

Interview of Don Graves by Mike Dunham

Transcript

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Mike Dunham: My name is Mike Dunham, I'm interviewing Don Graves, on the 8th of June, 2013, at his home in Anchorage. Um, before we start I'm just supposed to remind you that we're recording these to try and record a piece of Anchorage history. It- its intended to be used for public access at some point, but it remains confidential until you sign off on things. You're not obligated to answer any questions, its not, uh- its not testimony. And, uh, and anytime you get tired we'll cut it off, so.

Don Graves: Ok.

MD: Those, those are basically the ground rules there.

DG: Ok, thank you.

MD: And if you could state your name for the camera?

DG: Donald Graves, G-r-a-v-e-s.

Bob Curtis-Johnson: Hey, Mike?

MD: Yes?

BCJ: You're leaning forward into the picture, and I- I just wanted to let you know that so-

MD: Yeah, let m- ok, I'm gonna stay out of your way. I'm gonna be oddly here, but ok, not a problem.

BCJ: Ok.

MD: Ok, uh, lets begin with, uh, with a biography. Where you born and when?

DG: In 1929, in Hood River, Oregon.

MD: What did your parents do?

DG: My father had a creamery there.

MD: And how did you come to Alaska? What was the- when did you first come to Alaska?

DG: Well, the first time I came I was two years old, so I can't speak most of that. We lived out in the Aleutian Islands for two years, then we went back to the states in, uh, '34.

MD: Do you recall any part of the Aleutians experience?

DG: I have a couple of rather vague memories of 'em, most of 'em are fairly dramatic. Y'know, like when I got attacked by a fox. Which didn't attack me actually, but I thought it did. And I got- fell into a little stream that was near the house, and then coming back on the boat- I think it was on the Native, Native Trader or something like that- um, it was a pretty heavy-duty storm. And, uh, so we had some, kinda exciting experiences there that are no different than any other storm, but I do remember them.

MD: And you returned to Oregon?

DG: Uh, well, actually it was Seattle when- my parents lived in Seattle. And then later the next spring my sister and I moved down to Oregon and lived with my grandparents for quite a few years.

MD: When did you return to Alaska?

DG: Well in, uh, in- I spent a year in Juneau, or actually seven months in Juneau in '36-'37, the winter- (microphone buzzing) of '36-'37.

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DG: -but then I came back to Seward and I've lived here since, here in Alaska since 1943.

BCJ: Can I interrupt? Can I ask you to do the dates again? I just got a reset on the transmitter, so.

MD: Oh, the dates that-

BCJ: Just the dates he came up here.

MD: Ok. Um, camera problems.

BCJ: The 1936.

MD: Yeah, we'll- we'll repeat things uh, um, if you could just once again go through that chronology of when you came, when you went, and when you came back?
(laughs)

DG: Ok, well, um, I was born in 1929, and in 1931, I think probably the spring of '31, uh, we moved to the Aleutian Islands for two years. And went back to Seattle in 1934, probably the early part of 1934. And then, uh, in, I think it was February or March? No, it was January of, of '35, I moved to- to my grandparents', my sister and I moved to my grandparents' farm. In, uh, in the Willamette Valley in Oregon. Uh, and I lived there with them until I was fourteen years old, and that was 1943, is when I- my sister and I moved to Seward. And to be with my father. And then in '44 we moved to Anchorage.

MD: How did you get to Seward? What was the process-

DG: Oh, we came up on the steamer, Alaska.

MD: And did you have like, a stateroom, a berth? How- what were the travel facilities like?

DG: Um, well, that was during the war, y'know. Yeah, we had a, a big state room, my sister and I. And my father, my father had come down to Oregon to pick- get us and bring us back to Alaska. Uh, it was kind of interesting, if, as a side-note- y'know, we had a gun on the back of it, and a bunch of Navy guys that had the best job in the war. They just run up and down the Inside Passage and had their pick of the schoolteachers and so on that were coming up and going down. But we got to- uh, we came to Seward and we got there in, um, June of '43.

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MD: What was the road system like, out from Seward coming in this direction, to Anchorage?

DG: Well, it was gravel, of course, and there was a road, um, that divided where it does now, the Y. When I say divided, all it did was one part went to Russian River, and then most of that was an old CCC road- wasn't old, it was new then- but a CCC road. And then there was the old mining road that went to Hope. I've told friends that the first time I went to Hope there were flowers between the tracks in the road. It was in July of '43.

MD: And did you take the train, then? To move to Anchorage?

DG: When we moved to Anchorage we came on the train, yes.

MD: What was Anchorage like in 1944? Where, where did you live? What was your house like?

DG: Well, we moved- we rented a house at 12th and what was called East G, its called Gambell now. And, um, I- there was a couple of houses across the street, across 12th from us. Um, I think that was the edge of town, there might have been something a little beyond. And of course the road went to Campbell Field. That was east G, that turned into Campbell Field Road right about there at 12th, maybe 15th, I don't remember. And the road to Palmer- well, all of them were just gravel- the road went to Palmer. You couldn't drive to Wasilla at that time. I re-

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MD: What was your house like?

DG: Uh, well, it was pretty shabby, it was just a little rental. I think it had two bedrooms. But it was, y'know, they were just surrounded by brush on the little slope that's there at 12th still. And, um, we had a little oil heater in the middle of the room. And, uh, outdoor toilet, about seventy-five feet behind the house.

