

Si Dennis
NPS Skagway Oral History Project
Skagway, Alaska
December 6, 2009
Interviewed by Stacey Carkhuff

Stacey Carkhuff: This is Stacey Carkhuff interviewing Si Dennis December 6, 2009 in Skagway, Alaska for the Skagway Oral History Project. Si if you could tell me about where you were born and what it was like growing up.

Si Dennis: I was born in Skagway in 1948 at the Dowel Memorial Clinic. Growing up in Skagway wasn't too bad. I mean it was, I had some rough times and such. My Dad, he worked for the White Pass. It was fun growing up here.

Stacey Carkhuff: And your Dad worked for the White Pass. What did he do for the White Pass?

Si Dennis: He worked on the dock. He was a longshoreman.

Stacey Carkhuff: And how long did he do that?

Si Dennis: He did it up until he retired for I think it was yes, I think he was 65.

Stacey Carkhuff: Okay, and was your father also born here?

Si Dennis: No he was born in Haines.

Stacey Carkhuff: Okay so you were born and raised here and you are of Tlingit and Haida heritage. Can you talk a little bit about what it is like to grow up in a primarily white town being Alaska Native?

Si Dennis: It wasn't so bad growing up here because we had the mission, we had the mission school which was open at the time, it was preliminary Eskimo and Indian and I mean there were kids that came from different towns and schooled here. So it wasn't, it wasn't too bad, I mean it had its bad moments but you know that's part of growing up, I mean, in a small town anyway but.

Stacey Carkhuff: The mission school, can you tell me about that school?

Si Dennis: The mission was...I went to the public school.

Stacey Carkhuff: Oh

Si Dennis: But the mission kids that were here were kids that were taken out of different parts of Alaska and they were having trouble learning or they were having trouble growing up. They put them in a school that was run by the Catholic Church. They were all good group of kids. I mean it was the way things were back then. I mean. They had the school here and they all just came here.

Stacey Carkhuff: So as a child did you do a lot of hiking and ice skating and all of that?

Si Dennis: Quite a bit of hiking, quite a bit of skating, we'd just go up to Lower Lake and skate. We just hiked up the mountains a lot. I remember going up at like about six or seven we'd run up mountains and never tell our parents where we were, and just take off. And go up in the mountains and spend a week hiking and hunting and doing whatever. But we didn't have any TV. All we had was a radio, nothing else to do but run around in the mountains. So that's what we did.

Stacey Carkhuff: You had a lot of mountains to run around in.

Si Dennis: Yeah

Stacey Carkhuff: You said you hunted. What were you hunting for?

Si Dennis: Well I'd go out with my Dad and my Uncles and we used to go out and hunt seals and goat, mostly goat around here. Once or twice we went down to Haines to hunt moose but that was about it. Yeah. More or less hunting for like subsistence you know for my grandparents. We'd hunt seals

Stacey Carkhuff: Where did you hunt the seals?

Si Dennis: Just right out here in the bay

Stacey Carkhuff: Okay, what kind of seals are out there.

Si Dennis: There are harvest seals. But they're you know not very many people around here hunt them anymore except like in Sitka and Juneau and Haines. You know like the villages now people go out hunting for those. I mean I haven't hunted seals for quite a while.

Stacey Carkhuff: How old were you, do you think when you first started to hunt?

Si Dennis: I went out with my Dad and my Uncle and my Grandfather like when I was about six. I never shot but we'd go out there. And they'd show us what we're looking for, what to look for how to get the seals to come in. And my Grandfather I'd go with my Grandfather and he shot them and we'd snag them and we'd pull them in.

Stacey Carkhuff: So that's how you did it? You went out in a boat and shot and pulled them in?

Si Dennis: Well we had the boat but we put the boat on the beach. Then we'd sit there on the beach and wait for the seals. And then they'd shoot 'em and we'd run out and get 'em.

Stacey Carkhuff: Oh

Si Dennis: In the boat, cause soon as they're shot they'd float for about thirty or forty-five seconds so we'd have to be quick.

Stacey Carkhuff: You'd have to be quick

Si Dennis: So that's how we'd do it. When the seal came up for air when he was coming up to take a breath when he started holding it, that's when you shot him. That's why he'd float. His lungs would be full until it came out.

Stacey Carkhuff: Huh, that's really interesting. So I'm taking it that your Grandfather and Father were both really traditional. They did a lot of hunting, the subsistence hunting and fishing and they passed it onto you.

