

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF BRUCE NOBLE

CONDUCTED BY KAREN BREWSTER

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KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIBED BY RUTH SENSENIG

[00:00:00]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok, this is Karen Brewster. Today is May 15, 2019, and I'm here with Bruce Noble in Grand Junction, Colorado. And this is for the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park Oral History Project. Thank you, Bruce, for making the time this morning to meet with me.

BRUCE NOBLE: My pleasure.

KAREN BREWSTER: I appreciate it. Um, and so I know you were superintendent at Skagway from 2000 to 2004, is that correct?

BRUCE NOBLE: Correct.

[00:00:29]KAREN BREWSTER: So before we get there, can you tell me a little bit about your background and -- ?

BRUCE NOBLE: Sure. I started my career in cultural resources with the National Park Service. I worked as a historian, initially in the National Register of Historic Places program in the Washington office. You know, in a roundabout way, that all kind of led me to Alaska because I took a trip to Alaska. Alaska was one of the states that I reviewed National Register nominations for, so I took a trip to Alaska in 1988 and kinda thought, "Wow, this is an amazing place. I could live here." [00:01:09]And I got to know Sandy McDermott, later Sandy Anderson, who was in the cultural resources program in the Alaska Regional Office, and as I recall, she kind of invited me to apply for the job at Klondike Gold Rush when the time came. But then I left after -- after being in cultural resources in the Washington office of the Park Service for about eight years, I left during what the Park Service called "Operation Opportunity." The Park Service was reorganizing at the time that Al Gore was kind of reinventing government, and there were incentives being given to people in central offices to move out to the field, and so I moved in 1994 to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, and I became the chief of interpretation and cultural resources there. And so I was there for six years. Great experience. I loved Harpers Ferry. I love the person that I worked for at that time. And it was during that time that I applied for the job at Klondike Gold Rush and got accepted for it.

[00:02:19]KAREN BREWSTER: And where are you from originally?

BRUCE NOBLE: I grew up in western Pennsylvania.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And then what sort of an educational background?

BRUCE NOBLE: I -- I have a bachelor's degree in American Studies from the University of Wyoming, and then ended up getting a master's degree in History from the University of

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Wyoming. And I went and worked for a couple of years for the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office before I got hired on by the Park Service in D.C.

[00:02:53]KAREN BREWSTER: And what was it about the Park Service that attracted you to work for them?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, uh, good question. I had kind of grown up in a family that had had a lot of interest in national parks. My grandfather was a school teacher and had taken student groups on national park trips going way back to like, I don't know, 1920's probably, late 1920's. So as kids -- and we kinda grew up watching my grandfather's movies and slides and so on of his national park experiences. And he was kind of a commanding personality, and when he was ready to show a movie of his national park trips, it wasn't an option. You were sitting down and watching it. [00:03:42]And so that kind of affected all of us, and then as we got older, you know, our own parents took us on national park trips. And, you know, one thing led to another, and eventually it occurred to me, "Well, jeez, you can actually work in national parks." And I think that, combined with being in college and graduate school at the University of Wyoming, you know, in a public land state, where there were a lot of national park areas, you know, one -- it just sorta became a natural fit for me, and, yeah, it's worked out great. It's been a great career.

[00:04:16]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, so that job with the National Register Program, was that your first Park Service job?

BRUCE NOBLE: It was. Yep, 1986.

KAREN BREWSTER: So in Wyoming, you didn't do summer seasonal work?

BRUCE NOBLE: I did not. Uh, it -- well, not with the State Historic Preservation Office. However, I did have a summer seasonal job at a state historic site, South Pass City State Historic Site, which is actually a mining site. And I eventually published a pretty lengthy article about a historic mining operation in the South Pass City area that was published in the "Annals of Wyoming," which is the state history journal of Wyoming. So I kind of had a background in mining history, and then on top of that, I ended up being a co-author, with Bob Spude, a person who Frank Noors would know very well, and Bob spent time in Skagway, too. But in any event, Bob and I co-authored a National Register bulletin on evaluating historic mining properties for the National Register. [00:05:26]And it was really somewhat in that context that I came to Alaska for the first time in 1988. But in any event, the fact that I had background in mining history and some knowledge of that was part of what interested me in Klondike Gold Rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: And I think it was part of what actually made me a good candidate for the job. So, uh, yeah. All those things kind of came together as part of the puzzle, I think.

[00:05:57]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. So Skagway was your first superintendency?

BRUCE NOBLE: It was. Yep.

KAREN BREWSTER: And um, did the Park Service provide you any introductions or training to become superintendent?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, you know, it -- it's funny. I was actually thinking about that this morning before you got here. I mean, to a degree. I had -- I had been -- well, let me back up. Before I officially started in the permanent position as superintendent at Klondike Gold Rush in May of 2000, I'd actually been up there for a couple of months on a detail as kind of acting superintendent, basically because they wanted to get me there as soon as possible. So you know, I had a little bit of that time under my belt at the very beginning, and I also had some chances to go into the regional office and, you know, kind of meet people there and get a sense of who some

of the players were. [00:06:59]So all of that helped, but I do very vividly remember, when I first showed up, it was kind of like, well, is there going to be a brass band, or do I learn a secret handshake? You know, what happens? And, you know, suddenly it dawned on me, "Well, I just go to work."

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, that's what I do. So in that respect, there really wasn't a lot of preparation. They just kinda figured, well, you know, we picked you for the job, so go there and start doing it. So, you know, at the time I just kind of accepted that as how it was.

[00:07:32]When I look back on it, I realize, it was a little bit of an unnerving situation, you know, starting into a superintendent's job and, you know, having a lot of new things thrown at me and really not a lot of preparation for it necessarily. Although you know, I had worked in a park, and I understood how parks operated, but, yeah, it was a transition for sure.

[00:07:57]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I was -- I'm surprised that they don't sort of give you a training course on the duties and responsibilities and what administration rules you need to know and things like that.

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, I think -- I think maybe there's a little bit more of that today than there was at that time. And even then, some of that occurred over time. You know, for example, it pretty quickly came up that I was managing two commissioned law enforcement rangers at Klondike Gold Rush. There's a class called "Law Enforcement for Managers" that's taught at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Brunswick, Georgia, so I was basically told, after being there for about a year, maybe less than a year, I don't remember. I was basically told, you need to go take that class. Uh, so I did. [00:08:49]And there was a new superintendents class that I was -- I was asked to take. At that point, I wasn't all that new. I had been a superintendent for a couple of years. But I did go take the class somewhere in Florida. I'm temporarily blanking on the name of the town. St. Augustine, I guess, is where the class was. You know, other than having it be kind of a bonding experience with some other new superintendents, it wasn't particularly helpful.

[00:09:23]KAREN BREWSTER: But if you had had it when you were actually new, do you think it would have been helpful?

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, in a way, I almost think it would have been less helpful. Because at least by that point, I had some sense of what I needed to know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: And so, that was a potentially a benefit. But I didn't necessarily feel like I came away from that new superintendents class having received the things that I felt like I needed to know. And that was a little bit frustrating. [00:09:53]I know that class is still taught. I think it's been revamped considerably since that time, and, you know, I think there was a perception at that time that maybe that class was not entirely fulfilling the needs that new superintendents had, so, you know, I'm not quite sure what the class is like today, but I'd like to think that maybe it's a little more on point.

[00:10:12]KAREN BREWSTER: What were some of those things that you felt you needed that would have been useful?

BRUCE NOBLE: Oh, boy. Now you're testing my memory a lot. Uh, you know, well, things like the Superintendent's Compendium, which, you know, actually became an issue during the time that I was at Klondike Gold Rush. It became an issue for all the national park areas in Alaska. And, you know, understanding more about the compendium and how it worked would

have been helpful. [00:10:52]Uh, the other thing, like special park directives, when you come up with park policies and, you know, things that you're trying to implement at your park, you know, I felt like it would have been helpful to know a little bit more about how those things worked. And we really didn't get much, if any, of that out of that class. So those are some of the things that come to mind.

[00:11:19]KAREN BREWSTER: What's the Superintendent's Compendium?

BRUCE NOBLE: The Superintendent Compendium is, I would say, it's primarily law enforcement-oriented, but it's also kind of resource management-oriented, and it talks about, you know, special considerations in terms of how you're going to operate the park. You know, this area's closed to the public. This area has a certain speed limit for a certain reason. You know, you're allowed to camp in the campground for this period of time. You know, it kind of lays out some of the -- the fundamental rules that are used in operating the park on a day-to-day basis.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: So it has -- it actually has quite a bit of impact in terms of how you conduct business. [00:12:12]I think that's where it -- and maybe I'm getting a little off point here, but I think that's where it became an issue for the Alaska region. And I don't even to this day know exactly the genesis of how it became an issue, but I think it had to do with some things at Katmai and some decisions that the superintendent there was making at that time. And I think it came to the attention of Senator Stevens and others of influence, shall we say, that this was kind of like, uh, a non-public rule-making, basically. That, you know, the Park Service would put these things into effect, but there wasn't any opportunity for outside entities, for local communities, to have input into the compendium. [00:13:04]And so, during the time we were there, we were required for the first time to start going through a process where you would post your compendium on your website at a certain time during the year. You would accept comments on it. You would address those comments. Once you'd done that, you would sign it and put it into effect. I actually thought it was a really good thing, and it surprised me somewhat, for example, here in the Intermountain Region of the Park Service, we're not required to do that. I don't know whether they're still doing that in Alaska or not, but it -- again, I don't know exactly why it came to pass, but the transparency aspect of it, I thought was good. And it seems to me that it could be something that would be more widely adopted across the Park Service.

[00:13:53]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, well, thank you. That's helpful. And it is a little off track, but we need to define that. So when you came on with the -- as the -- with your detail for superintendent, was that because the preceding superintendent was still superintendent, or there was just a temporary vacancy, or why?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, uh, so I'll answer that and then some.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

BRUCE NOBLE: I'll kind of pivot off of that question. So there -- to my knowledge, there had been a couple of people who had been acting there in a temporary capacity before I arrived. One was Linda Cook. Linda was in cultural resources in the regional office at that time. Bob Barbee was the regional director when I got hired there. Bob really liked Linda. Linda was a smart person, uh, had a good sense of humor, you know. Bob really liked her. Linda, last I knew, was a superintendent somewhere in the Northeast Region of the Park Service, which is back kinda closer to where she originally came from, and whether she's still in the Park Service, I do not know. But she was there for awhile. [00:15:18]After she left, Betty Ricklefs who was the administrative officer, was an acting superintendent for awhile. But, you know, you only know

what you hear about things that happened before you got there. But what I heard was that the previous permanent superintendent, Clay Alderson, I think left Klondike Gold Rush under some difficult circumstances. And, in fact, I don't think I'd be betraying a confidence to say, I believe he was removed from his job. He was not removed from the National Park Service, but I believe he was removed from that superintendent job. [00:16:05]And, you know, I don't really know all of the circumstances that led to that, but I do know that it's a small town there in Skagway. It's a pretty tightly knit community. He had been there for a long time. He was married to a woman who was a school teacher. She was obviously very much embedded in the community as a teacher, as was he as the superintendent. They ultimately got divorced. You know, you like to think if you get a divorce, it's a personal matter, but sometimes in small towns when you're in a public position, you know, it becomes a public matter as well. I think it -- it kind of reflected on him as superintendent in a certain respect. [00:16:53]I also have the sense, and again, I wasn't there, but I have a sense that Clay, who I think had been superintendent there for about fourteen years, had gotten to a point where, uh, maybe he sort of thought that he'd been there long enough that people owed it to him to come to him. He didn't owe it to them to go to them. And so I think he had become, you know, maybe a little bit too sort of retrenched in his office. And I think there were some issues that required engagement with the community that were perhaps not working out quite as well as they should have. [00:17:36]So all those things had kind of gone down before I got there. It also added to the awkwardness of being a first-time superintendent. What I've subsequently experienced is that when you start a job, it's kind of nice to have some contact with your predecessor. Sometimes your predecessor doesn't really want to have much contact. You know, they've moved on. But, you know, I've always felt in the past like that opportunity has generally been there for me when I've started as a new superintendent, and sometimes it's been extremely helpful because your predecessor can say, you know, here are the things you need to be aware of. Here are some issues that are important. Here are some people that, you know, have some things going on with them. You know, all that was helpful. [00:18:23]I did not feel when I got to Klondike Gold Rush that I was at liberty to contact Clay. He was still with the Park Service, uh, and I just -- I felt like it would be awkward. I mean, I don't recall that anybody told me, don't contact him. But I just felt like it would be an awkward situation. So I didn't really have the benefit of his corporate knowledge, you know, his perspective on things. Before I left Klondike Gold Rush, I think he was -- I think he ultimately or at least for a time ended up managing the FAPLIC (Fairbanks Public Lands Information Center) there in Fairbanks.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

BRUCE NOBLE: And so, it got to a point where he and I were kind of a little bit in the same orbit. So I did eventually meet him, get to know him a little bit, and so on and so forth. And you know, we did eventually have a little bit of collaboration, but we didn't at the beginning.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: And -- and that -- that was kind of an awkward situation.