MD: Pit toilet? It wasn't plumbed, I take it.

DG: No, no plumbing. Well, we had running water, but we didn't have a sewer.

MD: Mmhmm. And, uh, what- what were you, or- what was the family vehicle?

DG: Let's see. We had a Ford, um, I don't remember what model it was, it was a Ford or sedan of some sort. Kind of a nice little car, actually.

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MD: Was it a problem driving it in the winter?

DG: Well, before, let's see. Yeah, before winter we moved into, uh, 15th and G. Was it a problem? Its only one- I think, up and down G Street, and maybe up and down 4th Avenue. But, uh, they didn't drive it very often, you just walked downtown to get your groceries.

MD: Where did you get groceries? Where did people shop?

DG: There was a Piggly Wiggly here, and the old NC Company were both very good grocery stores.

MD: Where was the NC Company located?

DG: Um, right about where the state offices are now, the legislative offices. In fact, that big- I don't think they filled it in- that was part of the NC Company that, uh, that's the parking area there.

MD: The parking space.

DG: Yeah, down low, that was in that space.

MD: And whereabouts was Piggly Wiggly?

DG: Um, well it was a- probably between E and F, I'm pretty sure of that. On the, uh, North side of the street.

MD: Uh, what was your school like?

DG: It was on- located on 6th Avenue, and uh, G Street, approximately. Between G and E- uh, F and G.

MD: And that was the old high school where the Performing Arts Center is now?

DG: Yeah, exactly. The grade school was on the other side of that same block, on 5th Avenue. And, uh, 'course I didn't go to grade school, I went to the High School here.

MD: What kind of courses were they teaching?

DG: I think all the standard courses. I had Mathematics and English and History and Civics and, uh, some sort of science courses. All, all the usual stuff.

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MD: Did they have a cafeteria?

DG: No. I don't remember- well, wait a minute, let's see. We had a- we had a kind of a meeting hall downstairs, but that was under the gymnasium. The gym had been built then. And so we- yeah, we were actually connected. I don't think it was a cafeteria, it was just a meeting place.

MD: Um, did you have any jobs when you weren't in school?

DG: Yeah. Um, I almost always had a job. Well, the first year I got here in '43, in '44, I worked for Ray Peterson, out at Merrill Field. Uh, he was- they had a roast for him a few years ago, and my friends wanted me to get up and tell my experience with Ray, and I said, "I was afraid of him when I worked for him and I'm still afraid of him". (laughs) I wasn't about to take a chance. He was a tough guy. He wasn't mean, he was just tough. And-

MD: How so?

DG: Oh, just- all business, and a hard worker, no-nonsense.

MD: What did you do for him?

DG: I was called the hangar boy. I swept the floor and dumped the garbage, and actually I had the job of gassing airplanes too, which was kind of fun.

MD: What kind of planes?

DG: Well, we had a Gullwing Stinson , and um, Ford Tri-motor, belonged to, um, to Ray. And then we gassed other- like Mudhole Smith had a- I forgot what he had, some sort of a Bellanca, as I recall. And, uh, Hawken Christenson had a Gullwing Stinson, or a- no, he had a biplane, I've forgotten the- the brand now. And, uh, Toevole- Toivo Aho. He landed out at , uh, the, Lake Spenard. So at fourteen years old without a driver's license I drove a 2,000 gallon tank of gasoline right down the middle of Anchorage and out to Spenard and gassed up the planes. Well, I always thought- in retrospect, at the time I didn't think anything of it, y'know? It was kind of fun to do that.

MD: What was Spenard Road like?

DG: It was just a little, kind of halfway two-lane gravel road.

MD: Were there many buildings or businesses along the route?

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DG: No, I don't think there were any. There, a house- a family lived at the Chester Creek, where it crossed. I suspect that was the last house there. The McRae's had a, a, homestead out there where McRae Street is. And there were just off of the road, so there's a little diversion in the road there. That's all I remember, that we met- out there where that swimming beach is is where the planes came to get gas.

MD: The, um. Was Merrill Field- how built up was Merrill Field? Was it paved by 1944?

DG: No, no. There were- Ray Peterson had a hangar, and what became Alaska Airlines has, I think it was called Alaska Star then. They had a hanger. And I think there may have been one or two others. But they were all on the 5th Avenue side. Um, there was nothing along the other side and there were no crossing ways as far as I can recall. And it was about half as long as it is now.

MD: And it was gravel?

DG: And gravel, yeah.

MD: What's the- could they bring in- uh, twin engine planes there? Well, I guess a tri-motor is a three-engine plane, but-

DG: Yeah.

MD: What's the biggest plane you ever saw that landed there?

DG: I can't remember the name, I think it was a Boeing tri-motor the Alaska Star had. There was a great big plane down there. But you know, those were short field planes. They'd fly at about 40 or 50 miles an hour, so, y'know. It didn't take 'em long to get in the air.

MD: Um, and then you worked on the paddle-wheeler Alice?

DG: Yes.

MD: Tell- tell us about getting that job, and what that was like.

DG: That was in '45, and, uh, we went, uh, six of us high school boys went to the Alaska Railroad. I think I went first, by the way, and I told the other guys about it, so we got six of us were- got jobs with the Alaska Railroad. We were to work on the River steamers. Um, it was kind of interesting, uh, we had to have physicals. Of course, we were in pretty good shape. I was 16 and all of us were 15 or 16 years old. And, uh, then we had to go in, and Colonel Olsen was the general manager, and, uh, we walked in there, he must have been- well, I could tell he was kind of alarmed when we walked in. He kinda shook his head and he said, "Well, you look pretty young to me, but I guess you'll have to do." (laughs) So that's how we got hired. And we did.

