and the little kid was sleeping in the milo field and she would have had no idea where he was at, because he was completely lost. That was really quite an experience just to find him there.

The coyote work down there is where I really started catching most of my coyotes. I learned a lot right there.

05:18

(Did you do mainly coyote work in Nebraska?)

Pretty much all coyote work there. A little bit of raccoon work, but mostly coyotes, and the turkey growers.

(And that was what part of Nebraska?)

Red Cloud, Nebraska. It's about forty miles, fifty miles south of Hastings on the Republican River.

(So you did that for two years?)

I was there for two years. Then one of the counties dropped out. It was a county program. From there, I didn't really know where to go. The supervisor in Nebraska called North Dakota and there was an opening in the northwest corner of—or the northeast corner of North Dakota at Langdon. At that time the missile site was being put up up there. There was no housing, so I moved into Lakota. I lived there for two years. From there I moved to Emerado, North Dakota. I was stationed there for I think it was three years. My main work in that part of the state was coyote, fox, beaver, and blackbirds. [pause] It was a county program at that time, and we had to meet with the county commissioners to get funds to keep the program going.

In 1965, [1975 is the date in the biographical form when Shorty moved to Stanley] one of the trappers decided he wanted to go into research in Idaho or Utah, I don't remember which one. But anyway, from there, from Emerado then, I moved out and took his position at Stanley, North Dakota, and I was there until I retired in 2002.

07:34

(So you moved two times in North Dakota?)

Right. I moved from Lakota to Emerado to Stanley.

(And where is Stanley?)

Stanley is about fifty-five miles west of Minot on Number 2. It's about fifty, sixty miles from the Canadian line and about eighty miles from the Montana line. It's in the very northwest corner of North Dakota. My main work there was coyotes in the sheep. When I first moved there, I think I

had like 120 sheep growers in the five counties that I worked. Then I did a lot of beaver work. I also worked on some foxes, raccoon, skunk, ducks, and geese who were quite a nuisance quite often when we'd get a lot of rain in the fall on the farmers' crops. I also worked real closely with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on different research projects they had going. I also worked with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department on research on coyote and fox, duck depredation. I also worked with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department spawning fish in the spring of the year and had real good relationship or fellowship with the workers up there. They would come and return work for me at different times if I needed it. So we had a good working relationship.

09:44

(You mentioned when you first went to North Dakota, I think you mentioned this, that you worked in the county, for county supervisors? Was that in North Dakota?)

In North Dakota it was a county-funded program.

(But you were employed by the federal government?)

Right. We were employed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service through the Department of Interior at that time. Then in, I think it was 1986, it was transferred over to the Department of Agriculture. Then I worked for the US Department of Agriculture ever since.

(Explain how that worked if the commissioners funded your work.)

We were asked to go out and meet with the commissioners. Usually the supervisor come along with us. And then we would get funds from them to pay our wages and part of our vehicle expense and then the state would match that fund and then the federal government would pay our different insurance, our retirement fund and this sort of stuff.

(Quite the cooperative effort!)

It was a real cooperative effort to keep the program going.

11:22 End of file 1

File 2

00:00

(All right, we'll get started again after just a small break there. When you started to work in the eastern part of the state, of North Dakota first, right? That was your first one?)

Right.

(Were you gone a lot from home? Did you have to do a lot of camping kinds of things?)

Well, my wife thought I was gone an awful lot. I was gone quite a bit. I didn't do a lot of camping, probably more out west. When I was working out of Lakota and Emerado, especially Emerado, I had a very large area, probably a hundred and fifty miles east and west and probably a hundred miles north and south. So my area was quite large. There was enough towns in that

area so we normally would just stay in motels. At that time you could stay at a hotel or motel for \$4 to \$10 a night. So it wasn't any big deal to worry about keepin' the per diem down.

(So the government reimbursed you for that?)

Right. Yeah. The government always paid for our meals and overnight lodging. So that really wasn't any problem when I was stayin' away from home. A lot of the work, especially on beavers, would be night work, shooting them out of towns. Sometimes if I was using a toxicant, putting out strychnine eggs, I would go into a town, advise the city police, put it over the radio or the TV that I was gonna use toxicants in town, to keep their pets at home. I'd put out the eggs that evening and then go around and collect 'em the next morning and do the same thing the next night. Normally I could take care of a skunk population in some of them small towns in, you know, a couple trips, which would really help 'em out.

02:31

At that time there was a lot of old vacant houses and old buildings that were gettin' run down, and the skunks would just move into them. I had real good cooperation with the city heads and the county sheriffs.

(What other kinds of methods did you use when you first started?)

Oh...my main methods for trappin' coyotes have been the steel traps, a few snares. Didn't know much about snares at that time, till I got into western North Dakota. I did a lot of calling coyotes. Did a lot of aerial hunting. [pause] I used to hunt for myself, for the trappers to the east of me for coyotes and would fly probably three hundred hours a years or so, or it'd be more than that, which is quite a few hours in the air.

(You probably used more poisons in the early days.)

Right.

(Did you use 1080?)

Yeah, we used 1080 when I was in Nebraska and the first two years, I think, I was in North Dakota, maybe three years, we used 1080. I used a lot of strychnine drop bait, which was very effective. Both of them toxicants were very effective. I hated to lose them, but that's just the way it went. We used M44s or cyanide guns, which we still use today, or when I was working. They were a very effective tool. I don't know if we killed a lot of animals that we shouldn't have been killing, but I'd think, say 99% of them were the animals that we wanted to take.

(Now strychnine, you mentioned using egg baits for skunks. Did you use it for—?)