[00:19:23]KAREN BREWSTER: And that was, you felt uncomfortable because of how he had left the job, and -- and -- ?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well --

KAREN BREWSTER: In terms of contacting him.

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, yes. Exactly. Exactly. Yes. Yeah, and, you know, not knowing exactly what had gone on on his watch except for what I had been told, and, you know, I know some of what I was told is that there are some things here that you need to clean up.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: So uh, but, you know, I came in with sort of those marching orders but without the opportunity to really interact with my predecessor about, you know, what his thoughts were.

[00:20:05]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, and you had mentioned that there were some issues that maybe, you know, how he dealt with them between the park and the community, do you recall what some of those might have been?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, the main thing that I recall that was really kind of front and center when I got there had to do with the Moore House.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: And uh, it was kind of an interesting issue. The assertion from the City of Skagway was that the street was too narrow in front of the Moore House. I'm forgetting now exactly what street it was.

KAREN BREWSTER: Fifth, I think.

BRUCE NOBLE: I think so, yes. Yes. And you know, the assertion was, there are four buses that go through there, there's traffic on that street. There's kind of a, you know, a narrowing down of the street right in front of the Moore House, and they would -- the city would like to have more room to expand, um, and widen the street. And there was a real logjam over that issue. [00:21:13]I think Clay Alderson, probably I'm guessing, other people on the staff did not think that was a great idea. You know, in some ways it probably wasn't the greatest idea. But it also seemed like there was a real kind of foxhole mentality rather than, you know, thinking about well, you know, can we meet each other halfway. And I do recollect vaguely having some discussion with Linda Cook, who had been there as acting superintendent about that issue when I got there, and as I recall, Linda kind of felt like, you know, it's not as big a deal as it's been made out to be. It's really a communication problem more than anything else. [00:21:59]And so we ended up doing a survey and trying to figure out exactly how much of the Moore House property would have been impacted, and it turned out that it was really pretty minimal. You know, there would be some impact. The -- you know, the park was going to be affected, a little bit. But it wasn't a lot. And, you know, we went through the compliance process, Section 106 compliance. I don't recall whether we did NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) compliance, but, you know, we got all the approvals that we needed to widen the street, and we widened the street. Well, we didn't do it, but we basically allowed the city to do it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:22:41]BRUCE NOBLE: And, you know, as I recall, I think they added a little boardwalk in there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, and a little fence.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah, and the fence. You know, I think all that got added in at the time. And uh, you know, to me, it didn't really seem like that big of a deal. And it seemed like it was kind of a small thing to do in order to get to a better place with the city. Which, in general, was a need. Not just on that particular issue, but just overall, working more closely with the city was something that clearly was needed when I got there. And actually, I feel like I made a lot of headway on that, by the time I left. But yeah, it -- it seemed like kind of a small issue that had sort of blown up, basically.

[00:23:31]KAREN BREWSTER: I thought that it had all been resolved under Clay's tenure. I didn't realize that it lingered over into your --

BRUCE NOBLE: Oh, yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: 'Cause I know it came to a head during his time, and I kind of thought that all got decided on.

BRUCE NOBLE: No. I think that was -- that was part of the whole, you know, mix of issues where it was felt like, you know, the superintendent is not engaging enough on this, was my take on it. [00:24:01]Now all that said, I do think it was a small thing, uh, in the grand scheme of things.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: However, I always found it kind of interesting, for the whole rest of the time I was there, I would -- you know, I've got an office job, so it wasn't like I was out in the park eight hours a day. But I was out and about quite a bit. And I would always make it my business to, you know, kind of look down the street at Moore House when I was going by there, just to see, you know, how's the traffic moving, are there any issues there. I never saw any tour buses on that street that I can ever recall. And I never saw much traffic on that street, period, that I can ever recall. [00:24:41]So, you know, what I came to conclude was that it was more of a symbolic issue than it was an actual issue. It was something that the city wanted to say that they were able to get done. And they wanted the Park Service to cooperate with them, whether there was a huge need for it or not. You know, that's -- that's kind of how it appeared to me after the fact. But, you know, again I would say, I don't feel like -- I mean, I would feel bad if I felt like we did harm to the park by agreeing to allow that street to be widened, and I don't feel bad because I don't think we harmed the park.

[00:25:24]KAREN BREWSTER: And the existing staff at the park who'd been working on that issue prior to your arrival, the cultural resources, historians, archeologists, how did they feel about that project of the widening or not?

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, that's a really good question. And I don't -- I don't really recall.

KAREN BREWSTER: They didn't come express their views to you?

BRUCE NOBLE: Not that I recall. You know, my -- and I'm just kind of, you know, digging deeply into my memory banks here, but I think -- the feeling I had from the park was that we need to move on. Uh, you know, we can't continue to be stuck on high center over this issue. If there was anybody who had major heartburn about it on the park staff, I don't ever recall hearing that.

[00:26:15]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Ok. Um, so then you said, you know, when you got there, things to clean up. I'm assuming that's internally within the staffing, administration of the park. Is that what you mean?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well --

KAREN BREWSTER: That you inherited?

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, a lot of it, I think, really was that issue with the Moore House. You know, that had become a real flash point. A lot of it, as I said, had to do with just kind of general relations with the city, with the mayor, with the city council, with the city manager.

[00:26:51]And, you know, the philosophy that I took there is that I'm not going to sit in my office and expect them to come to me. I'm going to go to them. Um, and so, I did that. You know, I went to city hall a lot and, you know, met with the guy, Bob Ward, who was the city manager. Bob was not a big personality, you know, not -- not an exciting guy, but I think he was effective at his job. And, you know, he knew which way the winds were blowing politically in

terms of what his city council members wanted. So you know, he could be a friend or, frankly, an obstacle, depending on, you know, what his sense of the politics were.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:27:37]BRUCE NOBLE: But I think in general, I had a good working relationship with Bob. John Mielke was the mayor at that time, and John was the one who had really, you know, I think sort of drawn a line in the sand over the widening of the street in front of the Moore House. And John, I forget his exact title, but he was sort of in charge of the White Pass and Yukon Route maintenance operation. And he worked out of the maintenance shop for the railroad up at the far end of town.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: And he was hard to reach. I mean, you couldn't always get him on the phone. It wasn't like he was sitting in his office all the time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: I'd just go up there, you know. I'd find him, and sit down and talk to him. And, you know, I think -- I think John and I probably looked at the world differently in a lot of ways, but I also feel like I worked well with John. And, you know, I don't know where he is today. I was told that he eventually left Skagway, but I'd like to think he would say the same thing about me. I think we ended up having a good working relationship. [00:28:40]Uh, the other thing that needed to be dealt with internally when I got there within the park had to do with just how we were organized. And for a -- a really long time, Skagway had had what was kind of an old-school organizational model where -- you know, going way back, there was a time when the chief ranger was sort of like the kind of almost the de facto deputy superintendent. 'Cause usually the chief ranger was over the interpretive rangers, they were over the law enforcement rangers, and they were also over resource management. So kind of like the, you know, the biologists and the wildlife biologists and, you know, hydrologists, those kind of folks. Well, you know, as time has gone by, and even then, most parks had kinda moved beyond that because things had gotten a lot more specialized, and, you know, it wasn't necessarily logical that a chief ranger who was mostly involved in law enforcement things should be supervising a wildlife biologist.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, so things were kind of separating out. [00:29:56]So prior to my getting there, they had already split off the interpretive function, and there was a guy by the name of David Eslinger, who was the chief of interpretation at the time that I got there. And then the next step that was kind of remained to be taken was to split off the resource management function so that that was no longer under the chief ranger. So we did that, and we put out a vacancy announcement, and I ended up selecting a woman, Theresa Thibault, as the chief of resource management. Theresa prior to that had been in charge of the city museum in Wrangell, Alaska. And there had a been a lot of sort of controversy around the museum. I think she was trying to do good things that weren't necessarily being well-recepted -- well-received in the community. [00:30:55]So in any event, she ended up getting the chief of resource management job, and so, you know, then the challenge became kind of standing up an independent separate resource management operation so that it was going to function on its own. And there were some challenges there. You know, it was just a change in how the place operated. There were new personalities involved. There were challenges. You know, I think we kind of worked through all that to the best of our ability, but I don't think it was ever -- you know, I'm not going to claim it

was a perfectly smooth transition. [00:31:39]You know, there was one employee at the time whose name I will not mention, but she had been there for a number of years, she just left. She was not really comfortable with the change in direction that things were taking. It was a disappointment to me because, you know, I -- I respected that employee, thought she had done a good job. I was sorry to see her leave. I even tried to help her find another Park Service job, which did not pan out, and she ultimately left. And then ultimately, I think ended up feeling like I was somewhat responsible for her leaving, which made me feel bad because I actually would have preferred that she not leave, and felt like I had helped to try to prevent that from happening.

[00:32:26]KAREN BREWSTER: And was her leaving based on the reorganization, or was it based on personalities and people who are now in different positions or supervisory positions?

BRUCE NOBLE: I think it was based on personalities. And, you know, exactly what went down, I didn't really know at the time and don't really know today. You know, I guess what I do recall from that time is, you know, sometimes personalities don't mesh. You know, that's just kind of human nature, but I also sort of felt like, everybody needs to get a chance. And I felt like some things happened really quickly, you know, after setting up the separate resource management division, where, uh, people needed to be given a chance. And I don't think everybody was as patient with, you know, providing that chance. And I think in the case of this individual employee, that's what resulted in her deciding to leave.

[00:33:32]KAREN BREWSTER: And I was also thinking that, you know, a whole internal reorganization with now reporting to different people, that some people can adapt to that, and some people are not so comfortable with that.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes. Yes. And, you know, I mean, I can be an example of that. You know, there have been changes that I've been comfortable with, and others that I haven't. You know, that's just kind of, I think, again, how human nature works. But, yeah, there was -- there was definitely some bumpy road there in that process. Yeah, an interesting mix of personalities.

[00:34:13]KAREN BREWSTER: And was there also a reassignment, if somebody was in one position -- didn't some people get moved around to other positions?

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, there was -- let me sort of think about how I want to explain this. Um, so I guess I'm just gonna be a little bit loose in the details that I provide. But there was basically a situation where there was a division chief who I just felt like was not living up to their responsibilities. And I felt like the person was kind of losing the respect and admiration of their staff, and uh, that people were gonna end up either being very unhappy, leaving, all of the above, perhaps. [00:35:12]And it was an extremely difficult situation because you can't really, um -- you know, you can't force somebody to leave. I knew that this individual was basically ready to leave Skagway, but I also knew that the individual was being very, very specific about the jobs they would take if they were to leave. And, you know, sometimes if you're trying to get out of a situation, you have to cast a wide net, you know. Casting a narrow net is not necessarily going to get you to -- to another place. And, you know, I tried to suggest that I could help find other jobs. You know, I tried to be as diplomatic as I could in saying, you know, maybe this isn't a good fit for you, but not exactly coming right out and saying that. And so ultimately, you know, I asked the person if they would be interested in another job. It would be a lateral position or lateral move.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: So that, you know, wouldn't lose any salary or anything. Person said yes. I -- I don't think they fully understood exactly what was going on, but, you know, so I was able to

move the person into the new position. I was able to kind of re-describe the position that that person had been in, actually bump it up to a higher grade level, and bring in a new person to do the job. And the person that had previously been in the job actually applied for it, and was not selected. [00:37:06]I think ultimately it got the park to a better place. You know, I think it was definitely a good thing to do. It was a hard thing to do. You know, I felt like, you know, welcome to the world of management, basically.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: When I -- when I looked back on it, I felt like it needed to be done for the good of the organization, but I didn't relish doing it. And I -- I felt bad about how it happened, and to a degree, I actually still feel bad about it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:37:41]BRUCE NOBLE: You know, it's not -- it's not exactly the way that I would like to interact with people that report to me, but it had kinda gotten to a point where I felt like I had tried everything that was legitimately within my power to achieve a different outcome and nothing had worked, and so I had to -- I had to go this route. And it was, uh -- you know, I think the employee accepted it pretty well. I think it did finally become clear, "Oh, ok. This is serious." You know, they did ultimately get another job. I -- I think moved to a place that was better for them. So -- and I think that where the park ended up as a result of all that, as I said previously, was in a better place. But it was hard.