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MD: Yup.

DG: And three of the six of us went up to Kenai- to Nenana. Three of the guys got assigned as, as working in the mess hall, which I didn't. I was happy I got assigned as

a fireman. And we were firemen with cordwood, so that was pretty interesting to me. Good exercise.

MD: And you boarded the ship in Nenana?

DG: Yeah, the boat was up on the waves when I first got there. In fact, let's see, we were there about a week before they got the boat in the water. And that was a big operation of course. But then, um, we actually worked on the boat a little bit before they put it in the water. But afterwards, then the guy- the Chief Engineer came in and got the fire started, and we learned how to keep the fire going and what to use. Pretty simple, it was a big gauge up above the boiler, and we had to keep the needle between two marks on that, and that was it. If it went down you put in wood and if it went up you shut the draft off, and that was all there was to it.

MD: How far did you go on the boat?

DG: Well, the first trip we went to Tanana, that didn't get off to a very good start. The water was high, and of course the, the pilots were rusty. We got about 3 bins out of Nenana and crashed into the trees, and ripped one whole rail out and broke all the rails on one side of the boat. But they had 'em all fixed up by the time we got to Tanana. And we had unloaded a bunch of stuff there and came back. Then the second trip we went to, uh, Galena. And it was high water, as I said, and they'd had a big flood. And there were hundreds, probably thousands of barrels of stove oil, diesel and gasoline, floating down the river. Especially from Galena. So we had a big load of fuel for 'em. And, uh, cause they were just- they got wiped out. And then the next two trips we went to Marshall, and what's called, what's-her-name, Ledge now? Uh, um, anyway, Marshall it was called then. And a little side trip to, uh, Railroad City and back. And then we came back- the last trip ended in, um, August, about the middle of August.

MD: What was at Railroad City?

DG: That was the, well the, the so-called railroad went over to, uh, Bethel, or over to the Kuskokwim River. Uh, I never saw the railroad, I think it was just logs and boards. Just a place to push a cart, and- but at Railroad City they had, um, two pretty good size buildings, warehouses. And we left some stuff there, and then the people from the other side would come and get it.

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MD: About how long did it take to make a trip? As far as-

DG: By the way, Marshall was called Fortuna's Ledge too, it came to mind here. Um, well, its kind of one of those questions- until you've made it you don't know, 'cause we'd get stuck on the sandbar after the water went down. And we spent a lot of time on the sandbars. And-

MD: How did they get off? Once they-

DG: Well, they-

MD: -bellied on one of those?

DG: -tried to- if there was trees around anywhere they could run ropes- lines over to trees or stumps or something and sometimes they could kinda wiggle off. They used jet, y'know, pumps with jets and try to undermine the silt and make it so you could float off. It was pretty tough when you were going downstream, because everything you did put you further up on the sandbar. Going upstream usually you'd get off maybe in a day. Or maybe just a few hours, but we spent two or three days on one sandbar. Pulled every tree within half a mile of the river, I think, tryin' to get off. They tried to avoid that. They had boats that went out in front, and they also had guys- old Mark Twain type, standing up in the bow of the barge with their long pole. And they'd holler back. They didn't use Mark Twain, they said "Three meter", or "Three yards" I think, or something like that. The pole was marked red and white. And, um, the deck crew did that. And then they'd try to find the channel that way, but y'know, the boat had some- we had two barges on there, I mean, with the boat, the boat and the two barges were probably two hundred and fifty feet long, y'know, you had to think ahead to get that thing around. Those pilots were pretty darn good. They were Native, by the way. The Captain. I never saw him at the wheel.

MD: The, um- so after that summer you returned to Anchorage. You returned to Anchorage after-

DG: Yeah, that was the year the Japanese war ended, too.

MD: Right.

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DG: So we had a big celebration then. I was reminded that I was supposed to tell you how I learned about the end of the war. I was working on a building at 7th and H Street, I think, it was an apartment building. And across the street is that, there's that same building is still there. Its some sort of a hotel, I think they're going to tear it down. Its gotten-

MD: Oh, yeah, the one with the bad reputation.

DG: -pretty ratty. Well that was a- this is going down in history- there was a house of prostitutes. And, uh, we called them- we had better names for 'em then. And when the war ended, the lady in the upper right hand corner rolled her window down, and leaned down, much to my pleasure, and said, "The war's over, the war's over!" and the rest of the crew just quit and walked off. And I was standing there leaning on my

shovel when the boss came by and I said "Well, what do you do when a war is over?" And he says, "Well, I don't know, why don't you go home." (laughs). So I did. And then they had a big celebration downtown, and everybody was drunk and cutting neckties off of each other. Y'know, that was the, I don't know- one guy got pretty upset about it and smacked one of those poor GIs for cutting his neckties. "Its the only necktie I had, you cut it right off!" (laughs)

MD: Was that on 4th Avenue?

DG: Yeah, the big party was on 4th Avenue.

MD: In the street?

DG: Yeah, it was jammed full. You couldn't even go across the street.

MD: The, um, what, what did you do for entertainment, in those days?