Si Dennis: Yeah [] halibut fishing, 58-59 I fished with my uncle gill netting down in Haines.

Stacey Carkhuff: What kind of fish were you gill netting?

Si Dennis: It was mainly sockeye, pinks. And in the fall time it would be [] dogs and chum salmon. But that was when we used to spend a week, a week out fishing and we wouldn't come back in until Friday afternoon. We'd stay out there for five days, doing it longer than it is now. Nowadays it's only like 12-14 hour openings [] with regulations and stuff.

Stacey Carkhuff: You were obviously only ten years old then. But is there still a strong commercial fishing movement down here? I haven't heard that there is.

Si Dennis: Not as much as there used to be. Used to be we'd get people out of Seattle. They'd come out of Seattle and they'd fish in Haines. And they'd just follow the fishing down the coast. Hardly anybody comes up Seattle [] anymore. Just basically they more people that come out of Haines that do the fishing. There's not much into it anymore. I mean it's pretty (shrugs) it just doesn't pay. Most of those people down there do it for subsistence, you know, for the winter. But it's not [] as far as fishing

Stacey Carkhuff: Right, so do you practice any subsistence hunting and fishing currently?

Si Dennis: Every once and a while I'll go out and do some fishing out in the bay and try to catch a salmon that kind of thing. But not the way it used to be.

Stacey Carkhuff: And am I correct to think that you have children?

Si Dennis: I've got three.

Stacey Carkhuff: Have you, I don't know if you taught them to fish [] or done any of that with them?

Si Dennis: Yeah but they have different. My kids aren't really into going out and fishing. Maybe now they are that they're growing up. But when they were kids they'd much rather be out on playing someplace else than being out trying to fish.

Stacey Carkhuff: Okay

Si Dennis: My youngest one, he's in college right now. He was really into fishing. He liked to fish. So we'd take him out fishing and do that kind of stuff but the other two were (shrugs) (ha) they just you know just weren't into it.

Stacey Carkhuff: Uh-huh, do you think hanging out with your Grandpa a lot and doing things with him kind of helped to instill the values that you hold today?

Si Dennis: I think so. I think so back when I was growing up, it wasn't so much my mother and my father that helped raise me it was my uncles. See I had five uncles that were; it was pretty much, you know, my uncles that took care of me and raised me as far as my growing up. In the Indian way it was my uncles that was supposed to raise me anyway but that's the way I grew up. They taught me all the ins and outs of fighting and taking care of myself which is quite a bit different than how it is now. Like with my kids, we brought them up but they didn't have no uncles or anybody to help them along. But my Grandfather he taught me quite a bit and my Grandmother. I'd go over there and I'd sit and talk to them quite a bit [] and everything. They taught me to speak a little bit of Tlingit but ever since they've passed away it's just kind of gone by the wayside, which is kind of sad. But it's just the way it is.

Stacey Carkhuff: Right, so I've heard that there is a revitalization of the Tlingit language and culture and isn't there a facility here in Skagway which encourages

Si Dennis: Yeah they have the Skagway Traditional Council which is where we started and they were at one time trying, they were getting CDs and stuff and having people listen to them. And it was teaching them to speak Tlingit. But I'm not too sure how that's going any more 'cause we haven't had a meeting quite some time. But they do have the CDs and stuff that you can listen to. It's almost like the learning CDs that they have for the languages that they've got.

Stacey Carkhuff: Oh the Rosetta Stone

Si Dennis: Yeah it's pretty close to that. They have people that talk and then you say it back to them and you can try to pick up the enunciations and stuff of the language which is pretty hard to pick up. It's different. But being with my Grandfather and my Grandmother they used to speak to me in Tlingit all the time. They never spoke to me in English. But like I was saying it just kind of went by the wayside.

Stacey Carkhuff: It's hard to keep something up. Especially, I mean, I wouldn't know but I can imagine. It would be very hard not having it every day.

Si Dennis: Yeah, it is you know not having anybody here. Like in Haines they've got the older people, the elders that talk to their kids and grandkids and other kids in Tlingit. And so it's different over here than it is over there so quite a bit.

Stacey Carkhuff: So did all five of your Uncles live in Skagway here?