We'd use strychnine lard balls. We'd take a square chunk of strychnine that was made in the research center, put that into a little piece of lard about the size of a dime or a nickel. We'd place these around a carcass, and the coyotes would pick 'em up and die from that.

05:37

(And then you used strychnine eggs for skunks?)

We used strychnine eggs for skunks and raccoons.

(How did you control beaver?)

Beaver, I'd use #330 Conibears, foothold traps, shoot a lot of beavers with a shotgun. Once in a while if possible I could use snares on beavers. Did a lot of work in cities for beaver control, especially in Minot, Grand Forks, Devil's Lake. Wherever there's a stream running through a town, they always had problems. Plus, the farmers would have trouble with the beavers plugging up culverts, washing out roads, taking down shelter belts that they'd planted, possibly damming up a coulee, and then the ice would be thin and they were afraid their cattle were gonna drown, fall through the thin ice. So this is some of the work that I did on beavers.

(What did you do with the ducks and geese?)

The ducks, we used cracker shells, put up flags, put out exploders. At one time we had a lure crop program where we would go and find a field that the ducks or geese were feeding in, go to the farmer, see if we could probably buy this field from him. Then we would just leave it and the ducks and geese could feed on that field and then they wouldn't go bother other farms, other crops that other farmers had. So this was a lure crop program we had. Sometimes we would put out decoys to lure the ducks and geese back into that field if they would happen to leave it. We spent a lot of hours hazing ducks and geese back into these fields.

07:53

(You probably saw a lot of changes in trapping over the time, because Conibear traps were outlawed, correct?)

No, not as long as I've been working for the Service. We could always use Conibear traps. Snares, they wanted to outlaw them, but they never did in North Dakota. Foothold traps, we've always been able to use those. I know a lot of states, they've had a lot of pressure on 'em to stop using 'em, but in North Dakota we've been lucky to keep our trapping heritage here.

(What differences did you see from working in the eastern part of the state to more of the western part of North Dakota? Were there differences in species?)

I think the western part of the state was a lot more coyote work, where the eastern part of the state was more fox, a few coyotes, and lots of beaver work. The eastern part of the state seemed to have a lot more duck and goose depredation than what I've had in the western part of the state. I also worked in the cities of Minot and Garrison on pigeon control, using toxicants to get rid of the pigeons in the towns around there. We'd use pellet guns and shoot 'em, or 1339 we would use to get rid of 'em. We've had very good success with doing that.

(You did quite a bit of work in towns, in communities, then?)

Right. Yeah, I did a lot of urban work, yeah.

(How is that different than rural work?)

You've gotta deal with a lot more people. When you're working in towns, you've gotta be in contact with the city police departments, the Humane Society, everyone involved when you get to work in a town. You've gotta make sure that everybody knows what you're doin'. You have to get releases from many, many more people when you go to town to work, unless it's a pigeon project. Then you just get the release from the city.

(Did you prefer the town or the country?)

No, I preferred working in the country, because there you were on your own, doin' what you wanted to do, and enjoying the farm life that I grew up with, you know, helping out the farmers, which I really—was one of the main reasons that I took the job. I was a farmer and I like to help farmers with problems.

11:05

(Did someone recruit you into the work?)

When I started, I worked with Odon Corr. I didn't really work with him, but I knew him growing up and I also knew a guy by the name of Kenny Johnson, who was a state trapper in South Dakota. And Clarence Grant, he was a—I don't know if he was a district supervisor, I think, in South Dakota. We did a lot of fishing and hunting together. They're the ones that sort of got me to apply for the job to take and do what I'm doing, or was doing, you know. [pause] The farmers that I worked with in some areas were kind of like hillbillies, or way behind times, especially the sheep growers. Some of them did things the old, old-fashioned way, where in the later years the sheep population went down because of the low wool incentive, and then the old farmers would die off and the children would take over, and the sheep population just gradually went down. I started with probably 115 to 130 sheep growers in my area, and then when I retired, I was probably down to 15 to 20. So it was quite a drastic drop.

(Wow, that's quite a change! Did you see any other industry change that much, like cattle?)

No, I haven't seen any industry change so much. Maybe some of the crops have changed over the years, like it used to be in western North Dakota it was mainly durham, and now it's much more diversified, with peas, sunflowers, oil crops, you know, canola, flax, and all that sort of stuff. It's been quite a change in the agriculture industry. But as far as the livestock, I haven't seen a drastic change like I did with going out of the sheep business. Some of them blamed it on coyotes. Personally, I think it was just the younger generation not wanting to go through the intensive care that they had to have, that the sheep had to have, you know.

13:57

(I'm gonna shut this door.)

There you go. I thought those guys'd be gone.

(You retired in 2002, right?)

Right.

(Did you do—have you worked with the government since then or done any kind of volunteer work?)

No, since I retired I haven't done any predator control with the Service since. I haven't killed a coyote since I quit working. I've had opportunities, but I figured that they kept me working for thirty-four years, and they're kind of a sacred animal now, so I haven't worried about them. (chuckles]

(Do you live on a ranch or farm?)

I live on a small acreage, five acres southeast of Stanley, is where I live. I've been there for probably twenty-five years.

(When you worked, did you do any research with the research center?)

Yeah, I worked with Guy Connelly when he was doing the collars on the dogs. I worked a lot with blackbird research, ever since I started in North Dakota, with all different kinds of techniques to try to get rid of the blackbirds. And research, I did a lot of research with the Fish and Wildlife Service and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department doing research on nests being destroyed by foxes and coyotes or whatever it might be, raccoons. I'd say for about ten years we worked quite a bit with 'em on that. I worked on Mallard Island, which is an island just south of Garrison, where they did a lot of research there on duck and goose nesting survival. [pause] I'm trying to think of more research stuff that we've worked with.