DG: Well they had a- they had a kind of a teen club on 3rd Avenue, um, that was closed most of the time. And we'd go over there and play ping pong and smoke. Y'know, all the things that you gotta do. Uh, we had a- there was basketball and school plays, and- I don't remember. I always had a job, I wasn't looking for entertainment most of the time.

MD: Were you there when they opened the 4th Avenue Theater?

DG: I was not at the theater, but I went the second night, I think. They had that- kind of a big party, and they didn't allow us kids in, I don't think. At least I didn't go. But I think I went the second or third night. I can't remember. Its a famous movie, um, oh, I forget it, but I won't- I'll try to remember it.

MD: And, and- you had, you had another year to go in High School, I take it. The war was over-

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DG: Yeah, that was my sophomore year, and I went, let's see...yeah, sophomore. Ok, well in- that was '46, and '47 I got a job working for the Alaska Road Commission. And that was kinda interesting. I started asking for that job in, probably in February, and the guy said, "Well, I'll put your name on the list", and he pulled out this book and thumbed through about five pages and put my name on the list. And I thought "Well I'm not gonna get that job if I'm on that part of the list", so about every week I'd go down and bug him a little bit, and say, "Have you hired anybody or am I still on that list?" Well finally he said "Well, you seem to be a little more interested in this job than some of these guys", so he took an arrow and I went up all the way to the next page. Well by, I kept bugging him, I didn't think about bugging him, I was just

workin'. But when- when they hired somebody, the day after I got out of high school that year, I got hired. I think he wanted to get me out of his office.

MD: (laughs) Where did you work on the roads, then, where did you work?

DG: Well, the first- that first couple, three weeks I worked here in Anchorage. And the foreman was Ralph Soburg. And he's got pretty well-known, he built roads and bridges all over the state. And I asked- I knew he was going to go down on the Kenai and build- work on the Kenai Road. So I bummed him for a job, I wanted to go down with him. And, um, I was actually pretty handy, as they say. I'd grown up on that farm pretty much, I could run all the equipment, and I'd been driving cars and trucks and tractors for, oh, since I was nine years old. Y'know, they're just part of the job. So, um, y'know, I could drive cars and all the easy stuff. So they needed a flunky so they hired me. And I was- I rode a boat, one of Anderson's boats down to Kenai. And we unloaded a bunch of equipment there. Unloading it is just a matter of jumping it off of the barge. And went out, and we stayed at Kenai Joe's for probably a month and a half while we built our camp. Stayed in his dance hall. And, so weekends when the fishermen were in we didn't get much sleep. Course we didn't need much, 'cause we were downstairs at the dance most of the time. That was always a big ruckus. But we finally got our road- our little tent place built. And it was about a mile and a half out of town.

MD: What are Anderson's boats?

DG: That was Squeaky Anderson, he had a- ran boats up and down the inlet. And he was pretty famous in World War II, he was the beach master at some of the Navy landings, uh, I don't remember which ones. But towards the ends. The beach master, he was the, uh, not the Navy itself, but their work branch. And- when they were unloading, really trying to fill up, get the people on, through the initial assault, and then unloading after that, and the civilians took over, or, I mean, that...darn.

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BCJ: CBs?

DG: CBs! Yeah, you- he was the- the CBs took over. Unloaded stuff, and. So he had, I think he had a barge line here. Barge line here before the war. Ad then he did for a little while after the war.

MD: Was that the way that supplies were taken down the peninsula?

DG: Yeah. And the train. but the Kenai, of course, was way off the railroad, so. And all the- there were canneries down there, so they'd come in- the loads would come in here to the- on the railroad, and then they'd load 'em on barges and take 'em down.

MD: Um, how much road was there in 19- I guess we're talking '47. How much road was there coming south from Anchorage?

DG: On the Kenai, or here?

MD: From Anchorage. Well, I guess, Anchorage first of all, but then also the highway system. What did it look like, going south?

DG: Going south?

MD: Yeah, from Anchorage.

DG: Oh, there wasn't anything in '47. Uh, just the, the road- the Campbell Field Road. And that was knew, you know, the Campbell Field.

MD: So the road pretty well ended at Campbell?

DG: Yeah, it was just before that. And the road they built down to, uh, Potter Marsh, the old road, on the East side of it, was built in '49 or '50, I think. I did some surveying on that in '50, but it had already been pushed through.

MD: So there was no road to Seward.

DG: Oh no, that didn't come until years later.

MD: Um, so the road you were working on from Kenai?

DG: Was just from, uh, Kenai over to Cooper Landing and down to Homer. Was there- where it- it was the uh, what do they call it?

MD: Sterling Highway.

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DG: The Sterling Highway, yeah. And the first year I was there at Kenai and we worked a little bit of road and kind of got organized, and the second year, um, I was over in Hidden Creek. Uh, which is near Cooper Landing. Or, actually near Sportsman's Lodge, about 5 or 6 miles. they had a crew work on that end, and they pushed it in I think seven miles maybe, to Hidden Creek. And I was stationed there, uh, the thir- the second and third years, and the fourth year, uh, back over and down to Soldotna.

MD: Tell us about the fire.

DG: Well, there was a-

MD: The great Kenai Burn.