Si Dennis: Yeah, they ... they lived here for quite a while. And then I had two uncles that moved to Juneau and I had one that moved to Seattle, after I was pretty much grown up. But they all lived here when I was growing up. They pretty much [] moved away and stuff like that. But they pretty much lived in Alaska, except for one.

Stacey Carkhuff: Seattle's pretty close, (ha)

Si Dennis: (ha) Yeah

Stacey Carkhuff: That's nice that they were [] for most of your childhood. Did you have any siblings?

Si Dennis: me, I've got, five sisters and two brothers that []. But we had a pretty good size family when we were growing up. I mean (ha)

Stacey Carkhuff: It must have been pretty fun. I mean in a small town with all those brothers and sisters growing up

Si Dennis: Yeah, it was... it was fun I mean but it was different. But I mean we all stayed in one little house and it was kind of crowded but it wasn't too bad I mean you know. We had winters that were cold, cold. Now, a-days winters are just so-so you know.

Stacey Carkhuff: Why do you think that is, the winters ...?

Si Dennis: I'm not too sure. We had winters when... when we were growing up it would start blowing snow in October and you would

Stacey Carkhuff: Wow

Si Dennis: You know it would stay cold quite a few days. Except for last winter, last winter it was almost like it used to be. But it wasn't near as bad but I don't know if they can attribute that to the global warming thing or just the way the world is rotating or something. I don't know. I just, it's not bad (ha) it's nice.

Stacey Carkhuff: Yeah looking outside and its 25 degrees and sunny.

Si Dennis: Yeah, yeah I don't know, I don't know what it is, but it's not too bad.

Stacey Carkhuff: Good, okay, well what if we move onto your working here in Skagway and we could talk a little bit about work as a Maintenance Mechanic at the National Park Service.

Si Dennis: Yeah I started, I started at the park in '82 and I started out as a carpenter helper. But that was the time when they were renovating the Admin and Visitors Center Building and that's where I started at. And we worked on that; it was like three years renovating it, gutting it, rebuilding it. Then we moved on to *** which is just up the street, about that time I went into, I went into maintenance. They took me off that and I took care of the buildings. I was actually a maintenance custodial then. But then I kind of worked with the restoration people off and on. I'd do, helped them find stuff and go buy stuff and that kind of thing. But then I finally ended up being in maintenance, purely maintenance mechanics so. And I've been doing that the last ten, twelve years. So it's been fun, I mean...when I first went into it was long shoring from '70 to '82 and then '82 is when the railroad shut down. And I had some friends that I had made and they were working for the Park Service. And they helped me fill out my apps and all of that kind of stuff and that's when I got in and that was in '82 so. And I've been here ever since.

Stacey Carkhuff: Seems like you like it. You've been there []

Si Dennis: Yeah it's been really rewarding, I mean as far as people helping you out. They sent us to school; I mean we went to a couple classes. We went to school down in Sitka. You know, and the Park Service is really great. If you really want to pursue it [] I'm probably going to retire there. I've only got a couple more years so ...

Stacey Carkhuff: So you said you started out as a Carpenter helper. Previously to that had you had any experience working in carpentry?

Si Dennis: Well yeah, not a whole bunch but you know ...just not what they were doing down there []. Like I had to learn on the job training there were different people down there that were pretty good at teaching how and what they were doing and stuff like that so yeah it was, it was ... first couple, three weeks it was pretty hard but after I picked it all up. And you know I'm a pretty fast learner so that helped and you know ... [] I had a real good friend and he was working there. And he was a pretty good carpenter and he helped me out quite a bit. And there were two or three other people that were really good carpenters and they'd show me how to do this you know. And I got to learn how to put up sheetrock and all that kind of stuff and mud it out and I leaned quite a bit. [] And it was really rewarding is what it was. I mean it was...I mean I can do quite a bit of stuff and ...

Stacey Carkhuff: Good

Si Dennis: Yeah and it's and right now it's like I'm the oldest employee down there. I've been there the longest and everybody kind of comes to me for answers about this, and [] about this, and where this stuff is in the building and stuff so. I'm kind of the person they come to, to see about what information. It's kind of fun.

Stacey Carkhuff: You're kind of mentor. Oh cool, so obviously renovating these early buildings from 1900s was a difficult task but did you find that it was more difficult because they were so run down and unkempt?