(That sounds like quite a bit, with the livestock protection collars.)

Yeah. Then we worked with the dogs, too, you know, the Great Pyrenees and the—

17:08

(Oh, the guard dogs.)

The guard dogs, yeah. We worked a lot with the guard dogs, testing them, tethering out lambs to see if the—that would be the 1080 collars.

(Where did you learn to call coyotes?)

Oh, I learned that—before I ever started workin' with the Service, I called the coyotes. Probably when I was fifteen years old, I started calling coyotes—or calling fox, at that time.

(And you mentioned that you did a lot of aerial gunning?)

Yeah I...yeah, I did a lot of aerial gunning out of Stanley when I moved there. I think I was allocated like a hundred and eighty hours. Plus then I flew for the two supervisors to the east of me, takin' care of their problem from the air. Had quite a few close calls when I was workin' with the airplane, wings getting tangled up in the fence, tail wheels getting caught on a rock pile and jerkin' it off and having to land without a tail wheel. High speed stalls. One time south of Velva, I was flyin' and it was a thunderstorm comin' up to the west. I shot at a coyote. We turned back around to get the next one. I was flyin' with an older pilot, and the plane just kept

goin' down and down after I'd shot at that second coyote. He had the stick pulled clear back and throttle full forward, and there was no lift. I could just see that wing about a foot and a half, two foot off the ground, thinkin' we were gonna end up in a pile. All of a sudden the plane shot up into the air. We just went straight in the air and got enough lift to get us back up. I thought we were going to have a crash. Elmer says, "Shorty, it's Miller time." And away we went to the motel. We never stopped. [chuckles] Yeah, that was a close call, one of the closest ones.

19:55

The other time when the tail wheel hit the rock pile, that was a close one, too.

(When you were landing?)

No, no we were after a coyote and the wind blew us right into the side of a hill and the tail wheel hit this rock pile and ripped the tail wheel off and away we went. And we had to land without a wheel that day.

(Wow, how did that work?)

Oh, it worked, we just kept it up on two front—we were on the wheels till we were ready to stop and then we just set it down. It worked out OK. More than one time, goin' up deep coulees, the wheels would touch the treetops comin' up out of them deep canyons. That's why the wife thought it was time for me to retire.

(Was that one of the reasons?)

Yeah, yeah, flying was one of the reasons that I quit.

(Did you like to fly?)

Oh, yeah, I enjoyed flying, yeah. It never bothered me to fly. I enjoyed flying.

21:00

Another close experience, when I was workin' with the Game and Fish Department, we were spawnin' walleyes and it was me and a warden and a Fisheries biologist. We'd picked up the fish out of the nets and we were going back in to milk them. I was sittin' in the very front of the boat. The warden was in the middle. I happened to look back and we didn't have nobody driving the boat. And we-to this day we don't know what happened to the biologist, why he fell out. Anyway, I looked back behind the boat and all I could see was his hand sticking out of the water. We all had chest waders on and no life preservers. I told Jerry to get back on—or the warden to get back onto the motor and turn around. So he went back and I kept my eye on that spot. I took the pole that we used to pull the nets out of the water with and we were dragging it along and it happened to catch him and we pulled him out of the lake and saved his life.

(Wow!)

Yeah, that was quite an experience, too, yeah.

22:24 End of file 2

File 3

00:00

(You were talking about how you had done aerial gunning and all the pilots that you worked with.)

Yeah, I think I flew with thirteen different pilots in all the years that I was working. My first pilot that I ever flew with was Irvin Larson and then I flew with his son Wayne Larson. When I retired, I was flying with his son Gary Larson, who's still working.

(Three generations?)

Well, it isn't three generations, but it's father and two sons. Irvin, he used to fly and shoot the coyotes all by himself.

(He did both?)

Yeah. He never had a gunner. He'd sit in a J-3 and use a single-barreled, single-shot shotgun. He would fly the plane with his knees and his feet and shoot with his hands.

(Was he pretty effective?)

Oh, yes, quite a few of them old-timers, that's the way they hunted. It was amazing that they could do it.

(When you started aerial gunning, did you have a radio? Did you have people on the ground helping?)

No. When we first started, we didn't have no radios, no helmets. The only ones that would be on the ground helping would be the ranchers. If we wanted to tell them something, we either took a shotgun shell box and wrote a note on it and tossed it out the window and they could read it so they would know where to go to where the coyote was in a brush pile, or we would point with our hands to 'em, because you couldn't talk to 'em over the roar of the airplane.

02:03

The first plane I flew out of was a Supercub. Then we went to the PA18. Or, the first one was a J-3. Then we went to the Supercub. The J-3, you could almost go so slow in that airplane if the wind was blowing that you could just fly right alongside the coyotes to shoot them. The coyotes could almost go faster than we were goin', some days. [chuckles]

(Did you know anyone that died in a crash?)

No, I don't know anyone personally, but I knew the people, trappers that have been flyin' that have been in airplane crashes, yeah. But as far as anyone that I knew personally that had died, no, I didn't know anyone like that.

(So you saw a lot of changes? Because I assume by the time you retired you had a radio, you had spotters on the ground—?)

Oh, yes. We had radios and then it was mandatory to have a helmet on so you could protect your ears. It was mandatory to wear flight suits and all the protective gear, mandatory to have a ground crew. So it's changed a lot. When I first started, we'd just go call the contract pilots, meet 'em at the airport, and take off.