[00:38:33]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, so you felt they needed to be -- they weren't being effective in their original position?

BRUCE NOBLE: I did.

KAREN BREWSTER: And therefore, that was affecting the functionality of the park?

BRUCE NOBLE: Exactly. Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then when you laterally transferred them into their new position, were they effective in that position? Was that a better fit for them?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, you know, I think potentially it could have been, but we didn't really have a long time to test it out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

BRUCE NOBLE: Because I do think that it was, you know, not a whole lot longer after that happened that the person did get another job and left.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. [00:39:10]And was there resentment from that person that -- after you moved them from their original position, it became a higher salary and then they didn't get hired for it? Now here's this newbie doing what they'd been doing.

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, well, you know, as I said, I thought the employee handled it pretty well. There could have been resentment. You know, sometimes there are things that people are unhappy with you about in your role as a superintendent that they're not necessarily going to come tell you.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, I mean, I think just logic sort of suggests that it wouldn't have been a happy situation. However, you know, I don't think he let that be a barrier.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: And uh, you know, I admire that.

[00:39:58]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. There wasn't any obvious him being disrespectful or difficult for the new person? To create an uncomfortable workplace for the new person?

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, I don't think so.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

BRUCE NOBLE: I don't think so. And I think even the new person would say that. No. No. But I think the new person came in with full knowledge about what the background behind all this was, and I think came in with an idea that, "Ok, you know, I've got to work hard to try to make this work as well as it possibly can." And actually, I think it did work pretty well.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: And I think it was, in a way, was a tribute to everybody's effort to, you know, really try to make the best of the situation. So yeah, that -- that -- I think it speaks well of everybody in that sense.

[00:40:47]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. When you first came to the park, did you have ideas in your head of where you thought the park should go? Did you have any kind of a background to know that?

BRUCE NOBLE: Um, well, I mean, interesting question. Uh, you know, I feel like I kinda knew a lot about where the park wanted to go. You know, one of the benefits of having come to Skagway from Harpers Ferry National Historical Park in West Virginia was that -- uh, the Harpers Ferry Center was right there in Harpers Ferry. They had a fantastic National Park Service library. They had all kinds of documentation about all the national parks in the system. So you know, I had access to the general management plan, which was relatively new at the time that I took the job. You know, I had access to like, Frank Norris' administrative history. You know, I think I knew quite a bit about what the background of the place was. You know, I think what I wanted to do was move forward on some of the things that the plan called for us to do. And, you know, did I have a particular kind of a personal vision? Not -- I mean, I think I wanted to go there and do good things.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. [00:42:15]But so for some of those things that you just said that -- that had been laid out in the management plan, do you have some examples?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, uh, you know, the one thing that comes to mind -- Well, maybe a couple of things that are sort of inter-related, uh, Dyea. Uh, you know, there was a lot going on in Dyea. There was a kind of a -- there was a cultural landscape study that was kind of in progress. I don't know whether it ever got completed, but it -- the cultural landscape study was trying to come up with recommendations for how the kind of Dyea town site ought to be managed. That was a controversial thing, um, I think in part because of the person who was in charge of the study who -- You know, initially, I had a good working relationship with, but what I began to discover over time was that when I wasn't around, I think this person was becoming very kind of autocratic in sort of cracking the whip and saying, "I'm producing this study. This is how things are gonna be." So, you know, I think there was some definite sort of tension around that study and about how, you know, the Dyea town site was gonna be approached.

[00:43:46]There was also related stuff about commercial use in Dyea, and -- and, you know, there had been -- I'm not sure what they called it exactly, but like a commercial services strategy that had been laid out for Dyea in the general management plan, and it kind of divided things into different kinds of commercial activities and the number of people that could participate in those activities. It was basically trying to, uh, I think control the number of people that were participating in commercial ventures in Dyea. And so, you know, we were trying to implement all of that. [00:44:33]You know, I think actually that worked pretty well. And we were also able to implement, and I'm not going to remember the right terminology here, but we actually had

kind of a per-person fee that we were able to implement for all the commercial operators that were doing business in Dyea. And so, as I recall, it was \$2 per person. [00:45:04] And the commercial operators were, you know, always, I thought, extremely nonchalant about things like that because they just passed it along to their customers. And, you know, these were mostly tours that were being sold on the cruise ships, and, you know, generally those folks had money to spend. And it wasn't really affecting the commercial operators' business. And the clients still wanted to go on the activity, and it brought in more money for the park. So you know, I think that was one of several things where our revenue position really improved dramatically during the time I was there because of us being able to implement that fee. [00:45:52] But then there were also other issues with, you know, what can we really do to keep Dyea from becoming too heavily impacted by visitation? So we ended up starting this, what the Park Service at that time anyway called VERP plan, V-E-R-P - Visitor Experience and Resource Protection. And they're sort of kind of social science-based studies, where surveys are done, and somebody comes in who's got qualifications in this area, uh, surveys the public, and basically asks them questions about what kind of impacts do you think would be acceptable in this area, and at what point would those impacts become so significant that maybe you wouldn't want to be here anymore? Or maybe you would find that it would impact the quality of your experience. [00:46:53] So we started working through that process, and I thought it was a really effective process. I think there were people kind of at the higher level in the Park Service then, and I think to a degree now, who were a little bit skeptical of those kind of studies, partly because of the social science aspect of it. And it's like, well, really? We're just going to ask people what they think and then make decisions based on that? Uh, but, you know, we started working through all of that, I think, with good intentions. And I know that study was ultimately finished, although it was not finished until after I left there. My impression is that it did good things for Dyea, and that, you know, it did help to kind of bring a little bit of additional order to that part of the park. So yeah, those were some of the things that came out of the general management plan that I really wanted to carry forward.

[00:47:49] KAREN BREWSTER: Um, what about the Chilkoot Trail? Were there issues laid out in that plan for the trail?

BRUCE NOBLE: Um, well, I'm sure there were. You know, I don't remember too many of the specifics. I do remember we put in a vault toilet, a Romtec vault toilet. I've been a fan of the Romtec, uh, product line ever since then. But we put in a Romtec vault toilet right at the trailhead there, kind of right where that truss bridge crosses the Taiya River. I assume that bridge is still there. And that was something that I -- I believe was called for in the general management plan, but I think it was just something that was generally perceived to be a need, that, you know -

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: People needed to go to the bathroom before they started up the trail.

[00:48:49] So we did put that in. I recall there was some issue that occurred before I got there where it used to be that there were trees that were kind of planted on both sides of the trail, right at the beginning. And there's a term that landscape architects use, like an allée of trees or something like that. I don't remember what the term is. But it was supposed to be sort of a, you know, a sense of arrival, that you are here, starting the trail experience. Well, those trees got cut down, I think by the highway department or something, and I think without a lot of knowledge from the park. And that had happened before I got there, but, you know, we were still dealing

with some of the ramifications of that in terms of sort of the, you know, initial starting point for the trail. [00:49:40]But, you know, I guess in general, uh, I mean, I could say a lot about the Chilkoot Trail, but my overall memory of the experience of managing the trail is extremely positive. You know, I thought it was just an outstanding recreational opportunity, you know, almost kind of unparalleled.

[00:50:05]KAREN BREWSTER: By the time you got there, the whole permit and campground system that's in place now was already there, or did that get established under your tenure?

BRUCE NOBLE: It was already there. The trail center was set up. What -- what did happen that was a significant change was that shortly after -- I would say within six months of my arriving in Skagway, Bob Barbee retired as regional director, and Rob Arnberger came in. Previously been the superintendent at Grand Canyon. It was an interesting thing to observe as a new superintendent. It was pretty clear to me that Rob came into that job with his ideas that he wanted certain things to happen at all the national parks. You know, he wanted to accomplish things as regional director. [00:51:00]What I found to be kind of interesting is, you know, I just observed my fellow superintendents and, you know, it seemed to me there were some people that were working with him, and some people who were actually resisting him. You know, maybe they had good reason for not liking the things that he wanted to do, and he certainly wasn't a person who brooked a lot of opposition, so resisting him was not gonna be an easy thing for anybody. [00:51:26]But one of the things that he clearly wanted to do for the Chilkoot Trail was to see us begin to charge a fee. Uh, and prior to my arrival, and prior to Rob Arnberger coming on, it probably would have been, mm, 2001, when he came on as regional director, there was a fee for hiking the trail. But it all went to Parks Canada. And I think Rob's feeling was, uh, he wanted to see the Park Service get a part of that as well. He didn't want to -- he didn't want to see it all go to Parks Canada. And um, you know, I don't remember the premise for why it all went to Parks Canada initially. I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that, you know, they were kind of operating the trail center, and they had a big investment in that, and I think it was kind of felt like it was appropriate to, you know, allow them to get some kind of financial benefit. Anyway, we went through a long, involved study with a guy from the regional office who was specifically assigned to help us figure out what an appropriate amount to charge people to hike would be. [00:52:44]And it was complicated because when the Park Service charges fees, we generally base it on comparability, so if we're -- if we're thinking about raising campground fees, for example, well we look at surrounding campgrounds and say, what are they charging? And, you know, we want to be kind of compatible with what the rest of the market is doing. But it was hard with the Chilkoot Trail because there aren't that many places that charge you to hike.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: So you know, figuring out what the appropriate amount would be was not easy. [00:53:21]As I recall, the amount we came up with was \$10. And -- and it didn't -- it didn't take away anything from Parks Canada. I mean, you know, it didn't lessen the amount that they were taking in. It kind of added to what the hikers were paying. And so we did that. We put that into effect. I do not recall that it had any impact on the number of people hiking the trail. Uh, you know, there are some local people that hike the Chilkoot Trail, obviously, but a lot of people are coming from a really long ways to hike the Chilkoot Trail, and they're spending a lot of money to get there, and I don't think an additional \$10 is gonna make or break it for most people. So uh, that was something that, you know, honestly, if Rob Arnberger as regional director was not so intent on having that happen, I probably just woulda let it be, quite frankly.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: But he did want to have it happen. [00:54:19] You know, I wanted to be one of the superintendents that was helping him to accomplish the objectives that he had in mind for the parks, and um, and so we did that. And I actually think he was right. I do think it was the correct thing to do. You know, it wasn't any kind of statement about our relationship with Parks Canada, which was fabulous. And, you know, the ability to work with Parks Canada was really one of the highlights of my whole experience there. But in terms of us getting some revenue from the trail, yeah, I think it was the right thing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. [00:54:52] And what about the historic building restoration and archeology work? Was that all completed by the time you got there?

BRUCE NOBLE: Along the trail, you mean?

KAREN BREWSTER: No, in town in the Historic District.