Si Dennis: Well they were pretty bad but they were just, what made it easy were the people that we were working with. We had people that were in Harpers Ferry and people that came up to actually do...be the supervisors. And they were good at what they did. And everything within the park as far as rebuilding these building you know they did a terrific job. How they were going to do it and what they were going to put into it and the blueprints and all that kind of stuff you know they'd just... and the carpenters and stuff we did have, they were good I mean. They did what they were supposed to do and so it made it pretty easy. Some of them we had a little bit of difficulty with but other than that it was it was pretty easy []. I mean they had people that were procuring stuff, buying stuff. And different people coming up checking it out and seeing where we were at and telling us what we had to do and how they wanted it done and stuff. And some I mean it was pretty good. I mean it wasn't nothing that they couldn't handle because they had people that could pick it up and do the job the way it []. I mean it was fun.

Stacey Carkhuff: Hmm so were there any events or things that you might have found as you were doing your work that were interesting or memorable?

Si Dennis: Ah, yeah it ... I mean there was stuff that, do you mean finding stuff in the buildings?

Stacey Carkhuff: Yeah if you found something like a little carving in the wall or just []

Si Dennis: A few things here and there, down at the depot that we found that they kind of left in place. But the rest of the buildings there were things found on the wall like paper and I think one building they found an old paper that was stuck inside the wall and you know just little things that they kept for the []. It wasn't anything big or anything it was just stuff that people stuck in the walls you know. Like some people, when they were building probably just stuck it in there to see how long it would stay there and who would find it.

Stacey Carkhuff: Yeah and whoever that person is, is long gone.

Si Dennis: Yeah

Stacey Carkhuff: And you guys found it. That's interesting.

Si Dennis: Yeah, ... things that were found that were, we'd turn in and we'd take it out and check it out, (ha) I can't remember all that was found but there was little writings here and there on the walls, little poems (ha) I mean ... and some of it we cut out [].

Stacey Carkhuff: Are they over in the museum?

Si Dennis: No just the curatorial person, we'd just give it to them and they'd just archive it and write it down where it was found and what day it was found and this kind of thing so. It was pretty good.

Stacey Carkhuff: So what do you think the significance is in rebuilding and maintaining these buildings?

Si Dennis: It's ...[] as far as you know we got a preservationist who helps us do that and it makes ... I've been on the streets and people ask me you know when was this building refinished and what did it look like and they'd just a lot of people just oohing and awing about how much work we put into them you know and. I mean it's just kind of neat, I mean summertime on the street people ask and you know ask me if I had anything to do with this building or that building, or ask me what I do. And I tell them well I just maintain the insides of them and keep them clean and stuff like that. I mean it ... it is kind of ... []people ask what, what it was or we've got the little brochures that we hand out and it tells what exactly where it was and what it was and but you know they just want to talk to a person most of the time. And it's pretty neat.

Stacey Carkhuff: So you pretty much get to recreate history for your job right?

Si Dennis: Yeah ... [] when I first started talking about the buildings I really I had to go back and read (ha)

Stacey Carkhuff: Do some research

Si Dennis: Do some research on what it actually was so I could tell them this is what it was, this building here was put here on such and such a date and moved from this place to this place, that kind of thing but ...

Stacey Carkhuff: Were there any building records [] left behind that explained what the building was for?

Si Dennis: I think there is. I mean I think there's some stuff over at the City museum that people can read up and stuff. And then a lot of times the curatorial person has got like emails from people that visited Skagway did they remember this building being something other than what it was. And they'd write and tell the curatorial person about it and you know ... just ... there were people asking you know questions and stuff. A lot of times it is just ... you know it's just people asking questions I guess.

Stacey Carkhuff: Interesting. Well were you allowed to choose the colors?

Si Dennis: They ... Most of the colors are pretty much the same as the way it was, just by ... the historian that we got. He's really, really sharp. I mean he's studied up quite a bit. Just tons of information of all the buildings and the colors they were back then...but they're pretty much, pretty much close to what they were as far as outside coloring, exterior. But they're...

Stacey Carkhuff: Who is that historian?

Si Dennis: Carl Gurgkee

Stacey Carkhuff: What about the interior?

Si Dennis: Well most, except for the Visitors' Center and the Admin are pretty much the same as they were. Except for where the Visitors' Center and the Museum part of it. They're changed into museums instead of what they really are. The other buildings are pretty much ... changed on the inside the dimensions on the inside except where ... the, the ones that are least *** (sounds like "V spats") they're changed to what the VC wants. They're not really into historical respect as far as what they were, so it's ah ... but you know []. In the historical part of it is the outside. That's the only part of it that hasn't changed.