(Take your gun?)

The only ones who would know where we were at was the farmer where we were going to, and when we left his farm, nobody knew where we were at until we got back home, you know. I'd usually give the wife a list of the different ranches that I was going to be flying on, so she'd have an idea where we were at. But back in them days, if it was cold, you probably wouldn't a walked away or you'd a froze to death before you got home. Like, if you opened up that window, it'd be fifteen, twenty below, and the tears'd run down your eyes and they'd just freeze on your cheeks. So it was really cold.

I always shot a double-barreled shotgun. I always felt they were a lot safer to use in an airplane. I felt very uncomfortable with an automatic, never knowing if it was unloaded when you brought it in the airplane. When you could—when you're using a double-barreled shotgun and you break it open out the window and you take the shells out of it, you knew there was no shells left in it when you brought it back into the airplane. To this day, I'd say you can shoot just as many coyotes with a double-barreled shotgun as with a automatic shotgun.

05:05

(Did you have to use an automatic or could you use a double—?)

No, you had a choice of what you could use. I've always stuck with the double barrel. I mean, when we were shootin' blackbirds out of the airplane on blackbird control, then we would use automatic shotguns. It made me very nervous when I'd bring it back into the airplane not knowing whether or not there was a shell in the barrel or not. If you still had some in the magazine and they'd like you to store it behind you, dragging it up over the shell boxes and the clothing and stuff, you never knew if it was going to reload. If you'd happen to catch the mechanism, it may reload itself, and then you would not know that it's loaded when you bring it up past you and the pilot's head and put it out the window. And then when you brought it out, it was right at the gas tank. So that's why I always figured a double-barreled shotgun was much safer.

Then—I don't know—we haven't touched on—I wrote up [pause] safety procedures with the use of M44s.

(Oh, you did?)

Yeah. I got an award for that. They sent me to Florida to get the award. My wife and kids both came down to that. That was a very memorable time, too, when I got that.

(When was that?)

I'd say it was like in '98 or '99. It should—I don't know if it'd be in any of the records or not. I'm sure it is somewhere.

(You wrote up safety procedures for the M44?)

The M44, yeah.

(For operations?)

Yeah. John should have that. He's the one that helped me write it out.

(How nice! What a nice honor!)

Yeah, it was, yeah.

(So you used quite a bit of M44?)

A lot of 'em. When I first moved to western North Dakota, I'd have four or five hundred of 'em out a year, in the winter. With all my sheep guys. When I had 120 sheep guys, that was a lot of sheep.

(But they were used differently then. Didn't they have a different kind of mechanism in the early days?)

Yes, yeah. They were different than they are now. The old ones had a 38-caliber shell that was filled with cyanide. At a later date it's a plastic M44 capsule that we used. [pause] I'd say they all work about the same, but the older ones you had to be a lot more careful with.

08:20

(Were they more dangerous?)

Oh, yes, yeah.

(How so?)

Oh, the old ones had a black tar top on 'em, on the shell. If it was shot outta there, or if you happened to—it could possibly break your skin and the cyanide could get into you like that. On the others ones, it was only a forty-pound spring that pushed the cyanide out and it wouldn't have the force to break your skin on your hands. I never really did have any real close calls with M44s because I respected 'em pretty good.

(Particularly those old ones.)

Or even the new ones. It doesn't make any difference, you know.

(You used to use 1080 for coyotes?)

Yeah, right, yeah.

(How did you use that?)

Well, we would go out and the way we would prepare it is, we would find some older horses or horses that were of no use and we would shoot them, mix up the 1080 solution and use a brine needle and inject it into the meat. This would spread throughout all the carcass. We would quarter it up. I think out of a large horse we could get eight pieces. Then we were allowed to use one piece per township. I don't remember the time period we had before we could replace it or if they cleaned it up. We could put out a, say, hindquarter of a horse, stake it down, and if it was ate up, then we could go and replace it after so many weeks go by, or whatever. I don't remember for sure. But it was very effective. Only thing about it is, if a neighbor's dog would happen to eat it, he'd probably go home and die on the doorstep. Whereas cyanide or strychnine, they'd be dead at the site that you put the stuff out.

10:55

(What did you like best about your work?)

Oh, I enjoyed being with the ranchers, the hospitality that the ranchers would provide you when you were working for them, the satisfaction of taking care of their problem. As far as different methods of control, I don't think it really made that much difference. I could use most any method that was provided, you know. The more you used it, the better you got to know it, and the better it worked for ya, as with anything but I think what I enjoyed most is just being able to help out the ranchers. It was very satisfying to help 'em with the problem that they had.

(What did you like least?)

Working in cities. [laughs]

(Really?)

[laughs] Yeah. Working beaver problems in a city, that's something that you had to be really, really careful doing for fear that you might catch some child in a trap, catch some dog in a trap. Coming back and finding something like that in your trap, which it never did happen to me, but—you used leghold traps, drowning sets, if something would get in that trap that you didn't want it and they got to struggling, they were gonna go probably five, six feet below the water and they wouldn't come back out. So that was always a worry when you set out beaver traps in a city.

Live traps, I worked with live traps for beaver over in the eastern part of the state. I'd set this live trap out. I told the farmer to watch me do it. I had a beaver in it, so he thought he could reset the trap and catch more beavers. He was in the process of resetting the trap. He went to slide it down into the water and the trap went off and caught him right on the forehead and knocked him out. When his wife—he was on a tractor. His tractor had run out of gas, and when his wife found him, he was still laying on the bank. It was like four hours later. So that was a close call there, that he didn't die from getting hit with that live trap. So after that, I would tell all the people that I will take care of resetting them myself, that they didn't need to be doing it. That was a close call there.