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, well. Restoration and archeology. You know, there was archeology going on along the trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

BRUCE NOBLE: And I remember we would, you know, we'd hire archeologists. We kinda had what we called a spike camp that we would set up, kinda near the base of the Chilkoot Pass, and we would have archeologists that were, you know, basically up there for most of the summer doing archeology work. You know, I don't recall there being a lot of archeology in town at that time, uh, cause I think most of that had been done.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:55:44] BRUCE NOBLE: And the restoration for the most part was done. What really happened in terms of the historic buildings in Skagway that was significant was that during the time that I was there, pretty much all of the historic leases on those buildings rolled over. And so this would have been, uh, you know, the early 2000's. So let's say -- I think most of them had originally been fifteen-year leases, so they dated back to the mid-1980's. And in the mid-1980's, there was some cruise ship traffic coming to Skagway, but it was nothing like what it became. And so the costs of those leases was pretty insignificant back in the mid-'80's. But in the early 2000's, when we rolled all those over, the lease prices just skyrocketed up, and that was kind of anticipated. You know, it was just, it was the market. You know, the market had changed dramatically. You know, I remember Jeff Brady, who ran the Skagway News at the time, and they were a lessee. They operated out of one of our historic buildings. And I remember Jeff saying, you know, if he could have anticipated what was going to happen in Skagway, he would have wanted more than a fifteen-year lease.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

BRUCE NOBLE: Because, you know, the change was -- was significant. But again, that brought in a lot of revenue. We were, as I recall, uh, by the time I left there, our annual revenue from those historic leases was about \$500,000. And uh, that was -- that was all money that the park kept. [00:57:41] You know, what the issue developed into was, we need to spend this. And, you know, that was one of the challenges that I had with the various chiefs of maintenance that worked for me there, was that over time, you know, that money began to build up more and more, and so we needed to have sort of a maintenance plan that, you know, spend out money that we were taking in. Because we couldn't just keep sitting on it. That wasn't ever the intent. And the purpose of the historic leasing law that allowed this to happen was that you could keep the money because it would be reinvested in the maintenance and preservation of the buildings.

So it was a great thing to have, but it kinda changed the whole dynamics, where suddenly we had so much money that we had to be much more focused on how we were spending it.

[00:58:34]But between that, you know, that \$2 per person fee in Dyea for the commercial operators, the Chilkoot Trail hiking fee, rolling over those historic leases during the time I was there, that was huge. I mean, it changed the whole revenue picture for that park. And, you know, that was something that I felt very proud of because I felt like, I managed that well, and I managed that to the benefit of that park, and I'm quite sure they're still experiencing the benefits of all of that today. So that was all really big stuff for the park financially.

[00:59:13]KAREN BREWSTER: Was there pushback from the community or the business owners for the leaseback program and why you had to raise the rates? Couldn't you've just left it the way it was?

BRUCE NOBLE: We really couldn't have, because again, it was all -- it was based on appraisals. And you know, comparability with what other people were paying. And, you know, when you have a lease with somebody, it's sort of like having a contract. And you know, when the lease ends, it ends, and so you know, you've gotta renew it with something new. And so, I think everybody, I mean, like I mentioned, Jeff Brady made that point. But I think even he understood that the market had changed. [01:00:04]And a lot of our lessees, for better or for worse, they became companies that were doing business with cruise ship passengers. And they had -- they had money, you know. Alaska Fur Gallery, uh, I think was one. There were a couple of jewelry shops. You know, I don't think -- I think these places thought it was worth their while to pay money there to be able to do business in that location, and it was a pretty prime location. So, you know, was there any kind of pushback or dissatisfaction? I'm sure there was, but, you know, I think people really kinda understood what was going on there. And we had great guidance. Kevin Apgar was the regional concessions guy in Anchorage at that time, and Kevin was extremely helpful. And Reed McCluskey, who was the chief ranger at that time, he did a lot of the legwork on -- on how those lease documents were drafted up, and, you know, making sure that we were dotting all of our i's and crossing our t's. And yeah, it all -- you know, it would definitely was a change, but you know, I think it was a better -- a better change for the park in terms of the financial position.

[01:01:23]KAREN BREWSTER: But, I was thinking was -- yeah, the community feeling like what's the Park Service doing, making money? That the Park Service is not supposed to be getting revenue as a federal agency. Was there a feeling about that?

BRUCE NOBLE: I don't -- I don't recall that. I don't recall that. Uh, you know, what I recall, quite frankly, is that the business environment in Skagway was the most cutthroat business environment that I have ever observed, uh, in and around any national park area. And I think it was basically because you had business owners that were more or less doing a twelve-month business during a four-month season, and so little things mattered in terms of revenue. And there was a lot of competition between the retailers about, you know, who could carry what, and people saying, "You know what? I am the biggest buyer of that product, and if you try to carry it, too, then I'm going to tell the wholesaler not to sell it to you." [01:02:36]You know, it was a rough-and-tumble business environment. And, you know, in that kind of environment, I don't think people really felt that what the National Park Service was doing was even -- it was almost in a separate world. And to the extent that it wasn't in a separate world, I think people would've just kind of felt like, well, you know, this is -- they're just part of how it works here. So no, I don't ever remember any pushback about that. [01:03:07]Uh, you know, in a more general sense,

I could see somebody saying, well, is the Park Service sort of playing into the over-commercialization of Skagway? And I would hear that from time to time, and I would mostly hear that from Park Service employees. You know, not necessarily so much the people that were working at Klondike Gold Rush at that time, but, you know, maybe people in the regional office, or maybe people that worked at the park in the past and kinda knew what it had been. And it -- there was just kind of a general lament about how commercial Skagway had gotten. And so, yeah, you know, there might have been a little bit of dissatisfaction with the Park Service role in that commercialization, but even there, I think most people that were concerned about excessive commercialization didn't pin that on the Park Service. You know, they saw that more as a result of the cruise ship industry, and, you know, the power that they had. But that's a challenge. You know, that was definitely a challenge.

[01:04:17]KAREN BREWSTER: Did you feel like it was getting overly commercialized?

BRUCE NOBLE: I did. Yes, I did. And, you know, I felt that way increasingly during the time that I was there. And I -- you know, putting myself in their shoes, I can see where the city council members would have been under a lot of pressure to try to accommodate this business activity. You know, there were some big players there that were spending a lot of money and were used to kind of getting what they wanted. And I think it would have been hard for, you know, any locally elected official to really stand up to that. But I remember being at a city council meeting where I was speaking -- I don't remember exactly what the issue was, but I remember saying, "Don't kill the goose that laid the golden egg." And I said, "The goose that laid the golden egg here is the historic character of Skagway, Alaska. And if you diminish that to the point where that's not visible anymore, then you have basically given away your biggest drawing card." And, you know, I don't know that people were really receptive to that.

[01:05:37]And the -- you know, the example of how that kinda could go off course has to do with that ice house, which as I understand it, I think it's still perched there somewhere on the Moore House grounds.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yes, it is.

BRUCE NOBLE: And you know, that thing was -- well, let's see. I think it was kind of sort of across the street from the Moore House, basically.

KAREN BREWSTER: Originally?

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes. Yes. Or maybe it was down another block towards the water. I'm not remembering for sure right now, but somebody came in and wanted to do kind of a big redevelopment of the buildings that were facing out onto Broadway there. And as a part of the redevelopment, they wanted to create more parking behind the building. And so, uh, in their mind, that was going to necessitate something happening with the ice house.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: That, you know, it couldn't stay where it was. [01:06:43]Well, I found this to be hugely frustrating because, to me, they could've changed the design for the parking lot.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: I mean, it would not have really required that much of them. Maybe they could have parked fewer vehicles in there, but they could've just left the ice house where it was. And, you know, I had spent a long time saying, we're not going to move it. And, you know, I had really stuck with that position because I didn't want people to think that that was the easy out for them. You know, I wanted them to figure out another solution to the ice house issue.

[01:07:15]KAREN BREWSTER: The Park Service already owned that building at this point?

BRUCE NOBLE: We did. We did. Yes. Uh, you know, it was in a state of relative disrepair. It was more or less kind of storage, if you could call it that. There was just kind of stuff that was stuck in there. It wasn't restored. It wasn't being used for any particular purpose. But it was there in its original location, and it was a historic Skagway building. [01:07:42] And it ultimately became clear that this developer wasn't going to back down, and they were not gonna change their plans. And I remember one day, you know, we were having a meeting, and I was kind of saying, "Well, you know, even if we did want to move it, I mean, how would we pay for it?" And Evelyn Meyer, who was there for many, many years, retired a few years ago, she was kind of our budget analyst. And Evelyn said, well, you could pay to move it with historic leasing money. And I'm like, wow. You know, that never occurred to me. So at the end of the day, that's what we did. And my recollection is, it was not cheap. I think it was like, \$90,000 or something to move that building. I could be wrong. But it cost quite a bit of money, and I hated to do it. It was happening right at the end of my tenure there, and I thought, this is such a horrible outcome, but the only other option was, the building was going to go down. And so it kinda seemed like this was really the only recourse at that point. So yeah, that -- that -- that was frustrating.

[01:08:59] KAREN BREWSTER: And then do those funds also go into helping restore the building, or that's a separate pot of money, restoration funds?

BRUCE NOBLE: No, they did. And, you know, that's really what the money fundamentally was for. And that was what I was talking about earlier, that it -- you know, it more and more became a game of coming up with -- there's a name for the plan that I'm not remembering right now, but it was sort of like an ongoing maintenance plan for all of our historic buildings. And we would say, you know, each year we're going to spend x amount of money doing these things on these buildings, and to kinda have a list of projects lined out, uh, so that you had something to spend the money on.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: Because we didn't want to just continue to accumulate it.

[01:09:52] KAREN BREWSTER: Right, but I was thinking, like the bigger, whole -- if you had a whole building, whether it's the ice house or the YMCA/Meyer building?

BRUCE NOBLE: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or you know, it was the Mascot or the Pantheon, those got restored from some pot of money, but I'm thinking that's different than the leaseback pot?

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, oh, I see what you're saying.

KAREN BREWSTER: Those weren't historic restoration funds?

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah, I think initially, they were getting specific money for that restoration work. And, you know, like I said, most of that was done before I got there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: I don't recall for sure how it was done, but I think they were, you know, sometimes just getting add-ons, you know, budget add-ons from Senator Stevens. Like "Oh ok, we'll give you this amount to do this building." So it was kind of like an addition to the park's basic budget is -- is what my recollection would be.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. [01:10:51] My -- another question I had on the lease program is as you said, you know, that rollover, and you had to increase the rates, and so people had to apply, how did you decide who gets a lease for Building A, and who gets it for Building B?

BRUCE NOBLE: It was a competitive process. You know, you had to advertise all of 'em. You had to accept proposals. You had to evaluate the proposals. You know, it was really kind of like

how we handle concession operations in the Park Service. You know, it's a competitive process, and you kind of look at the proposal. You look at what the person is offering. You look at their financials to kind of, you know, try to make some determination about the likelihood that they can actually, uh, run a viable business in that location. [01:11:41] You know, in the case of these buildings, certainly a lot of it had to do with how they proposed to protect the building and protect its historic character. And there were certain things in -- in the solicitation that we put out that kind of dictated that, uh, you can't make certain changes. You know, that was clarified. So, you know, we wanted to see how people responded to that and get some level of comfort that they weren't gonna come in and, you know, want to tear out the interior of the building or something.

[01:12:16] KAREN BREWSTER: So it wasn't like low bid wins the contract?

BRUCE NOBLE: No. No. It was -- I mean, I think if anything, it was probably more like high bid, you know, would've -- but I don't think it was totally bid-related. You know, I think it had to do with the complete package of, you know, what they proposed to pay. And I think there was kind of a -- as I recall, sort of a minimum threshold that they had to agree to pay.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: So, you know, that I think was pretty much spelled out up front. I think it was more to do with how would they preserve and protect the building. That had a lot to do with it. And could they -- you know, did their financials really indicate a -- a -- a pretty good expectation of them being able to be successful there. Because you didn't want to have somebody come in and go belly-up in a couple of years, and, you know, then have to go through the whole thing all over again.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. [01:13:14] And was the issue of a local business versus a business coming in from Outside, was that a factor in the decision-making process?

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, you know, not that I really recall. Uh, you know, did -- did we want to have Jeff Brady and the Skagway News stay as a -- as a lessee? Yes, we did. You know, there was no question about that. Uh, I'm trying to remember the woman's name. There was a little building that was kind of on the alley between our headquarters building and Jeff Brady's building called Miss Kitty's Buttonhole --

KAREN BREWSTER: Buttonhole, yeah.