Stacey Carkhuff: Okay, they made the interior fit more modern purposes.

Si Yeah it's mostly the ones that were least *** (sounds like "V spats"). The VC's can do what they used to be able to as far as putting in cabinets

Stacey Carkhuff: Oh

Si Dennis: They're dividing whatever, what they need to make their shared room whatever it should be ... they're all pretty much modern type stuff.

Stacey Carkhuff: So when the Park Service acquires new buildings is that something that you are a part of or do they acquire them and then you work on them?

Si Dennis: Most of the time it's up to the upper portion of the park. They're the ones that make the decision of what they're going to acquire and how far they're going to take it. That kind of thing, and

then after they get done doing what they do, then they, we go in and do whatever they are going to make it. Like they just acquired ... a couple buildings from []

Stacey Carkhuff: Okay

Si Dennis: One of them they're going to restore it to I think the original, what they originally was a Soapy Smith's museum thing. And the other one is going to be some kind of office or something. But you know ... it's whatever they you know people up at region it's whatever they decide that should be done. People [] at Admin they'll get together and talk. And do whatever I guess. But we don't get, we probably don't get them until after they do whatever they do, so ... (ha)

Stacey Carkhuff: Are there any particular buildings that you've really enjoyed working on?

Si Dennis: The one that I really enjoyed working on was probably the Admin Visitors' Center. You know it's the base of the game where I started learning to do carpentry and this and that. It was fun. It was ... sometimes pretty challenging but I had a lot of people there that would show me how to do this and that. And the other buildings I didn't have too much to do with all the other buildings because I was back in maintenance, doing mostly maintenance. But I think the building that I did have was the Admin building. That was fun.

Stacey Carkhuff: Uh-huh, so as the Maintenance Mechanic, switching topics a little bit, what is your primary duty?

Si Dennis: It's basically I take care of all the rigs that we got all the cars, and trucks. I do, I do work for everybody that's down there. I mean they give me work orders to do this and do that. And my days are spent just doing all the work orders I get. I mean that is what I work off of. I don't work for any one person. I work for the entire park, this park anyway. I go and [] just to go over to do this and do that. So my days are pretty much changing every day. So I don't exactly do the same thing every day,

Stacey Carkhuff: Yeah

Si Dennis: Which is kind of neat, I mean, you know I'm just everybody's helper so to speak. I can just do whatever they want.

Stacey Carkhuff: So you're essential to the park service

Si Dennis: I, I mean I enjoy it. It makes my days go fast. I don't end up doing the same thing like staring at a computer or something (ha)

Stacey Carkhuff: (ha) Right

Si Dennis: I mean it's fun. So that's, you know, that's my job.

Stacey Carkhuff: It sounds like you really like it. That's good.

Si Dennis: I do. It's ... fun. It's ... I like working for the people, the [] all the guys that I work with and it's just, it's just neat.

Stacey Carkhuff: Good, so before working for the park service you were a long shore man. And you did that from 1970-1982. Do you want to tell me, I don't know what a long shore man does? So if you could explain what a long shore man does and how you got into that job?

Si Dennis: Well in '70 on, at the Oar Terminal, the oar terminal is still here but back then we had a bigger building, you know I started out there as just a worker. I worked the belts. They had a big belt that they ran the oar on to lower the ship and this and that. And I worked up to running a front end loader to load the ships. And then eventually I ended up over on the dock side, on the wharf side working on, putting the ship, called The Brown, F.H. Brown, and it brought in cargo that we unloaded and loaded onto trains. And the trains took them up to Whitehorse. That's when the train was driving []. So we unload, loaded the containers, those containers that were on a ship. So we just unloaded that and put it onto trains and they took it away. And we unloaded the empties and stuff and they took them back the other way. So it's kind of like a heavy duty operator. I did that for twelve years. And then they finally shut down []. But basically that's what ... I actually worked two jobs back then. I worked the Oar Terminal and White Pass, just something in between that.

Stacey Carkhuff: So you went up to White Pass and did things there too?

Si Dennis: No, no we just worked down here on the docks.

Stacey Carkhuff: Oh down on the docks

Si Dennis: When I was in High School I worked on the railroad as a [] section crew, section crew maintenance working on the rail. And we did that all the way up to Glacier, a place called Glacier.