14:23

(What did you find most challenging?)

Oh, probably the most challenging would be trapping coyotes after the furs were worth so much money. They were up, like, \$80 to \$100 per coyote and then the ranchers would start losing livestock and then they'd go catch coyotes that had been caught by amateur trappers and then try to catch 'em again, because they would be leghold foot trap-smart, you know. Sometimes it may take a week, ten days before you could catch 'em, and then possibly you'd have to switch to snares or calling 'em, where normally I could catch them in a foothold trap right away. So that was kind of challenging.

Then challenging as far as aerial hunting is when you get in rough country or wooded country and you get one shot at a coyote and he's out of sight, to be able to hit him before he got away from you. It was a challenge for me and also a challenge for the pilot, having a very good pilot to know what to do in situations like that. And I flew with some really good ones.

(What would they do in a situation like that?)

We'd see the coyote and if possible we would try to—the pilot hopefully would know enough to come around and go after the coyote going away from the brush pile or the tree growth instead of chasing him into it. A new pilot, he would see the coyote and go after it without even thinking and it would disappear into the brush. A lot of times you had no choice, depending on wind direction, because you always have to go into the wind when you're making a pass, to slow the airplane down and then to get lift back up again. Some of the newer pilots, they didn't realize what they were supposed to do and then they would—after two or three times out with 'em, they would finally figure out, or you'd tell 'em what to do and they'd get so they could do it. I think I broke in, like, two new pilots, started two guys flying that didn't know much about it. They were crop dusters, but they'd never done any aerial hunting.

17:22

(So you had to teach them?)

Pretty much, yeah. Some of 'em scared the daylights out of me, but we made it through it.  
[chuckles]

(While they were learning?)

Right, yeah.

(What was the most difficult social or political situation you found yourself in, and how did you solve it?)

[pause] I don't know if I really got any political situations.

(You must have had something kind of like that with your beaver work in towns.)

Yeah.

(Or was that more just challenging rather than more a political or social problem?)

I'd say [pause] politically, like, getting the respect of the senators and representatives in an area so that they would be willing to go to bat for us through the legislative session to get money to help us with our program. I'd get to know the senators and representatives very well in my areas that I worked, you know. Normally I had very good relationship with all my people like that.

(Did they usually get the problems? Did they usually understand?)

Oh, yeah, they understood. Many of them were ranchers or farmers and they understood the problem, you know, that ranchers or people raising crops would have. If you could get them satisfied, the land owners, so that they would go and tell the senators and representatives that it would help 'em out, then they would normally stand up for our program and help us out, yeah.

(Can you think of a funny thing that happened while you were handling or capturing animals?)

Yeah. [chuckles]

20:06

(I usually ask for the funniest, but if you've got a couple, I'll take a couple.)

Well, this is a skunk story here. I was working at Emerado, and this lady, she kept calling and saying she had a skunk in her live trap. Well, I'd just run in there and get it and go get rid of it. Well, then she called and said that there was a skunk in my live trap. So I went in there to get it, and she wondered when I was coming. I said, "Well, I'll be there within a half an hour." I drove in there and here she'd gathered up all of her old lady friends. I'd say she was sixty or seventy years old. So I talked to the skunk like normal, got him awake, went walking up there with my blanket that I was going to put over this live trap. And happened to trip on a board and my face ended up about a foot in front of that trap and the skunk let loose and I was yellow from the top of my head clear down my chest. All these women were standing there watching this. So I just stood up, picked up my trap without putting the blanket on, went and put it in the pickup, and drove off. And I never said a word! [laughs]

(Did they say anything?)

They didn't say nothing. They were just laughin'. Then another time I had a skunk in a chicken house. I'd brought my daughter along. She was probably six, seven years old. I put this trap in alongside the wall of the chicken house, got a pitchfork, poked the skunk into the trap and I told my daughter to be very quiet when I come out with the skunk. So I had the skunk in the live trap and I walked out the door and she hollers, "Daddy, you got the skunk!" Right there was all it took, and that skunk let loose and my whole leg was yellow again. [laughs] If she had just been quiet, everything was fine!

22:33

[laughs] (How about stories with coyotes?)

One time we were flyin' coyotes for a rancher northeast of Stanley. We noticed this coyote was having a hard time running. So I shot the coyote and I went back out there to check it to see if it

was a male or female. Anyway, I found the coyote, and it ended up that both of its ears had been froze off, his nose was gone, he'd lost one front foot and one hind foot clear up to its hip. I'm not sure, what had happened is, someone had caught it in a trap and it managed to get away, and I ended up shooting it. That poor critter! It was amazing it could even run.

Another coyote I took southwest of where I'm living now, I shot it and went to check it and it didn't have no bottom jaw. All it had was its tongue. He was using his tongue for a bottom jaw. When I opened him up to see what was inside of it, all that was in it was ants and little tiny bones. So he had to be pouncing on the mice, swallowing them whole, you know, because he could not chew 'em because he didn't have no bottom jaw. And then he was digging in the ant piles and eating the ants and the straw just to survive. He was in good shape. He was fat.

(Really!)

Yeah. But somebody had to have shot him in the bottom jaw some time or other. I kept that coyote for a long time. I think I finally give it to one of the Game and Fish guys and I don't know what they ever done with it. I wish I'd'a mounted that one and saved it, because it was amazing. I mean, his tongue was just like shoe leather, like a chunk of rawhide.