BRUCE NOBLE: And Jan -- I think her -- no, it wasn't --

KAREN BREWSTER: Jan is the --

BRUCE NOBLE: No, it wasn't Jan Wrentmore.

KAREN BREWSTER: It -- it -- no, she's the Red Onion. Sue Rappleye?

BRUCE NOBLE: Sue Rappleye, thank you. Thank you. And uh, you know, I don't remember all the, you know, dynamic that went down there, but Sue was -- You know, it was a smaller building, she was a smaller operation, uh, you know, I -- without recalling all the details, I'm sure she would have been more price-sensitive in terms of her ability to pay more for the lease. And I don't really remember how that played out. I don't recall whether she continued on as a lessee after it rolled over or whether she got out of it at that point. Uh, you know, I know at some point she did get out of it, but I don't remember exactly whether, you know, that happened when I was there or whether it happened later.

KAREN BREWSTER: But you remember her having issues with the fees?

BRUCE NOBLE: I don't -- I don't specifically remember it, but I could see where she would.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

BRUCE NOBLE: I could definitely see where she would. [01:15:04]And, yeah, it was -- it wasn't a bit of a dilemma just because you got these big kind of conglomerates that followed the cruise ships around, whether they were in Alaska or the Caribbean or whatever, and so, yeah, you did have local folks that were competing with those people, and they were driving the market up. Absolutely. So, you know, it was a consideration, you know, kind of in our hearts, I guess you would say, but did we actually have an ability to control, you know, who got what lease? Not exactly. You know, it wasn't like there was a local preference or something.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. That's what I was wondering. [01:15:45]Because there certainly is criticism through the years that I'm sure you've heard that, you know, there's all these outside businesses selling jewelry. It's not local products, local people.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so how do you respond to that criticism?

BRUCE NOBLE: It's -- are you asking me that?

KAREN BREWSTER: How do -- how -- I know you're aware of the criticism.

BRUCE NOBLE: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: If it's a bit of a criticism of the park because you're the --

BRUCE NOBLE: Sure.

KAREN BREWSTER: For your buildings, because you're the lease provider.

BRUCE NOBLE: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: So if someone were to make that comment, how would you respond?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, I would respond by saying, it's a really tough issue. And it is. And I don't remember exactly, you know, how the lease documents were set up. I don't remember exactly how the solicitation was handled, so, you know, I don't recall all the details about how much flexibility we had. But I do know that just the mere fact that the lease prices had gotten so high would sort of dictate that some local people were not going to be able to do it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:16:56]BRUCE NOBLE: And, you know, is that a good thing? You know, I guess in terms of supporting local business, it's not a great thing. You know, was it a good thing budget-wise for the park? Yes, it was. You know, it absolutely was. But, you know, could somebody with some, uh, level of legitimacy criticize the Park Service for their part in that? Yeah, I think they probably could. But again, you know, I would say, we weren't the primary driver of it. You know, we were just kind of stuck in the middle of this, kinda, really dynamic cruise ship-oriented environment. And, you know, it was tough. [01:17:43]And, you know, we were basically, you know, in the grand scheme of things, I mean, I know people will say, well, the Park Service has sixty million acres in Alaska, or whatever. It's a big player. But, you know, in terms of budget and staffing, you know, we were a pretty small entity. And, you know, we've got all these big corporations.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, that are in there doing business in Skagway. You know, you're kinda out-gunned. So it was a hard -- it was a hard situation.

[01:18:13]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and as you say, you didn't have an ability to give preference for local people. It was a straight-out competitive -- ?

BRUCE NOBLE: Not that I recall. Not that I recall.

KAREN BREWSTER: And did you have in your policies a way to say, well this business -- a business has to have a certain Gold Rush theme, or it has to carry certain kinds of products? You couldn't dictate that?

BRUCE NOBLE: I do think we had some control over the products that they offered, and I do think we did have some control over the, you know, the kind of thematic way that they presented themselves to the public. Certainly, in terms of signage and whatnot, you know, that was huge.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, the Historic District Commission was really pushing on all that.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes. And, you know, that -- that was basically, as I recall, it was created as a result of the park being created there. And, you know, the park had kind of a seat on that commission. I was very involved with it. And I think it was something to do with the business of the commission that led to me, you know, getting up in front of the city council members and saying, "Don't kill the goose that laid the golden egg." So, yeah.

[01:19:30]KAREN BREWSTER: Also about this leasing program and all that, we do have to remember that the Park Service does not own every building in downtown Skagway.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: You only had control over the buildings that you owned.

BRUCE NOBLE: Exactly. Which, you know, relative to the totality of the buildings in Skagway was a pretty small percentage. You know, I think we had some great buildings, and, you know, some sort of anchor buildings. But, yeah, we did not own the majority. But yeah, we --

[01:20:03]There was a whole kind of historic signing plan that we developed during the time that I was there, and a tremendous amount of effort went into that, uh, you know, in terms of coming up with sign specifications that, you know, in some cases were actually based on historic photographs and, you know, other documentation that we had and trying to replicate, you know, fonts and -- and, you know, sometimes replicating signs for businesses that didn't even exist anymore.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:20:38]BRUCE NOBLE: I seem to recall there was some sign that was something named Noble, you know, some product named Noble that we ended up highlighting on the side of one of the buildings there. But, yeah. Yeah, you know, there was a lot of concern about appearance and presentation, and even a little bit about, you know, some wayside signage and some, you know, information about the historic character of a particular building. Yeah, that was all part of the leasing program, as well.

[01:21:08]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, and that applies to any building in the historic district, public or private. They have to abide by those sign and font requirements and things?

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes. Yes. You know, again, you get situations where there are waivers granted and things, and so forth, and you know, that -- I think that was the issue with that building that ended up impacting the ice house. It seems to me that it was -- it was going up higher, it was wider, there was something about it that was kind of in excess of what typically would have been allowed. And, you know, again, I think it was a hard call for the mayor and the city council members, but, you know, I think sometimes money talks, and I think sometimes they caved to money.

[01:21:57]KAREN BREWSTER: I didn't realize that waivers were an option.

BRUCE NOBLE: I think they were. I mean, you know, I think, the -- you know, the Historic District Commission could make recommendations, but, you know, it wasn't like they were

necessarily like enforcing the law or anything. So some of it was just kind of goodwill, basically, in terms of people's ability to or willingness to comply.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:22:24]BRUCE NOBLE: There was a guy -- I forget the guy's name. Casey, uh, I think he was a lessee, too, and he was kind of a local guy who ran a jewelry shop.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, McBride.

BRUCE NOBLE: Casey McBride, thank you. Yes. Yes. And he had been the chair of the Historic District Commission for a really long time, including most, if not all, the time that I was there. And, you know, I liked Casey. I think he worked really hard to try to, you know, do the right thing for the Historic District. It was tough. Definitely a tough job.

[01:22:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I would assume there was a lot of pushback from business owners to not want to have to abide by all those details.

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, I'm sure there was. And, you know, I don't remember all of that in terms of non-Park Service buildings.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: But, yeah, I just know that over time there was um, you know, increasing numbers of challenges going on there. The place that always got -- the people -- the place people were always wanting to compare Skagway to was Dawson City. And, you know, I don't know what Dawson City is like today, but back in those times of the early 2000's, I mean the streets weren't paved.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, Dawson City was more remote. So just by its very nature, it was kind of more rustic. You know, it hadn't been discovered by, you know, big, corporate tourism the way Skagway had, and so, you know, there were a lot of people saying, "Well, jeez, wouldn't it be nice if Skagway could be more like Dawson City?" Yeah, it would've -- it would be nice. And I think in terms of historic authenticity, it probably would have been for the best, but, you know, the business environments in the two places were just so different.

[01:24:14]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, well, I drove through Silverton yesterday on my way here, and it reminded me of Skagway. The train from Durango, it stops. It's an old mining town. You know, it's a bit of a tourist attraction. People come in on the train. It has not been fancified in the same way that Skagway has been.

BRUCE NOBLE: Right. Right. Yes. Exactly.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um, but it has the same kind of feel to it. [01:24:41]So, on the Historic Commission, you said, so the Park Service had a representative who actually served on the Commission?

BRUCE NOBLE: I believe that that was required. I think that that came out of the legislation that created Klondike Gold Rush as a national historical park.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: I believe it was 1976 that the legislation was passed. And it called for the establishment of a Historic District Commission and for, uh, representation from the Park Service on that commission. And I think somehow that got sort of, uh, incorporated into the city government's -- you know, they established the Commission.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, through their own channels in response to the Park Service legislation. And it, you know, continued to function after that. You know, I think they did a good job. I think

the people on the Commission, and, you know, I don't -- beyond Casey, I don't remember many of them now, but I think they were really committed to trying to do the right thing. It just -- it got increasingly challenging.

[01:25:51]KAREN BREWSTER: And was there a conflict of interest having a Park Service staff person on the Commission?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, uh, you know, I think because it was basically legislated, there wasn't a conflict of interest. Uh, you know, serving on commissions and so on, usually you need to get some kind of ethics approval to do that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: At that time, things were a little looser than they are now, but I don't -- I'm not sure that it even would have been required just because I think it was like, you know, a legislated role for the Park Service.

[01:26:27]KAREN BREWSTER: So during your tenure there was always a staff person on the Commission?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, and I think it was me. You know, I think after Theresa Thibault got there, I think she had some involvement in it, but yeah, I think it was me.

KAREN BREWSTER: It wasn't Karl Gurcke, the historian?

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, not that I recall. Uh, yeah. No, I don't recall Karl being really involved in what the Historic District Commission did. Maybe he was, and I just -- maybe I was just seeing it through my involvement, but yeah, I don't recollect that.

[01:27:00]KAREN BREWSTER: But you remember going to Commission meetings and having those discussions.

BRUCE NOBLE: Oh, absolutely. Sure. Oh yes, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Well, I was thinking, shall we take a little bit of a break? Are you ready for that?

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. I could stand to go --

(After the break)

[01:27:14]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. I thought I'd sort of take us back to some of the management administration issues that you walked into.

BRUCE NOBLE: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: That you started to talk about before. Um, that it seemed like before you got there, that maybe were some issues within the leadership team. Oh, your vacuuming's getting louder.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: She must be above us.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. Do you want to --

KAREN BREWSTER: Shall we --

BRUCE NOBLE: Pause it for a minute?

(After a break again)

[01:27:43]KAREN BREWSTER: So we were -- I was bringing up again this issue with the administration and the leadership team and what you inherited. And I know -- I think it was before you got there, there was this, um, evaluation report done?

BRUCE NOBLE: Right. Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: That was before you got there?

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes, it was.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you know the circumstances of what led to that?

BRUCE NOBLE: Um, you know, I don't. And when you had first mentioned that, I had completely forgotten about it. And I've kind of thumbed through it a little bit. Didn't you send me a copy of it?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. I haven't --

KAREN BREWSTER: I also have one here if you want to look at it.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. I haven't really read through it word for word. Uh, you know, it does seem to me that some of it had to do with just kind of the organizational changes that I talked about.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, breaking things up that had previously been under the chief ranger. [01:28:37]And, you know, I don't -- yeah. Management review. I mean, I tend to look at this -- oh, interesting. Huh. Yeah, some of the people who were involved in this. Goodness gracious, Jack Burns. Yeah, I worked with him at the Denver Service Center. I think it's the same guy. Um, what I tend to see in this is that this is kind of a -- probably a routine thing that they were doing when there was a change in superintendent. They were probably bringing in a team, and, you know, evaluating the operation and making some recommendations. So I think that's kind of what --

[01:29:15]KAREN BREWSTER: So you don't recall if this was done because Regional felt like things were not working well with staff at Klondike?

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, I don't recall, and um -- yeah, so here's some of the -- Yeah ok, interesting. I do not recall. But my guess would be that there was nothing out of the ordinary about this. I really doubt that it was being done because it was thought that there were some specific problems there that called for. You know, like I said, I think it was probably done more as sort of a routine matter.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: And, you know, I think it was partly to help a new superintendent coming into the job to sort of move forward on things that the regional office felt like needed to be moved forward on.