DG: There's a real, there's kind of an interesting prelude to that. That day the- Mr. Sterling, Holly Sterling, was going to come through kind of on an inspection tour he was the retired head of the Road Commission. Federal, uh, job. And I'm pretty sure he was retired. But they, anyway he had an interest in that road. So at breakfast time the foreman got up and with all of his usual expletives says, "I want you guys to work today. No goofing off- Mr. Sterling's coming by and I want ya working!" So we all were really going to put in a good day for the foreman, that was Ed Halleher and he was a great guy. We'd do anything for Ed. So anyway the guys came in at noon and had lunch, and on the way out some guy flipped a cigarette into the brush right there near Hidden Creek, and, um, went on, and, um, and the cook noticed that there was a little fire there, and he went to the, um, to the shop to get the, somebody out of the shop to help him fight it. And, um, when they got back it covered, uh, a half-acre probably. It was one of those really hot days, there'd been no rain for weeks. And it just got away- it blew up and it went way up, uh, Hidden Creek, all the way around the lake, and over into Gene Creek- into the Gene Creek Valley. And then in time went down all the way to the lake and kind of curled around. And then on a really nice, breezy day it came roaring back up through our camp at the end of, um, probably August. And it wiped us out. It burned everything in our camp. (laughs) Except what we had pushed down into the water. Everything but the outhouse, we saved the outhouse.

MD: How did the- how did you- what type of precautions were you taking when you saw the fire coming your direction?

DG: Well, we tried to get our gear out and get it in the middle of the, of the clearing. And quite a bit of it was saved, but the tents all burned. Uh, I guess the most exciting part of that was that we had seven thousand cases of dynamite stored over in- near the shop, and with the help of Mr. Sterling we moved all that stuff in about, I don't know, a couple hours. And out in the middle of the clearing, which was still not a very big clearing, where it caught fire and the whole thing burned. And I went out there afterwards and the ground was like glass, about that deep, it just was that hot. It was- it was a pretty wild fire. It burned down all of our, our, our employment records and everything. But we went back to work in a couple of days and spent the summer there. In fact that- '47 I worked up until late- early October, and then came into Anchorage and worked on the, on the Eagle River. The road that goes down into Eagle River. They had the old bridge, but they're going to build a new bridge where it is now.

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MD: What was the road to Palmer like?

DG: It was just a one- like one and a half, you could probably pass or meet anywhere.

Most people didn't pass each other. It wasn't very easy. It was just a gravel road, but it was well traveled.

MD: When did- um, if you were coming in from Palmer or Eagle River, what was the approach to Anchorage like? I mean, uh-

DG: Well, you came in on what is now called the Davis Highway, which is on the base, and came right into 5th Avenue. And, uh, Mountain View, Mountain View was kinda separated from Anchorage, there was a space with- where nobody was. There was a store there, which was kinda too bad, it had everything in the world in it, all kinds of Native stuff. Native baskets and art and so on. That'd be worth a million dollars now. Uh, I can't remember the name of the store. But then it just came in up 5th Avenue past Merrill Field, and the first place you came to that you'd think of as Anchorage was probably about, maybe, well, again, East G.

MD: Yeah. Um. Then, so after- after you graduated, um, what year did you graduate then?

DG: In '47.

MD: '47 is when you- ok.

DG: I stayed out a year, I worked for J. B. Gottstein all winter long, carrying and unloading freight. I was in good shape, I can tell you that.

MD: (laughs)

[01:35:16:00]

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DG: I could lift up a hundred pound sack of flour and put it up really high. (laughs) And I did it a lot. Um, then in the spring I kinda foolishly left Mr. Gottstein. He was a really nice man. And, uh, a couple weeks before I could go to work on the peninsula, so I worked for, uh, Wally Martins, he had a dry cleaning shop here. And I picked up the dry cleaning. And it was kinda interesting, I got some of the stuff left over from the guy before me, but you kinda had to hustle your own work, and so I went around knocking on doors. And maybe one of the colorful elements of old Anchorage was that I lived in, three places in Anchorage, I lived at 12th and East G, 15th and G, and 11th and F. And I was never more than a block away from one of those houses of prostitution. And I found 'em by the dozen, I think, 'cause I'd go up and knock on the door, and this lady'd come out with a big smile and she'd say "Yes", y'know, and I'd say, "Well, do you have any dry cleaning?" God they were great. They'd load me down with everything they had. And I'd go in there with all these fancy clothes and get 'em cleaned, and, y'know, take 'em back in a couple of days. I actually made pretty good money at that. But then I went down on the peninsula and was setting-building a bridge down there. I worked on the bridge for about a month.

MD: The, um, and, and then you skied?

DG: Yeah, we, that's a good point, that was one thing I did in the wintertime quite a bit. When I, um- we had to go out to the base, the O'Hara had a bus-line, and we could catch a bus on, I don't know, maybe C Street or someplace like that on about 4th or 5th. And ride out to the base for fifteen cents probably, or something. And then we get on a G.I. truck, one of those old 6x6s, and those guys- I wouldn't ride with one of 'em now. I mean those guys were just kids themselves, y'know. And that road up there was just one truck wide, and its covered with ice and deep ruts, and they'd- we'd bounce up there and get all the way up and ski all day long, and then if you were lucky you'd catch the last truck home, and, uh, get off on the bus and ride it back into town. And if you're unlucky you just walked home. (laughs)

MD: This is Arctic Valley?

DG: Yeah.

MD: Did they have a lift?

DG: They did, they had a rope tow. Actually, they wound up with two of them by the time I quit skiing there, which was probably in '49.

MD: The, um, did you ever miss the bus?