(What is one of the scariest things that happened to you?)

Well, I think the serious one is the one I told you about when I was flying, with that high-speed stall with the airplane and almost hitting the ground. Yeah.

(That would do it.)

Yeah.

(What is your favorite lure recipe?)

Hmm. [pause] Oh, I had a beaver lure that I used. I don't even remember what's in it, but I had a really good beaver lure, and then I had [pause] H40, that was a lure that we used on cyanide guns. That was made out of seal oil. [pause] Seal oil we can't get. That's why we're unable to use it any more. Tallow. [pause] I don't remember what-all goes in that. H40 was a very good lure. Then we had like two or three different ones that we were buying and using for trapping. I'd make another one out of coyote pads, the hooves off of a horse, and then add other ingredients. It was a very good coyote lure, too.

(Did you make your own lures?)

Sometimes, yeah. In the early days we made most all of our lures. I mean, I got a whole packet of recipes from trappers that I've saved, you know, years and years.

(So in the early days you had to make most of them.)

Pretty much, yeah. The hardest part was to get the ingredients to put in 'em, you know.

(Yeah, because if you had to use coyote pads—)

You had to catch the coyotes and you had to take the hooves off of a horse, the frog off of a horse and put that in there, put in coyote urine and make your own lures, is what we were doing, yeah.

28:03

(We talked earlier, before the tape was on, about dogs for hunting. You didn't use dogs much?)

Well, I used a dog for bird huntin'. I loved to hunt with a dog. As far as coyote hunting, I never really got into using dogs. I guess maybe I never had the right breed, or didn't have the time to spend with 'em. I know dogs take a lot of time and training to get them to do what you want. I've been with people that have had very good coyote dogs, and they worked fine, but they were always a nuisance for me to have along. Especially stayin' at motels, you gotta either leave 'em in the pickup and hope they don't bark all night or—always have to be watching after 'em. If you're staying in motels, it's really hard to keep a dog all the time.

(What is your favorite trap to use?)

#3 long spring, used that for years and years. That's what I grew up usin', and it was probably the best trap that I had used, you know.

(Particularly for coyotes, I assume?)

Yeah. And snares. I used lots and lots of snares. They were very effective. If you couldn't catch 'em in a trap, you could normally catch 'em in a snare.

(Were they effective with coyotes that had gotten used to traps?)

Right. If coyotes had been in a trap and if you set a snare, you could normally catch 'em.

(With a snare?)

Yeah.

29:57

(Lots of trappers modify the traps that they buy. Did you ever do that?)

I modified some of 'em. The #3 traps, because they wanted us to have more tension on the pan so we wouldn't catch skunks and nuisance animals, you know, animals you didn't want. I guess it worked OK, but I never really worried if I caught a skunk or not, because a skunk usually drew a fox or coyote to the area. I mean, it got rid of your scent around there. I'd say the best thing for disguising a person's scent is regular old sagebrush, out on the prairie. Just use that around your trap set and it's going to take away your scent and the trap's scent. I always cleaned my traps, kept 'em clean, dyed 'em. A little sagebrush goes a long ways when you're catchin' coyotes on the prairie.

(What would you do with the sagebrush?)

I'd just pick it and rub it between my fingers so it smelled and put it under the trap or sprinkle a little around the trap. Most of the time I'd put it in the ground around the trap.

(The actual sagebrush?)

Yeah. Or if you've got a trap basket or a box you're keeping traps in, just pick a handful of that and throw it in there and it'll keep the bad smell out.

(How did you clean your traps?)

A steel brush and water, and then I would boil 'em in logwood crystals. In later years we used that black trap dye with gasoline, but it probably wasn't as effective as logwood crystals. I'd prefer that, but it did take the temper out of the traps.

32:01

(What is logwood crystals?)

I don't know where it come from. It's kind of a dye. I don't know where they got it from, but it's like crystals. It's either brown or black. We'd dye our traps in that.

(Just put it in water?)

Yeah. Put it in the water, put like a cupful in three gallons of water. Then this would color the water and then put them in there and boil it for a little while and your traps would come out real clean.

(And that's the thing you liked the best?)

Yeah. It's probably more effective than the black trap dye or that boughten stuff that you mix with gasoline. Then you got the smell of gas in your traps and you gotta go hang 'em out for three weeks to get rid of the gas smell or otherwise you've got that on 'em. That meant that with the gasoline it isn't nearly as hard as the traps. You know, you don't take the temper out of the steel. With boiling them over and over again for years and years—

(But you have to get the smell out, so it's a trade-off, it sounded like.)

Right, yeah.

33:18

(How did your trapping techniques change over the years?)

Oh, I don't know. I don't....

(Or did they?)

I don't think I changed trapping techniques that much. I mean, I learned new techniques from different trappers and try 'em. Some of 'em were the same things that I started using. Normally you'd go back to your same old way of doin' it, you know. Maybe I had something that

somebody else had been doin'. For trappin' coyotes, I think basically it was pretty much the same as when I started. Beaver trappin', the more you beaver trap, the more you learn. Beavers, most of them are fairly easy to catch. But once in a while you get a smart beaver and then you gotta use a different technique on 'em, try something different.

(What about fox? Did your trapping techniques change at all for fox?)

No. Fox trappin' is probably the same as when I was a younger kid trappin', pretty much the same.

(What size did you use for fox?)