[01:30:08]KAREN BREWSTER: And as you said, one of their recommendations was the resour -- creating a head of resources position.

BRUCE NOBLE: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Which you did implement. Um, were there other things that you implemented that you think that were coming out of this report?

BRUCE NOBLE: Um, you know, there was another thing that I looked at when you had first sent me this that I thought, wow, actually, we didn't really do that. So let's see here, "Recruit GS-12G for resources." Yes. Yeah, April 24, 2000. So that would've been when I was there kind of in the acting capacity.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: "Hire a GS-5 administrative support clerk as outlined in the report." Maybe we did that. I don't really recall. You know, that would not -- you know, I'm not trying to judge things based on the grade level, but that wouldn't have been an extremely significant thing that I would have necessarily recommended. [01:31:07]Uh, "budget computer specialist," we did do that. Uh, after a little bit of drama, somebody coming and then leaving after two weeks.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

BRUCE NOBLE: We ended up getting an excellent person in that position. Um, she ultimately left the Park Service after transferring to a couple of other Park Service jobs, and that's kind of unfortunate, but that's a whole different story. So, uh, yes. "Chief ranger position by removing the duties associated with resource management." Yeah, and they're basically saying, I guess, come up with a new position description for that.

[01:31:44]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Which would make sense, if you took out their supervisory role of interp. staff and resources staff, you'd have to have a new job description.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes. Yes. "The new chief of resource management over the first six months should review the recommendations associated with the historian, museum curator and custodial worker," so on and so forth. Ok. And I'm -- you know, I'm sure at some level, that was done. "Review position descriptions. Conduct desk audits on wage Grade 5 maintenance worker and wage Grade 3 custodial worker." Mm, I kinda remember that, but I don't remember exactly what was going on there. "Hire temporary interpreters." We certainly did that. "Prepare a written historic lease maintenance program." This is what I was talking about earlier.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: "Including a funding plan." [01:32:31]"It is critical the Park document the cyclic maintenance program using historic leaseback program funding in order to ensure that accountability is achieved."

KAREN BREWSTER: And so that, you implemented that?

BRUCE NOBLE: We did, but, you know, that would be maybe the one thing of all of those things that probably didn't come together as well as I wish it could have. You know, we -- it -- I just -- I think we had a tough time finding the right people to actually do that. Um, and it was, you know, kind of a complicated thing. And I just don't think we had the right people at the table during my tenure there to really get that in place the way it needed to be. And so that became, you know, a bit of a struggle, sort of an unfulfilled expectation. [01:33:29]I remember there was a woman who came in after I left to act for me, Nancy-somebody from the regional office. You seem to be able to --

KAREN BREWSTER: That name's not a familiar one. I can't pull that one out.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. I can't think of Nancy's name right now. And she ultimately -- you know, she spent, whatever, three to six months there in Skagway, eventually retired from the Park Service. I don't think she ever did become a permanent, full-time superintendent, as far as I know. But I remember talking to her and saying, you know, "We really do need to get that maintenance plan done." [01:34:08]And I was told by people after I left, she really cracked the whip, you know, trying to achieve that. And I think she ran into some of the same challenges that I did, just, you know, having the people around the table that needed to be there in order to accomplish that goal was a bit challenging. I'm kind of guessing, uh, I think they did ultimately get a good, uh, a really good facility manager in there who's very highly regarded. I think he's the guy who's the facility manager at Denali now. Ray-somebody -- I can't --

KAREN BREWSTER: I don't know.

BRUCE NOBLE: I can't think of his last name. But I'm kind of guessing when he got there, they probably did get that done, is my thought. But, yeah, that -- of all the things on the list, that was probably the one thing that really didn't get done to the degree that we would have liked it to of.

[01:35:03]KAREN BREWSTER: And you mentioned that there were challenges to getting that done, getting certain people around the table or whatever. Can you expand on that?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, uh, I mean, what I -- here's what I would say as a general rule. When I was there at Klondike Gold Rush, I was always amazed by the quality of the young people that we would hire. We had some extraordinarily good employees. You know, Jim Wessel, who came in as a ranger, fabulous guy. Rose Perotto, later Rose Worley, she was the one we hired into that I/T budget analyst position, fabulous employee. We hired a woman named Meg Hahr who was just sensational. She came and worked in our resource management division, went to Kenai Fjords, got a job as the chief of resource management at Pictured Rocks on the Upper Peninsula of Lake Michigan, and, unfortunately, right after she got there, she was killed in a bicycling accident. A really, really sad thing 'cause she was just a wonderful human being and just such an outstanding employee. [01:36:26]So we had great, great young people who were early in their career, you know, didn't have kind of family encumbrances that would make it difficult for them to come to Alaska for a Park Service job, but what my observation was, when you got to the division chief level, that's where it got more challenging to get the right people into the jobs.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: Because I think people who have reached a point in their career where it's reasonable for them to aspire to that kind of position, well, you know, a lot of times they, you know, they're going to be old enough that they're gonna have kids. They're gonna have kids maybe in high school. [01:37:03]There were -- there were certain people that maybe wouldn't have wanted their kids to go to high school in Skagway. It was a small school. I know there're even local people who had kind of lived there for a long, long time that would send their kids out of Alaska to go to high school, just because they thought they'd get a better education there. You know, it -- it became -- in my opinion, it was hard to get people who were really, really excellent, high-performing people as division chiefs to want to come and work there. Uh, you know, it sounds to me like maybe there's been some forward progress made in that regard. [01:37:45]The other thing about going to Alaska kinda later in your career is that, uh, you know, it used to be that you didn't want to retire in Alaska because the, uh, the locality thing worked against you. You know, when you got the locality pay, but what you actually got was base pay for your regular salary, and your retirement income was going to be based on base pay. And base pay is like, really low. So you know, base pay was being supplemented by the locality, but, you know, it wasn't really helping you when it came to what your retirement income would be. So a lot of people late in their government careers would not want to go to Alaska. [01:38:33]Now, you know, that has changed now. They've changed the locality pay. I think it's a more conducive environment for people to come there and even to retire there if that's what they choose to do. So in any event, yeah. It was a tough -- it was a tough challenge, getting the right people into division chief positions. That was my experience.

[01:38:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And were there issues with some employees who had been there a long time and therefore they're sort of set in their ways, and a new superintendent comes in, and it doesn't work as well?

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, I don't really recall that. You know, I -- I mean, I did mention earlier the issue with the one employee who left --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: -- when -- when a new supervisor came along, but I didn't necessarily feel like that reflected directly on me, it was just kind of like a change.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:39:30]BRUCE NOBLE: You know, I didn't -- I think maybe there were times when there were some people that reported immediately to me that I didn't feel as supported by as I would have liked to have been. Uh, you know, that was true. But in terms of what you're describing, people who have been there for a long time, you know, who might have had ideas about how things ought to be done and who weren't supportive, I don't really recall that.

[01:39:54]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, especially you coming in after somebody who had been superintendent for so long. I mean, superintendencies with Park Service frequently change on a regular basis.

BRUCE NOBLE: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: But they had somebody there for thirteen, fourteen years. That's -- I was wondering if that made a difference to the new -- the new regime?

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. No, I didn't feel that. I do remember somebody made a comment one time about, well, you know, I was handling hiring very differently, uh, than -- than Clay had, my predecessor that -- You know, he would get people really involved in the hiring process, and, you know, it wasn't just him making a hiring decision. [01:40:42]And, you know, I will say at that time, I was doing a lot of that kind of on my own, when it came to making a hiring decision, partly because I guess I felt like it was ultimately my responsibility, and I think partly because at that time I was like, "Well, jeez, I don't want to necessarily create more work for other people. You know, I'd like to sort of try to contain that." [01:41:08]I think over time, I've actually seen the benefit of getting people more involved and having sort of panels of people that are involved in making hiring decisions, and, you know, being a little more inclusive in that regard. I do remember that comment being made, and, you know, I mean, those things are legitimate. I don't -- I don't really remember as a general rule that there were people that weren't receptive to my being there.

[01:41:35]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Well, you mentioned the -- getting that lease building maintenance plan going.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that you had challenges getting that off the ground. Can you talk about some of that?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, just I mean, I think, again, it was just having the right person in the job.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that job meaning chief of maintenance job?

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes. Yes. And I -- you know, I just -- you know, I was there, mm, for a year, well, maybe two years, with one chief of maintenance. I don't -- I don't recall now what -- I don't recall if he retired. I think he retired. And then we hired another chief of maintenance.

[01:42:25]You know, they were people who had experience in the Park Service, the kind of day-to-day operation stuff. I mean, that was kind of their bread and butter, and they knew that. But to kind of, you know, ask them to sort of take it to a higher level and deal with something that was maybe a little bit outside of their comfort zone, well, you know, we just didn't have the right person to do that during the time that I was there, is -- is my -- my recollection of it.

[01:42:56]And, you know, the other thing is, like anything, it becomes a workload factor. I mean, you know, it was going to take some effort. If I -- if I had to do it all over again, looking back on it, I think what probably would have been helpful at the time was to ask for more regional office help to do that. You know, I think they would've had people who would have been willing and able to help. And, you know, that -- that would've been a good thing. You

know, that's always a little challenging as a superintendent. You know, you want to be careful about the times and the places that you ask for regional office help, uh, because, you know, at some level, you want help when you need it, but at other levels, you want to sort of give the impression that you're taking care of your own issues. And, you know, if you're asking for too much help too often, well, you know, that can sometimes sort of give the wrong impression. But no, I think in hindsight, asking for regional office help with that at the time would have been a good thing.

[01:44:05]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that brings up one of my questions, which is the local versus regional relationship. Good, bad, um, did -- this is an example you said where you might have wanted their help. Were there were other times where they came in and wanted to do things, and you were like, we don't need you, or they're interfering with local issues?

BRUCE NOBLE: Um, you know, for the most part, I don't remember a lot of that. You know, I alluded to some of it when I talked about Rob Arnberger as regional director.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: I mean, he had certain things that he wanted to do. And I think in all the parks in Alaska, you know, he was kind of expecting the superintendents were going to cooperate with him in trying to get those things done. And we did that with the fee that we implemented with the Chilkoot Trail. [01:44:57]But, uh, you know, I'm not thinking of too many examples of that. I think the -- the one frustration that I probably had, just as a general rule, dealing with our regional office is that, I didn't feel like most of our people in Anchorage really understood the complexity of the operation at Klondike Gold Rush. You know, I think in Alaska, with so many big parks there, you know, the complexity of a superintendent's job and of a park operation is judged based on how many millions of acres you manage. And, you know, in Skagway it was based more on how many hundreds of thousands or millions of visitors you have.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:45:43]BRUCE NOBLE: And it was also based on some of the things we've already talked about, your ability to operate in this really dynamic business environment, political environment, you know, really being elbow-to-elbow with a lot of people in that small town that you had to be able to work with and get along with. And so, if you're just looking at it as oh well, you know, this is one of our smallest parks in Alaska, uh, you know, a lot of times I think people wanted to put it in the same category with Sitka. I do not think there is any comparability, other than the fact that Sitka and Skagway are both in Southeast Alaska. [01:46:20]I think Skagway is a much, much more complicated operation. It certainly was at the time, and I would guess that it continues to be today. And I just never really felt like our regional office fully got it, as far as what was going on in Skagway. Now the breath of fresh air was the regional chief of maintenance, who came in from Yellowstone, by the name of Tim Hudson. And Tim is still working for the Park Service. I think he's worked for the Park Service for like fifty years now. He's a -- as far as I know, he's the superintendent of this new national park area that got established in Maine a couple years ago, North Woods or something like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

[01:47:05]BRUCE NOBLE: But Tim was a, you know, real veteran Park Service person, and he instantly got what was going on in Skagway. And, you know, he told me after he got there, he said, "Wow." He said, "You got a lot going on here, Bruce." And I was like, "Well, thank you for recognizing that." Because, you know, he was one of the few people who I thought really sort of

did see all the ins and outs of what goes on there. But I'm sorry, I'm kind of probably deviating from --

KAREN BREWSTER: No, no. No, no. That's -- you're answering exactly what I was asking, which was the local versus regional relationship and how that worked or didn't work and changed over time and things. So that answered that. [01:47:54]I was thinking that, you know, Klondike you say wasn't very well understood. I wonder if that's partially because it was historic, as you said, it was in this town and it's historic, and most other Alaska national parks tend to be more wild lands, natural history kind of parks.