DG: Well, I did a time or two, and I had to ski all the way to 15th and G. (laughs)

MD: Quite a go.

[01:38:27:00]

[00:31:10]

DG: Yeah, from Arctic Valley. Yeah. But like I said I was in pretty good shape.

MD: Yeah.

DG: I was pretty hungry when I got home.

MD: And you hunted from time to time? Duck hunting and things?

DG: Uh, just one time. A guy that lived next door took me up to Eagle River with him and we hunted, shot a couple ducks. I did a lot of duck hunting when I moved up to Fairbanks, but very little here.

MD: So, um, so, we're about 1949 now, um, just your other jobs, I guess.

DG: Yeah, well, in '49 and then '50 I went over to Valdez. I, I went to the University of Nevada for two years. And actually a year and a half. And I just got tired of that place in Reno and left there in probably March of '50 and then I stayed with my dad out at Moose Pass for two or three weeks. Then I went over to Valdez and went to work for the Road Commission, and went out and worked on the Tok cutoff. And that was just a one lane road at that time. Crooked as the dickens. They, the guys that built it just went around a tree, they didn't push it over. so we did a lot of work there. And then I spent, oh, maybe six weeks out on the Denali Highway. And then I caught a bus and came in to Anchorage and went up to Fairbanks and went to the University of Alaska. In the fall of '50.

MD: Um, when did you get your degree?

DG: '54.

MD: '54. And its a degree in?

DG: Civil engineering.

MD: Civil engineering.

DG: Yeah.

MD: Were all those years studying, or is that part of your military experience?

[01:40:17:00]

[00:33:00]

DG: Uh, yeah, well I went into the military as soon as I got out of, that's another kind of a peculiar, y'know, everyone I know went to military school. I went to ROTC. And I was made a Lieutenant when I got out, and everybody I know went back to West Virginia and went through engineering training of some sort, and then they got sent- a lot of them got- went to Spain and so over. So I was hoping I'd go to Spain. Well I never even left Fairbanks. I went right out, six mile, to where the engineering group was, and I got a thirty-five cents cab, travel pay. And I didn't even have a uniform. I showed up in my Cowichan sweater and I walked in, and this Captain is sitting there and I saluted him and he looked up at me and he said, "Who are you?" And I said "I'm Lieutenant Graves", "You are?" (laughs) he said. I could see he was pretty incredulous. Well I didn't have a uniform, y'know, I didn't. So anyway, he sent me off over to buy a uniform. My career was pretty unspectacular. I actually enjoyed it more than I expected to.

MD: All of it spent around Fairbanks?

DG: Yeah.

MD: And, um, so-

DG: I left- when I got out I left through the front gate and I didn't even get thirty-five cents travel pay. The front gate and Fairbanks are contiguous-

MD: Right!

DG: So no travel.

MD: Uh, did you come back to Anchorage then?

DG: No, I lived in Fairbanks until '73. I got married while I was in the army, or actually before I graduated, and in the army we had a couple of kids, and, uh, when I got out I got a car. So, you don't move very far with two kids and a brand new car, you just need a job. Fortunately I had one. A friend of mine worked at the utilities system and so he hired me.

MD: When you came back to Anchorage, '73, what was your job?

DG: I was working for the University of Alaska then, I was in charge of their construction program. And it was a statewide job, but most of the work was here in Anchorage, and I just got tired of living in hotels.

MD: What, what, um, what was the campus like at UAA when you got there?

DG: Well, there were two of 'em, in a way. There was a community college had the, kind of the, a bunch of brand new buildings, the four that make the quad there. Its all been infilled now with several other buildings. Just the four concrete buildings and a couple of wooden ones. And, uh, then the University had the, was no, well, at that time it was the library, I haven't been in it for a long time, and, uh, I don't know what's there. The library's brand new great big building kind of adjacent to it, but maybe its still part of the- I don't know. Anyway, that was the library at that time.

[01:43:23:00]

[00:36:07]

MD: The, um, and, there wasn't a lot of parking or even parking issues, as I recall, at that time.

DG: Well, yeah, we didn't actually, there were, they just parked where there wasn't something else. And, uh, so we were supposed to build a parking when we built what's called the, the, uh, it was a academic building, was an addition to the library building, we were supposed to be building a parking lot. But it, it sort of didn't get into the budget somehow. And so we got a bunch of sand, that might be what I mentioned, we got a bunch of sand to get it filled but we didn't have enough money to put gravel on it. And we couldn't put, uh, pave it. And so everybody kept driving in

and getting stuck. (laughs) And so finally they put the heat on, and my responsibility was to Fairbanks, it wasn't to the people in Anchorage.

MD: Yeah.

DG: And the people in Anchorage didn't like that a bit. But they had a lot of juice with the people in Fairbanks under certain circumstances, so they freed up some money and I was able to make a pretty decent parking lot out of it. They had one light out there in the middle, and that was your navigation. In the wintertime they plowed it, I think, just barely. But it was pretty primitive. And then over where that quad was you could just park anywhere on that. That, we fixed that up while I was here at the university.

MD: Yeah, how would you characterize the changes in Anchorage in the twenty years when you left to go to school and when you came back?