I'd use a #2 trap, coyotes #3. Mink I'd use a #1.5, maybe a #1 or so on muskrats. In the cities once in a while we'd have to go in and take muskrats out of ponds, around condominiums and stuff. Not too often. Once in a while. That was good public relations for us.

(That was.)

Yeah. Same way with the pigeon control. That's good public relations there, for the whole city to get rid of five thousand pigeons and get it down to like where you'd drive through town and see fifteen, twenty pigeons. That's quite a reduction, yeah.

(People were happy about that?)

Yeah. That's something that the public could see, you know. Yeah.

(If you had a grandchild asking you about trapping secrets, what would you tell him or her?)

"Go learn on your own." [laughs] That's the way I did it. No, I'd probably teach 'em, you know, how to trap. I taught my son how to trap. He does pretty good. He don't trap a lot, but he traps—he can trap OK. I did give a lot of trapping classes to 4H kids, Boy Scouts. I'm not afraid to give 'em my secrets about trapping, because I'm not going to be around forever, so they might just as well learn it. There's very few kids that's got an opportunity to trap now. So it's good to teach as many about trapping and taking care of the furs and how to call and all this sort of stuff, yeah.

36:45

(So no real big secret, more learning and doing?)

Not for me. A lot of trappers like to keep it to their self. But I figure, it don't make no difference to me, you know. If they wanna learn how to do it, it's fine.

(What do you think that trapping and wildlife management will be like twenty-five, fifty years in the future?)

Well, I'm hopin' that they still have the use of the traps in twenty-five or fifty years. With the population growing like it is, it's just pushing the animals into a smaller and smaller area to live in. There's always going to have to be some kind of control. To catch a coyote and put him in a zoo, catch a beaver and put him in a zoo, I feel sorry for the coyotes that have been in the wild all

their life and then end up like that. I'd rather they, that you put 'em to sleep, and I think that's the way they would feel, too. If a coyote's been raised in a zoo, never known the difference of being out in the wild, then I think he could stay in a zoo. But as far as trying to place an animal in a different setting, it's just like if they were to put me in a pen somewhere and expect me to survive, you know. It just don't work. I mean, it may work, but you're not gonna feel good about it.

(So you see the habitat just getting smaller and smaller?)

Yeah. The farming habits are taking more of the native grassland. The cities are getting bigger, more people. Some areas, the people have left and the animals are flourishing or getting more of 'em, but then, they don't have their natural food that they used to have. So then they come into the cities or into the towns and that's where they get into trouble with getting into garbage or attacking kids or whatever it might be.

(And that's not gonna change.)

Nope. Never gonna change.

(What do you see as the biggest challenges facing people that do what you did?)

More public relations. More taking care of the public, making them happy, plus taking care of your job. Because everybody knows what you're doing any more. Used to be, if you'd go out and catch a coyote, nobody'd know the difference. Now if you catch a coyote or whatever, someone knows about it. It isn't like it used to be years ago.

(How do they know about it?)

I don't know. It seems like nobody can keep their mouth shut or something, I guess, I don't know. Like, you work for a rancher and you tell him you shot eight, ten coyotes for him, and when you go into town to the coffee shop, they already know about it before I get to town, you know. So then they find out about it and they're visiting there. Then the people in the booth next to 'em hear it, and you don't know what kind of people they are that's hearing all this stuff, and it just keeps spreading. It goes from eight or ten coyotes to maybe fifteen, twenty by the time it's out of the coffee shop. Yup. And I've had that happen, you know. I go out and kill a few coyotes somewhere, and the next thing you know, you've gotten twenty coyotes out of that place and you haven't only killed but a very few, you know.

41:22

(So the challenge in that is the public relations?)

Yeah. Yeah.

(And making sure people understand?)

What we're doing and why we're doing it, yeah.

(Did you see a lot of problem in North Dakota with those kinds of attitudes?)

Nope, no, I haven't, not in North Dakota, no. Most of the people understand that if someone's got a problem, it needs to be taken care of. Some of the higher-populated areas, they're always gettin' into trouble, seems like. Like in Colorado, wanting to take away the steel traps, only wanting you to shoot them or whatever. You don't have the equipment to work with, or the versatility to take care of stuff like there used to be.

(Do you see different attitudes in North Dakota regarding that type of thing in the urban areas now, or are people still pretty understanding in urban areas?)

Well, in urban areas some people would like to see the beavers, you know, swimming up and down the parks. This is fine, until they go cut down their cherry tree or apple tree. Then they want to get rid of 'em. Well, then, they don't really want to get rid of 'em, they want me to move 'em. I'll say, "Where do you want me to put 'em?" I said, "If I move 'em somewhere else, they're gonna eat somebody else's trees, or do damage some place else." Well, they never thought that far, you know. And I say, "If you expect me to move 'em for somebody else's problem and you don't want me to get rid of 'em, you can just keep 'em." I said, "They can eat your trees. Because they're gonna eat somebody else's trees." Then they say, "Well, I guess that'll be the way it's gonna be, then." So I'll drive away.

About two days later, they'll call up and say, "You know, they've ate a couple more of my trees. Maybe you'd better come get 'em." So I'll go back and get rid of their beavers for 'em. I used to move beavers, and to me, it's just a waste of my time, moving 'em from one place to the next. I mean, I could catch their beavers, take 'em out and shoot 'em. Then I'd be lying to 'em that I didn't kill their beavers. So I just tell 'em the truth. I say, "You either let me get rid of 'em here, or you keep 'em." Most of them time, they decide, "Maybe we'd better get rid of 'em." You might as well be truthful with 'em, because they're gonna understand the problem. Otherwise they'll think every time that the beaver's swimming, you can go haul him some place, you know. And it just don't work like that for me. You might just as well let 'em know about it.