Stacey Carkhuff: Uh-huh, so you said you worked on the Frank H Brown and did cargo?

Si Dennis: Yeah,

Stacey Carkhuff: What kind of a ship was that?

Si Dennis: It was a container ship. It was made to haul containers. You put them down in a hole called cells. They had six of them across the ship. You'd put them in cells. And then we'd close it up and put the cover lid lock it up, bolt it down. And then we'd put some stuff on top, some containers on top. But it also [] oil, fuel

Stacey Carkhuff: Oh at the same time

Si Dennis: Yeah it was a combination of fuel and fuel barge and containers and great big tanks on the side that would be there on the side. And they'd pump that up to, actually up to Carcross or I mean actually up to Whitehorse through eight inch pipes. []

Stacey Carkhuff: [] no longer there correct?

Si Dennis: No they took them out. Now they do, they truck it. It is no longer going up in the pipe. (ha)

Stacey Carkhuff: Okay, so how did you load the cargo? I'm assuming it was very heavy. What machinery did you use for that?

Si Dennis: Well we used, on the ship we had what they called a ship's crane, which was a crane that ran across the deck on a trolley [] over here and then they'd run it out to the end. And they had some wings on it so you could go out onto the docks and drop it off on a flat, a railroad flat. Then they'd move the train up and you'd go back get another one and run it out there and set it on these flats, which was usually the crane *** up and down with the tide [] it had a pretty long ways to eye that and they had little cones on the train about that big and that shape (motioning) and they had to get those coming down and then as you're letting it loose the ship would go up and as you were coming down from a rolling ...that's when you picked up the splitter[] pretty much. You had to be pretty well coordinated to do all that. Cause you had two things at one time. I mean it was fun. There was a lot of guys who done that. My Dad was the one who taught me, my Dad it was three or four other guys that went up in the crane and watching for about [] until they felt like I could do it. Finally I started running it. Then on the other end they had what they called a strato carrier, which was a, it was a container rig that lifted up containers and ran over the tops of the cars. So if you had ten or twelve cars that's how many cars you had to run over. So, that was kind of, you know, it was kind of hard to learn at first but after you learned it, it was okay. And then you were sitting sideways too. So the rig is going this way and you're sitting this way steering this way and so you had to look that way. And all the wheels turned (motioning) and you can make sharp turns ... so all the wheels were turning.

Stacey Carkhuff: That would be a little disconcerting not facing what you were doing.

Si Dennis: Yeah, it takes some

Stacey Carkhuff: That would take a while

Si Dennis: It took some getting used to getting that one down.

Stacey Carkhuff: Oh I bet. Did anyone ever make any mistakes or have accidents with those?

Si Dennis: Oh yeah, we had guys banged the cars and jack-knifed it and stuff [] part of the job. Most of the time due to like ice build up on the deck and stuff like that.

Stacey Carkhuff: Wind?

Si Dennis: (nods) Wind. Had a few guys dump their can coming out of the cell. You go down there and it had a little light on top that blinked when the hooks were out. [] it turned back you do your, you know as soon as it blinked you knew you had to hook things. And they'd be lifting and it would be okay until it got out of the cell. And as soon as you'd clear the cell and whatever hook wasn't there it would tip it that direction. So we had a couple of them do that and a couple cans drop down.

Stacey Carkhuff: What was in the cans?

Si Dennis: Most of the times it was when they were shipping out of Canada they were shipping containers full of asbestos.

Stacey Carkhuff: Oh

Si Dennis: It wasn't the kind of asbestos that you shouldn't be working around it was a different. I don't know what kind it was but it was in big containers and we never seen it. We never seen it and most of the time I mean they were all banded. They'd lock them up. So you couldn't.

Stacey Carkhuff: Okay

Si Dennis: And they were in bags and stuff. And then there was stuff like ore. It was ore and it would come down from the mines up in Yukon. And then they had whole bunch of stuff that they shipped down and when they were shipping back in [] and stuff like that.

Stacey Carkhuff: Oh okay.

Si Dennis: It was just like groceries. Like we had refrigerated cans that had all the groceries and freezable that they shipped up to Whitehorse, and that's how Whitehorse was getting all the produce and stuff from here. So it was all kinds of different stuff, just different commodities and stuff.

Stacey Carkhuff: Uh-huh and so after that ended that's when you started the park service job?