DG: Well, there's, of course in '73, 150,000; when I left there was about 20,000. I think there's, its credited with having 15,000 in '43 when I, when I first got here. There was probably more than that. I don't think there was a census in '40. It was- Fairbanks was said to be the biggest town. But of course Bob Atwood had his way, and they moved the base in, and all kinds of people, and so the Native Hospital was here, there was just no comparison. Providence was still on 9th Street. They hadn't moved that yet. But that's, y'know, all of Spenard was in. Y'know, it was considered a pretty rowdy part of town. I mean the Spe, Spenard area.

MD: Yeah.

DG: There was essentially no comparison. Not even compared to now. I mean, the town was doubled in size from '70 to '73, I'm quite sure.

[01:46:36:00]

[00:39:19]

MD: Right. Um, what were people like in the '40s? Was there, was there a sense of, I guess, civic psychology that's different than it is now?

DG: Well Bob Atwood was a big guy in town, and he stirred up a sense of civic responsibility. So yeah, there was that, with about twenty-five people, maybe. Most people were just here for the money. And, uh, one thing I thought about that is so different from now is that there were no Natives in Anchorage, or practically none.

MD: Mmhmm.

DG: And you've heard the stories, no doubt, about they'd have a sign that said "No natives or dogs allowed"?

MD: Mmhmm.

DG: And there were two signs that way that I remember. I don't remember the ones that said dogs, I saw "no Natives". I think, in my view the dogs was added by people who wanted to juice up the story a little bit.

MD: Right.

DG: And I remember thinking the, the sign wasn't because they were native, it was because they had urine tanned clothes on, and they, these were kinda nice places that people wanted to get away from the rough, y'know, there was no paved streets and the sidewalks were practically minimal, so they'd want a nice place out in the evening, and they didn't want somebody sitting over there that was maybe a couple months away from a bath both ways.

MD: What were the nice places like?

DG: Uh, they were nice. (laughs)

MD: What were some of them?

DG: Well, one of them was the Chinese joint, I can't even remember the name of it now, it was right on about C Street and 4th Avenue, and then the other one was out at Lake Spenard, they might have got built up during that period. And, uh, there was, they were nice, y'know, nice meals and waiters with shoes and y'know, everything.

MD: Furniture that matched?

[01:48:44:00]

[00:41:28]

DG: Sort of. Yeah. The Chinese place, that was all, they had the big chairs, y'know, that loomed up over ya. And everything was made out of straw.

MD: What was- were there ever issues in getting good food?

DG: Well I didn't hang around restaurants very much.

MD: But I mean-

DG: And my folks didn't.

MD: But I mean, instead of just canned food, or.

DG: Oh, you mean just among the population?

MD: (inaudible) Yeah.

DG: Well, yeah, y'know, all the fresh stuff was flown in at a pretty expensive rate. I remember the first day they had watermelons in Anchorage after the war. They were selling them for seventeen cents a pound, that's about what they are now. I'll tell you, you needed money to buy a watermelon. (laughs) I don't know why I remember that, I didn't have one, but I do remember the price.

MD: How are you doing?

DG: I wouldn't mind about a two minute break?

MD: Ok. Bob, we'll take a break here.

BCJ: Ok.

DG: I'd like to get up for a minute.

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DG: I'm very happy about my life here.

BCJ: I'm rolling.

MD: Ok. Um, what are some of the changes in construction that you think have been important over the years?

DG: Well, everything. I, I went to the University of Nevada and I graduated in '54, and at that time, previous to that time, uh, they just shut construction down in the winter. And that to me was just great. And I remember puzzling, "Do I want to work in the winter and take the summers off and have a great summer, or do I want to work in the summer and take the winters off", y'know, and I enjoyed skiin' and all that stuff. Well, it never worked, because 'bout then they started working year round, they started building the big tarps over big buildings, y'know, like power plants. And I worked mostly in buildings and we'd rush around and get the thing enclosed, so to speak, in the fall, and work on it all winter. And, uh, so its a good way to stay busy but it didn't leave you the free time that I had sort of hoped for.

MD: Are you surprised to see how areas we I suppose would have considered swamps at some point in time, have been built upon?

DG: Well, the best example I can think of is, uh, the, what's the lake where Sears is? Uh, Blueberry Lake? That was a lake, when I was here. I shot a duck in it one time. (laughs) Illegally, but I did. And, uh, yeah, that was pretty big. It was, I don't know, half a mile long or more?

MD: Yeah, and, um, how did they manage that? How-

DG: They just filled it in, they drained it and filled it in, I understand. Yeah, they've, it's a big marsh there. The whole thing was. I have a friend that was given a gift of an acre of land right where Sears and Roebuck is now, and I helped him survey it, locate it, so he could, y'know, register it and all that. And we had to wear boots to do the surveying. It was just marsh.

MD: Yeah.

DG: Uh-huh.

MD: Sorry.

DG: That's it.

MD: The, uh, over time, who- any remarkable characters you've crossed paths with who were worth remembering?

DG: Well, yeah, I-

MD: Either famous and powerful people or not so.

DG: I could mention Anton Anderson. He was the head of the utilities system for a number of years, and then, uh, was mayor of Anchorage for a number of years. Uh, worked on the, uh, he was the railroad engine- chief engineer for the Alaska Railroad. And was in charge of the Whittier tunnel, surveyed that and was in charge of that. Relocated the railroad through, uh, Nenana Canyon on that big hillside, mudslide that's before that had been there for years. And uh, I knew him quite well, he was my father-in-law. We used to come and visit him fairly often.