44:26

(I'm going to stop this CD because we are at the end here.)

44:31 End of file 3

File 4

00:00

(This is the second CD for an interview with Shorty—or Jerald—Shoemaker. We're just gonna continue on here. You were just telling me when we had the tape off that your kids got into wildlife biology. What do they do?)

My daughter, she works at Fort Riley, Kansas, on the military base there. She was a biologist taking care of the food plots. Then from that she moved up to be an environmental scientist on the base, where she worked with environmentally safe things down there, makin' sure that they build homes in the right places. With the big influx of military personnel coming back onto that base and the closing down of other bases, she's involved with setting up environmentally safe projects, building of homes and etc. for the base there.

(What base is that?)

Fort Riley, Kansas. It's a armored base, you know, tanks, etc. And then, my son-in-law, he works for the same outfit that I used to work for, Wildlife Services. He takes care of predators on the base there, raccoons, skunks, dogs, whatever might cause a problem there. Then my son, he works for [pause] Wildlife Services in Auburn, Alabama. He's a microbiologist or microscientist. He makes fish vaccines for different types of fish. He invented the first live vaccine for catfish. I think he's invented or produced like six different vaccines for fish now so far.

(What other interests or hobbies do you have?)

Oh, I fish a lot—too much, the wife says but I do a lot of fishin'. I guide fishermen. I've been guiding fishermen even while I was workin' for Wildlife Services, over the weekends. I fish a lot of tournaments. One of the trappers that I work with, Greg Simonson and I, we've been partners fishin' for quite a few years. I also fish with another fella up in the area that I live in. We've been fishing partners for years, fishing together, too. I also enjoy gardening. It keeps me busy in the evenings when I'm home. I collect cast iron frying pans or dishware, whatever I can find. Also like to redo old furniture, that sort of stuff. My wife goes to rummage sales and picks stuff up and I fix it up again. Somethin' to keep me busy in the wintertime.

04:00

(And no trapping or hunting?)

Nope. Since I retired, the only animals that I take now is if my dog corners a skunk or raccoon, I'll go get rid of that. But as far as killing a fox or coyote, they kept me in a job for thirty-four years and I kind of think they're a sacred animal. So I'm not gonna worry about getting rid of them any more.

(Well, we are at the end of my questions. Do you have anything else that you'd like to add, anything you'd like to talk about that you thought about while we were talking?)

I know I've enjoyed working for the Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Interior, then the Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Services. I've had some really, really good friends. My supervisors and state directors have all been swell fellas. I've always appreciated bein' around them and working with them. I'm glad that I still feel welcome to come down to their meetings and the camaraderieship that we've always had, I really enjoyed that.

(Did you—so you really liked your job?)

Oh, yeah, yeah. I was glad I quit farmin' and started trappin', yeah.

(Did you take a lot of time off, or were you one of those people that really liked the job and just kept doing it?)

No, I usually took my time off. My wife and kids and I would usually go camping a lot, go on a trip about every year when they were growin' up. I always felt that if I earned time, I was entitled to take it back. The job could always wait, you know. I'd usually tell the farmers I was

going to be gone and they accepted it. It's just the way it was. Otherwise you could work twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year for them, you know? I did a lot of work on Saturdays and Sundays during their calving season and lambing season. But after that was over with, I usually took my time off.

06:45

(Well, I think that's all the questions I have, Shorty. So we'll conclude the interview.)

OK.

06:51 End of file 4

File 5

00:00

(We're gonna add just a little bit more here to this second CD with Shorty Shoemaker. When the tape stopped, you had started to tell me about a supervisor you knew that encouraged you to take time off, actually, or at least not work hard all the time.)

Yes, I had a state supervisor, his name was William Pfeiffer, Bill Pfeiffer. He was a real liked fellow. He always had told us the family came before your job. He would stress this many times, to be sure to take care of your family, no matter what happened. That's kind of what I've lived by for years and years. If the family needed me, the job was number two. I feel that's a very good policy. I think everybody should heed to that.

(In the early days, did they have credit time, or comp time? Like you said you would work really hard for lambing and calving season. Could you take that—how was it in the early days?)

Well, when I first started, we would work many long hours and we had no comp time. They just told us that if you felt like taking off an extra day or two during the week, to go ahead and do it and not worry about it, because they didn't keep track of our hours at that time like they do now. We would just put down 8 to 5, that we had worked twelve or fourteen hours extra during that week and they would all understand that. We never had to really worry about an eight-hour day then. They knew we were out there doing our job. As long as they didn't get no complaints from the ranchers, they knew everything was fine and I think that was a good policy we had then. I think everybody kind of felt the same way at that time.

02:30

(How did it change?)

I think it must have came down through the Denver office or office in Minneapolis that they would like us to keep track of our time more accurately when we got to sending in different time sheets all the time. It went from a forty-hour week, we could only work forty hours a week. Well, there was no way we could do that, because we were putting in probably sixty- to seventy-hour weeks. Then we told 'em, or asked 'em if we could get comp time. That's when they started letting us build up our time so we could have, like, 120 hours comp time built up and then we'd have to use it in a certain amount of time. Which was fine. That way they knew when we were off and what we were doin'. It just got to be more paperwork. Before, everybody pretty much

went on an honor system, you know. But I think that's the way it is with anything any more. They all want to know exactly what you're doin'.

03:56

(Anything else?)

Nothin' I can think of right now. [laughs]

(OK. We'll try it again!)

04:03 End of file 5. End of interview