Si Dennis: Yeah, they shut down the rail in '82 and I started work, it was like the middle part of '82 that I started working for the park.

Stacey Carkhuff: Did a lot of men that used to work for the White Pass move to the Park?

Si Dennis: Yeah we had, it was probably five or six of us. It [] those guys were the guys I was talking to you about that would help me with my carpentry and stuff. Those were the guys that worked up there and previously in their other lives someplace else as carpenters and so

Stacey Carkhuff: So you worked with them for a long time.

Si Dennis: Yes and they started, I had three or four of them just retired from the park so. They moved down south. []

Stacey Carkhuff: So to go back further in history, you said in high school you worked as a Section Crew Maintenance?

Si Dennis: Yeah

Stacey Carkhuff: Ah, what besides obviously maintaining the sections, what exactly did you do for the job?

Si Dennis: We did, we maintained the rail. Section three we were from Clifton all the way up to [] Inspiration Point was our district and we'd go up there in the mornings, 7:00. We check all the rails, we'd

check the switches, and they'd assign us a rail that we had to replace it was mostly, mostly the rails that were on the curves. And that was where the train leaned into so []. We'd go up there and if they had a stretch that had ties that needed to be changed out we'd change out ties, that kind of things. It was mostly just maintenance yeah. Track patrol we'd go out on track patrol, check out the tracks, check out the bridges, make sure the bridges were still there, (ha) that kind of thing. But you know it was mostly just maintenance. And they were running a train just about pretty close to seven days a week.

Stacey Carkhuff: Oh for cargo up to Whitehorse?

Si Dennis: Yeah and passengers. So it was it was a lot of wood ... being in high school we'd go out there and work like crazy for eight hours and you know. [] I did that for two summers.

Stacey Carkhuff: That's a good start to a good career.

Si Dennis: Huh?

Stacey Carkhuff: That's a good start to a good career.

Si Dennis: Yeah it was actually ... I was working with a bunch of guys that were in High school when I was there. And it was fun. It was lot of hard work.

Stacey Carkhuff: I bet

Si Dennis: [] and changing out ties and rails, spiking, you know that kind of stuff.

Stacey Carkhuff: What's spiking?

Si Dennis: That's just spiking the rail down to ties. Six inch spikes, rail spikes which is square and they've got a great big loop on one end of it that goes over the rail [] like

Stacey Carkhuff: Kind of loop on one end, oh wow. Good thing you were in high school (ha)

Si Dennis: (ha ha) yeah it was ah it was a lot of work but it you know it was the only job in town so we'd just do it. It was fun.

Stacey Carkhuff: White Pass was the big employer.

Si Dennis: Yeah actually when my Dad was working there, there were probably two or three hundred people working. It was a big employer you know type thing and then it just ran. Actually it just ran out of business and they couldn't do the hauling like they could and [] money thing you know.

Stacey Carkhuff: But they reopened it in '88 as a passenger train.

Si Dennis: Yeah so that's been...they haul quite a bit, they haul quite a few people in the summertime, three hundred, four hundred thousand. That's a lot of people.

Stacey Carkhuff: That's amazing.

Si Dennis: And they were starting to think of running the rail further. I heard talk about that [].

Stacey Carkhuff: And what do you think about that?

Si Dennis: I don't know I, it used to be kind of fun when ... you know when it would take... in the winter when we played basketball it would take eleven hours to get up there. You know but I think there might be people out there that would like to ride the rail all the way to Whitehorse. It's a neat, it's a neat [] especially during the day but. It was kind of neat. And these people would actually enjoy it I think.

Stacey Carkhuff: Oh yeah

Si Dennis: I mean the route, the scenic route you know it's just unbelievable. It's just fun.

Stacey Carkhuff: Uh-huh was there anything else that you'd like to [] is there anything from your history that you think would be important?

Si Dennis: I think just about everything I said is you know pretty much what we used to do so it's, it's just been fun growing up here I mean you know. You know right now I wouldn't want to go down south or any place except to visit, that kind of thing [] just trying to stay where I'm at until I retire. Then I don't know what I'm going to do, but

Stacey Carkhuff: I'm sure you'll find something (ha)

Si Dennis: (ha ha) Yeah

Stacey Carkhuff: Well thanks for coming and doing this interview with us.

Si Dennis: It's been great. It's been fun.

Notations:

[] indicates gap in replay

*** indicates the recording was garbled