[01:53:17:00]

[00:03:18]

MD: In the photos I've seen of him, which are mostly from the '50s-

DG: I'm sorry, what was that again?

MD: In the photographs I've seen of him, which are mostly from the '50s, he always seems to be wearing exactly the same hat.

DG: Yeah, he did, he slept in 'em too! (laughs) My wife said "Dad, you gotta, you can't lay down and just sleep in your suit". He said "I don't mean to, but I just fall asleep and then I have to get up in the morning and go to work". (laughs) And he saved all of his snus cans because during the war the, the snus cans were made out of cardboard, and he liked the old metal ones. And they were still using cardboard after the war, so he'd put the snus in his metal snus can and carry it around.

MD: And he lived in a hotel?

DG: Uh, let's see. He lived in the Alaska Railroad dorm for a long time, which was down near where the hospital was at that time, down in the, in the valley. It, it had nothing to do with the Native Hospital, it predated that.

MD: Right.

DG: And then he stayed- he had a room in, actually an apartment, in the top of what is now the Anchorage Hilton Hotel, or the, it was the Anchorage Hilton, its just the Hilton now I guess, isn't it?

MD: Yeah.

DG: Yeah, yeah. And, uh, those were the places that I remember him.

MD: Very modest means, I remember.

DG: Yeah. yeah, he was- something, I don't know if you've ever found it, but he wrote a thing, uh, that got wide distribution. It was called, something about- I'm sorry, I shouldn't have started this. It was a little folder, he used to stand out on the street corner and give it away. Something about "How I Like Anchorage" or "How Anchorage Was", and I even found it on the web a few years ago. It was- he was a real character. (laughs) He's smart, he was so damn smart it was painful. He could memorize poetry, he'd sit around in the evening and quote, for hours he'd quote poetry and, and books that he liked, y'know, well written books. Whole chapters out of books. He was a, he's gotta be a genius. And a drunk. (laughs) Most geniuses are.

MD: Um, was there any kind of a library in town in the '40s?

[01:55:50:00]

[00:05:51]

DG: I think the Loucac- the Loussac Library was built, I'm pretty sure that was built after I left. No, let's see, I think there might have been a library but I for- I can't remember right now. Yeah.

MD: And, uh, and then, any general observations to add, or words for the future?

DG: Well, I'd, when Bob mentioned that idea, y'know, I've never asked for a job that I didn't get in Alaska. And I finally had to amend that, I remember I did ask for one that- thank god I didn't get it, the guy who hired me was smarter enough to realize- and that was to work as a deckhand on a boat out in the Aleutian Islands. And I was fourteen years old and that was just- I was about five foot eight and weighed a hundred and twenty pounds at that age. That's how big I was when I went up on the Yukon. And you just can't get a better deal than that. I've never been a day in my life without a job unless I was between jobs like traveling, uh, like moving to a different office or something like that. It just didn't need to be one.

MD: Um, when you, um, came to Anchorage, when you were working as an engineer here, you began to use computers. Was that your first experience with-

DG: Oh yeah, it was after I'd left the University that I got involved with computers. Y'know, I worked for the old NC Company at thirty-five cents an hour, and the union lady came along and unionized me and raised my wages to ninety-five cents an hour, but I got fired the hour before that, as it turned out, I never got it. So I walked down the street, in ten minutes I walked into Bob Atwood's office and he hired me for thirty-five cents an hour, working in the morgue. And then at the end of that job I went somewhere in school or out down the road or something, and then I came back and I worked for the Wolf Brothers, and they had a furniture stores. And during that period of time the cops were beginning to crack down on the ladies of the night. There's the Union Steam Bath on 4th Avenue I think, and the, the, uh, uh- its called a Mexican thing- over on about 7th, a big building, I mean there were, it had fifty or seventy-five rooms in 'em probably. And, uh, its called the- I can't quite think of it. Anyway they were busing those places, and all the ladies would get run out of town for a little while. Well then they'd move back in, and they'd buy furniture from the Wolf Brothers. Only the Wolf Brother that I, that would help me deliver, he wouldn't- he didn't want to me caught walkin' in or out of one of those places, so he always made me carry all that stuff in. And I'd come out with whole handfuls of green cash. They always paid in cash, they didn't take checks. (laughs) That was kind of interesting, I knew all the ladies a little bit, all the madams anyway.

[01:59:03:00]

[00:09:05]

MD: So, um, you, you've spent a lifetime really with engineering and technology, probably more that, more so than a lot of people your age.

DG: Oh yeah, I think so.

MD: What would you imagine the future of Anchorage-

DG: Imagine what?

MD: How would you imagine the future of Anchorage?

DG: Um, well, y'know, I've heard it said, this is a heck of a nice place for a town, it's too bad they build a town here. And, y'know, I just really, I think- if Wasilla doesn't get ahead of it, it'll be, y'know, obviously a very central important part of Alaska. And this is where the money is, and this is where the jobs are. Um, and I like living here. I just, if I had a choice I'd probably live somewhere else, but I'm too old for a choice now, so I don't want to move. And I like Anchorage, it's just that, you gotta, y'know, in twenty minutes out of town, anywhere you go, there's something fun to do. You can climb the bluffs or go skiing or go fishing, and all these mountain trails there are now. You can't get that in any other town in Alaska or probably most places in the Untied States.

MD: So, pretty satisfied with things?

DG: Its a great town.

MD: Thank you very much.

DG: Thank you.

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