BRUCE NOBLE: I -- I think that's true. I really think that's true. I think that had a tremendous amount to do with it. And I think that was also the same reason why they tended to lump Klondike Gold Rush in with Sitka.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: 'Cause they thought, oh, they're both historical parks, it's kind of the same thing. Well, not exactly. You know, Sitka for one thing, just didn't have nearly the cruise ship traffic that Skagway had. But I think there were other differences, as well. [01:48:46]You know, I recall, one of the things, I'm thinking more about kind of regional office relationships, one of the things that was always really frustrating to me and really hard to understand was the land selection process in Alaska. And, you know, there was municipal land selections that had taken place within the boundaries of Klondike Gold Rush. So the City of Skagway actually owned land within the park boundaries out in Dyea. And they also owned a fairly sizable chunk of land way up the Chilkoot Trail. It was actually up above Sheep Camp Campground.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: It was between Sheep Camp and the Chilkoot Pass.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[01:49:36]BRUCE NOBLE: And, you know, I never really got a clear answer about, "Well, you know, why did Skagway even want that?" But, you know, what I think it was is, it was like a -- it was an investment, basically. You know, if they had that land, well, at some point, you know, maybe there's something they would want to do to develop it, or maybe the Park Service would buy it from them for a ton of money. So, you know, it was sort of an investment. But what I always thought was really unusual during the time that I was there was that the National Park Service was a minority land owner within our own boundaries.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

[01:50:16]BRUCE NOBLE: We did not own the majority of the land in our boundaries.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and I know that the Chilkoot Trail is just a corridor.

BRUCE NOBLE: It's just a corridor. Now --

KAREN BREWSTER: You don't own the whole area around it.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes. Yes. Now we did make some headway on that, because there was a piece of legislation that went through, I think before I got to Alaska, but it involved Glacier Bay. And Glacier Bay had a piece of land, I believe it was called Falls Creek, that was taken out of wilderness status. So it was actually kind of a big deal. But the reason it was taken out of wilderness status was because they wanted to put in a hydroelectric power plant there to provide power for Gustavus. And I think they have ultimately done that. [01:51:10]And as a part of the legislation, there was a requirement that in compensation for the Park Service giving up this land, having it taken out of wilderness status, the State of Alaska would give land to the Park

Service. And one place that they could do that, under this legislation, was -- I think it was called Long Lake at Wrangell-St. Elias.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: And another place that they could do it was along the Chilkoot Trail at Klondike Gold Rush. [01:51:45]And uh, you know, I worked a lot with Chuck Gilbert, who was the lands program coordinator in the regional office for many, many, many years. I liked Chuck a lot. I told Chuck many times, I said, "Geez, Chuck. You know, I really feel bad possibly being a beneficiary of this legislation because it just seems wrong to me that they're taking land out of wilderness status at Glacier Bay." And he was always, you know, very supportive, and -- and saying, "You know, Bruce, you didn't create that. You know, that's not your responsibility. Don't -- don't get too hung up on that." [01:52:22]But I do remember having a meeting one time with Marcia Blaszak, who I think at that time was the deputy regional director, and Gary Candelaria, who at that time was the superintendent of Wrangell-St. Elias, and myself, to talk about, you know, what were the replacement lands gonna be. And I really was grateful to Gary because Gary basically said, "You know, we got thirteen million acres at Wrangell-St. Elias. It's not going to kill us if we don't have Long Lake. You know, it would be fine for that to go to Klondike Gold Rush." And that's what I'd been advocating for for a long time, so I really appreciated him saying that. That didn't all totally come to pass during my tenure there, but not long after I left, we did acquire, you know, I think a couple of thousand additional acres along the Chilkoot Trail that had previously been owned by the State of Alaska. So that was a big deal. But I -- I'm guessing even today, we are still minority land owners within the boundaries of Klondike Gold Rush. And I just -- I thought it was wrong. [01:53:35]I had -- at Harpers Ferry, I had gotten to know the guy who was the superintendent of Antietam really well. John Howard was his name. John was a really creative guy, somebody who probably didn't get as much credit for the good things that he did as he actually deserved. But as I recall, he had worked a lot with the Mellon Foundation to get land -- to get money to acquire property at Antietam. And I had talked to John and had gotten some information about the Mellon Foundation, who the contact people were and so on and so forth, and I might have even had some conversations with people at the Mellon Foundation. And I kind of thought, you know, here's -- here's kind of an iconic historic place in Alaska, and wouldn't the Mellon Foundation potentially have really strong interest in trying to help the Park Service acquire this land. [01:54:33]And I got to talking about that in a meeting one time with Rob Arnberger when he was regional director and Marcia Blaszak when she was the deputy regional director, and Marcia in particular said, "You know, Bruce. I don't think you should be working with the Mellon Foundation to try to acquire this land. If we were going work with the Mellon Foundation at all in Alaska, I'm not sure the Klondike Gold Rush is the place that we'd want 'em to focus their efforts." And I -- you know, I didn't say anything. I mean, these were people I reported to, but I just thought, "Holy smokes." You know, it wasn't like I was asking them to do any work.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:55:14]BRUCE NOBLE: And it just seemed to me that it was such an obvious, you know, potential benefit for Klondike Gold Rush, and they just completely shut me down. And, you know, that was getting towards the tail end of my time there, and I was -- you know, I was kind of getting to a place where I'm feeling like, "Well, if you're not letting me work on this, then what else -- what else can I do here?"

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: So you know, it kinda got me to a place of starting to think, yeah, maybe my long-term future is not here. [01:55:47]Although it was painful because I loved Alaska. You know, I loved -- I loved Klondike Gold Rush. I loved Alaska in general. You know, I think in a perfect world, I would've spent my whole career in Alaska. It was really hard to leave. Really hard. But, you know, I was just getting to a point where I was feeling like, I'm not getting the support I need to do the things that I think this park needs to do.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. [01:56:14]And so, um, what was I going to say about, um -- so that land issue, does that -- that's a legacy of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act?

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes. Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: But wouldn't the municipality -- they had the land already before ANILCA?

BRUCE NOBLE: No, they didn't, and uh, you know, it would have been, I think, kinda undifferentiated federal land before ANILCA, and then it became Park Service land, and then municipalities got to make their selections.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, but I didn't think they could select within what was already selected as federal land. That's why I was thinking they had it first, and you -- and the fed had to select around it.

BRUCE NOBLE: Well --

KAREN BREWSTER: I don't remember.

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, again, I'd like to understand more about that. Actually, in retirement, I might just go back and work on that. Because I've -- you know, I've thought about writing several things that that would factor into, and I would like to understand it more.

[01:57:20]Klondike Gold Rush was not an ANILCA park. It actually --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, it was pre-ANILCA?

BRUCE NOBLE: It pre-dated ANILCA. There were a couple of provisions in ANILCA that applied directly to Klondike Gold Rush, but for the most part, you know, we were not dealing with ANILCA on a daily basis like some of the ANILCA parks did.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: So I was never as familiar with all the provisions of ANILCA as I would have liked to have been at the time. But uh, all I know is, they did select land within federal boundaries at Klondike Gold Rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Ok.

BRUCE NOBLE: That did happen.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. That's a new one on me.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah.

[01:58:04]KAREN BREWSTER: So we were sort of talking about, you know, the division chiefs and leadership and your management style. So when you got there, how were those positions communicating and working with each other and then with their respective staffs?

BRUCE NOBLE: I think there was definitely friction at the management team level. You know, absolutely. And, you know, it's kind of hard to even describe exactly where all of it was coming from. You know, the one division chief that I talked about feeling badly about having to put him in a different position and so on, in that particular situation, I just don't think there was respect there. You know, I think people --

KAREN BREWSTER: From his staff?

BRUCE NOBLE: And -- and peers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[01:59:00]BRUCE NOBLE: You know, I think the peers saw, "Wow, you know, there's a lot of stuff that's not getting done." But there were other aspects of it that I think were a little more personal. You know, people that were for whatever reason, they were just not getting along. And uh, you know, that was unfortunate. There could have been some gender issues there, or some perceived gender issues. You know, I can't really -- and I think some of it was just style. You know, I think there were some people that, you know, didn't like other people's styles of operating, and so it -- it made it challenging. [01:59:46]And, you know, when you're a superintendent of a park, what you fundamentally want is for people to get along. But if they don't, you can't wave a magic wand and make that happen. And, you know, you can do leadership team retreats and have people come in and, you know, make recommendations about how you can work more effectively together, and so on and so forth. And, you know, we did some of that during the time I was there. I've done it subsequently at other places that I've been. But at the end of the day, people really have to make an individual decision that they're going to do something different to work better with their peers. And uh, you know, I just -- I didn't feel like we quite overcame all that, you know, during the time I was there. And that -- that was frustrating.

[02:00:37]KAREN BREWSTER: So those retreats, was there any progress made after those, or did the participants have to all say, you know, we'll be nice to each other now?

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, you know, I'm sure there -- I'm sure there were those kind of pledges that were made. I remember we brought in kind of a facilitator, I think from Anchorage, to work with us. And I remember we had a retreat out in Dyea. And, you know, this would've been, I'm going to say, 2003. You know, I'd probably been there for awhile for that time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

BRUCE NOBLE: And um, as I recollect we all went through the Myers-Briggs process and so on. And I remember the facilitator kind of saying -- I hope it was a joke. It really, actually, was not a good thing to say out loud, but I remember the facilitator saying, you know, looking at each of your individual personality profiles, it's kind of amazing that you're even able to work together as well as you do.

(Laughter)

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, that's not very helpful.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. It was not a constructive thing to say. It was the kind of thing that you could certainly think, but you shouldn't have verbalized it. And she did verbalize it. And as I recall, it was to the whole group, although I don't really remember exactly when and how it came up. [02:02:05]But, yeah, I just think there were -- there were issues there that never really got totally resolved. I'm sure people said, you know, we're going to try to work together to try to do better and so on and so forth, but, you know, I just don't think it really got resolved to the degree that I would have liked to have seen it.

[02:02:26]KAREN BREWSTER: And you gave the example of that one position that you moved around. Were there other things that you tried to implement to try to improve the communication and morale?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, you know, at that time we weren't doing the Employee Viewpoint Survey and so on. You know, I mean, the stuff that we kinda did, uh, to try to deal with morale I think was sort of the garden-variety things that you do. You know, you have social get-togethers

and, you know, parties for this reason and that reason and potlucks and things like that. You know, in those kind of environments, everything was -- was pretty good. You know, I think on a, you know, kind of a personal level, I think people could sort of put their differences aside and do fine. It was more in the work environment that you couldn't overcome those things.

[02:03:22]And, yeah, there was -- and I think you alluded to this in some of the emails that you sent, there was somebody at some point who, you know, filed some kind of a complaint against me or something. And I, you know, I don't remember exactly even what the nature of it was, but the challenge with this particular employee is that they wanted to be paid more, and they were viewing me as an obstruction to having that happen. Well, Marcia Blaszak, who had been around the regional office for a number of years and who ultimately became regional director, she wasn't going to let this person get a pay increase in a million years. I mean, it just wasn't happening. So it almost didn't really matter what I thought because when it got to Marcia's level, you know, it wasn't going to go forward. And so, I never actually told that to this employee because I basically felt like, uh, it would be creating an issue between that employee and some other person, and I didn't want to, you know, add to the difficulty of the situation. So I just kinda, you know, did the best that I could to take my own responsibility for that, and uh, and the employee, I think, as time went by, became increasingly dissatisfied that they were not getting a pay increase. And I think they saw the remedy for that to be to come after me. [02:05:08]And uh, you know, initially, I think there was some suggestion that it was really bigger than just this particular employee, that it -- you know, that it extended further in the work group than just that person. But the regional office ultimately decided that it was just -- it was just kind of between me and that employee, or at least, that's how we were going to approach it. And I actually think that was the right decision. And so they sent over, like a conflict mediator to sit down and work with that employee and I. Uh, you know, again, I honestly thought so much of it was related to that person wanting more money and that, you know, that was really the root of it. But we did talk about some things that, you know, we could do to work together more effectively. We ultimately signed an agreement to, you know, kind of solidify our commitment to working more effectively together. [02:06:19]I took it all really hard. You know, if that kind of thing were to happen today, I would take it hard, but I wouldn't take it as hard because I've seen how things go in the workplace, and, you know, I better understand that even when people are doing their very best to get the right outcome, sometimes people just aren't happy. That happens. It's just kind of the nature of things. At the time, I kind of felt like, "Wow. You know, I've been here -- I've poured my heart and soul into this job." And I really had. And I felt like, you know, now somebody's sort of trying to victimize me for all the effort that I put into it. So I really took it hard. It was a difficult thing for me. [02:07:04]Not too long after that, the employee got another job. And they actually did get a grade increase, so they got the promotion that they wanted. We happened to be on annual leave when I got a call to do a reference check on that employee, and uh -- and so my wife overheard it. You know, I'm talking to the person on the cell phone. And uh, -- and we finished the call, and my wife said, "You lied." And I said, "Well, what do you mean?" And she said, "Well, you said all these things about this person that aren't true." And I said, "Well." I said, "I was trying to emphasize the positive. You know, I will admit that." But I said, "You know, the reality of it is, this person and I are not getting along. Now what am I gonna do, you know, scuttle their chances for getting another job?"

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: So you know, ultimately that person moved on. Hopefully, they were happier, you know, wherever they ended up. But that was definitely a difficult situation for me, for sure.

[02:08:13]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and it's interesting you bring up that being a new superintendent and kinda walking into this bit of a quagmire of personalities and then the leadership issues, that that must have been challenging.

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, it was, and, you know, by the same token, you know, if I'm looking at it objectively, it might have been challenging for everybody else as well. You know, it was challenging for me, but you know, I was -- I was a new superintendent. And so did I have it all figured out? No, I didn't. And, you know, the reason I know that is because I've been doing it for nineteen years now, and I still don't have it all figured out. You know, it's complicated work.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[02:08:59]BRUCE NOBLE: But, you know, I -- I would like to think I've gotten better over the years. And, you know, was I making some rookie mistakes? Maybe. Uh, you know, that's a possibility. But, you know, I always feel like in the workplace, just like in families, just like in human relations, you know, fundamentally there's got to be a level of forgiveness towards each other. I mean, things are not always going to go exactly the way you want 'em to. And, you know, at some level, you've got to accept that and come to work the next day, and roll up your sleeve and get back to work. And, uh, yeah. There wasn't -- there wasn't as much of that kind of level of forgiveness going on there as I think would have been helpful for everybody involved.

[02:09:44]KAREN BREWSTER: And do you see how your management style was sort of implemented there? I don't know if you can describe your management style.

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, you know, what I would like to think and what I've always told people is that I try to be inclusive, you know, and I try to be more of what I understand as kind of the, you know, the Japanese corporate management model of letting the employees have a voice and not making autocratic decisions, and, you know, that's the way I've attempted to operate. I am by no means the sort of person who's going to come in and say, look, you need to do this, this, and this, and have it done by noon tomorrow. You know, that's just not my style. So you know, I try to work with people where they're at, and supportive in trying to do the things that need to be done. [02:10:35]And, you know, that's how I feel I'm operating. Now, you know, maybe other people see my style a little differently than how I see it. You know, I don't know. I can't speak for how somebody else might see it, but I think that was another reason why I took some of these things so hard because I thought, "Gez, folks. You know, I'm not trying to, you know, keep you under my boot heel. You know, I'm really trying to allow you to blossom and flourish in your job, and, you know, let's get a little, uh what, thankfulness and a little bit of mutual support for that." And, you know, I didn't feel like there was as much of that as I would've liked to have seen there.

[02:11:19]KAREN BREWSTER: Did you have situations where an employee came to you with complaints about their supervisor or their work situation?

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, you know, I don't remember that so much other than that one situation that I already mentioned --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: -- about the employee who left.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, I don't -- well, and, you know, and I guess I remember it a little bit in terms of the one person that I had to reassign.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: Who ultimately left and got another job. I did have some people come to me and say, "You know, if I've gotta keep working for this person, I don't think I can stay here." [02:11:55]So, you know, I did have some things like that. It wasn't -- it wasn't commonplace. And in my experience, that doesn't happen very often. That's a really dangerous thing to do. If you go over the head of your supervisor and go to your supervisor's supervisor and say, "You know, that person is jerking me around." Uh, you're taking a real chance. You might get what you're hoping for, but you might not. So a lot of people don't want to take that risk, I don't think.

KAREN BREWSTER: Even if it's your supervisor that you have problems with? So who are you supposed to go to?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, I mean, yes. Absolutely. And, you know, what I've done -- I don't remember whether I did it at Klondike Gold Rush or not, but what I've subsequently done is, you know, I've got a published open-door policy. And I put it out in writing. You know, I renew it from time to time. And I basically say, "You know, the objective is to work out issues with your own supervisor when issues come up. But if you're not able to work 'em out with your own supervisor, come and talk to me." And, uh, people do do that sometimes. And -- But again, you know, when they do, I usually have a tremendous amount of admiration for the people because it's a hard thing to do. You know, it generally has to have gotten to a point where somebody's really, really unhappy about something before they take it to that level. And, you know, other than the instances that I'm already remembering --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: I'm not really remembering other examples of that happening at Klondike Gold Rush.

[02:13:34]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Um, but you feel there was some improvement with the leadership team and people getting along while you were there?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, as a -- yes. As a general rule, I do. Because, you know, the one employee I mentioned who wanted a pay increase got another job, got a pay increase, moved on. Now that happened fairly soon before I left, so I wasn't really around to kind of, you know, reap the benefits of that, but I think it was a positive thing for the park. Because I was not the only one that this employee did not get along with, so I think it was a good thing. You know, the person I mentioned who had to be reassigned and ultimately left, the person that I hired to replace that person, was really good, and I think came in and brought some good things to the park, and was somebody who kinda operated in a, you know, non-confrontational manner and fit in well with other people on the management team. So yeah, I think we did -- we did make some positive changes. It just, I guess you might say, through attrition.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: But it wasn't necessarily all the way to the point where you would have looked at it and said, this is ideal.

[02:14:50]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, you said that example of one person you hired that it worked really well. Were there people that got hired that it added to problems or created new problems, that didn't work out as well?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, uh, mm. You know, the -- the -- how to -- how to answer that question. You know, you gotta look at sort of the totality of things, and you can zero in on something and kinda miss the bigger picture sometimes. You know, there -- the person who I hired as a chief of resource management, I mean, I think it was friction there that caused this one person to resign

from the Park Service. And, you know, was some of that coming -- was some of the problems that led to that coming from the person that I hired? Maybe. You know, that's -- that's entirely possible. [02:15:56]On the other hand, you know, that person that I hired had a lot of connections with, oh, the -- boy, I'm -- I'm blanking on the name right now, and I shouldn't be, but uh, the folks who were the owners of the National Bank of Alaska.

KAREN BREWSTER: Rasmuson family.

BRUCE NOBLE: The Rasmuson -- the Rasmusons. And, uh, you know, ultimately, although it didn't totally come to fruition on my watch, I think those connections were really instrumental in getting the Rapuzzi Collection into Park Service ownership. So, you know, some of this stuff you gotta, like, take the whole package. And you can zero in on something and say, "Well, I wish this person was nicer to that person or whatever" Yes, you do wish those things. But, you know, you kinda gotta look at the whole package.

[02:16:49]KAREN BREWSTER: So in that case, you think in the big picture, that person was effective in accomplishing the goals you had hoped would be accomplished?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, you know, yes and no. I mean, certainly as far as the Rapuzzi Collection was concerned, absolutely. Now, you know, that person kind of came out of a cultural resources background like I did.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: So I think you'd probably say, I had expectations for somebody in that position that might have been a little greater than I had for other people in other division chief positions because I -- I knew more about what that person was doing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[02:17:32]BRUCE NOBLE: And so, you know, I might have been a little dissatisfied about some things that didn't happen exactly the way that I would've like them to have happened. And, you know, that's part of a learning experience and the growth process you have to go through being a superintendent, as well. You know, everybody comes out of their own background. They've got their own specialty area, but at some level, you gotta realize, you know, you just can't engage in everything. You know, you've gotta kind of pick your battles, 'cause there's only so much you can do as one person. [02:18:05]So yeah, you know, I think even where that person was concerned, I think in general, I was accepting of what -- what that person brought to the table. Was everybody else accepting of it, and was that a good fit into the personnel chemistry at the management team level, well, that becomes a little more problematic. You know, maybe it wasn't exactly the best fit for the work group. So, you know, those are the kind of things you always have to kinda -- you know, hiring people is challenging business.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. It's very difficult. Definitely. [02:18:46]Um, what was I -- speaking of that, cultural resources. This is a question that Klondike wanted me to ask about is if you remember a historic preservation workshop that was held in Skagway?

BRUCE NOBLE: I do. And I've actually, you know, sometime during the process of emailing back and forth with you about this interview, I did get on the phone and talk to Karl Gurcke, and we talked a little bit about that as well. Uh, that was a sensationally successful thing, in my opinion. I had the benefit of having started my career in the Washington office of the National Park Service, where, you know, most of the brain power for the cultural resources program in the National Park Service was located. So I knew a lot of people that really knew their stuff and who were influential, kind of at a national level, I guess you'd have to say. [02:19:47]And so at some point, it occurred to me, well, you know, I know these people. I ought to try to get some of 'em

here. And so I did. And we brought a number of people there. You know, some of them were Park Service people. Some of them were people like, as I recall, Judy Bittner, who was, and I think still is, the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer. You know, I think really highly of Judy and always worked really well with her. And, you know, I think we put on a really sensational conference. And you know, I think it provided a lot of good information.

[02:20:24]And a lot of it, I think, was kind of growing out of what I talked about earlier. It was my concern that Skagway was killing the goose that laid the golden egg.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: Which was, you know, its historic character. And so I think we brought in some really good people to talk about, now these are the things that really need to be considered in preserving your historic character, and how you go about doing that. And, you know, where the money is to help achieve those goals, and so on and so forth. So I thought it went really well. [02:20:56]The one thing that I -- I sort of remember in hindsight was that we had a lot of park employees there at that conference who, I think, benefited from it, and that was a good thing. I really wish we would've had more people from the community. And I remember there was one person from the community, Charlotte Jewell, who at the time ran Jewell Gardens and other things.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, she participated in the conference, and I remember her saying at one point, "Well, geez, you know, why didn't you do more to advertise this?" And I was kind of like, huh. Goodness gracious, I mean, you know I felt like we had really bent over backwards to advertise it, and you know, my frustration was that we didn't have, kind of, more receptivity.

[02:21:41]You know, I was happy that she showed up and found it to be beneficial, and I'm sure there were others, too, in the community. But you know, part of my recollection it that I really wish there would have been more of a turnout from the locals because I just felt like there was so much good information, and I would have liked to have seen it, you know, spread even widely -- even more widely.

[02:22:04]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, like you said there were lots of local building owners who, if you're talking about preserving historic buildings, might have benefited from more information.

BRUCE NOBLE: Exactly. And I -- again, I do think there were some.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: Virginia Long, the Portland House. I think Virginia's still in Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yep. Yep.

BRUCE NOBLE: I believe she was there. Virginia and I were always very friendly and her significant other, Howard. You know, I liked them a lot. I think she was there. You know, I'm sure there were some other people from the community.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Do you remember what year that workshop was?

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, I'm going to guess -- you know, again, it was probably towards the tail end of my time there. Uh, it probably would've been 2003.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Well, that's good to help explain it 'cause I didn't know what it was.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, it -- it -- 'cause I left around Memorial Day of 2004, so the season was really kinda just kicking off at that point.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: So it -- it's -- it must've been 2003 that that happened, would be my guess.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. [02:23:08]And how much interaction was there with the Seattle unit of Klondike while you were there?

BRUCE NOBLE: Good question. So Seattle -- well, it's hard to even know where to jump in to start answering that question. You know, I think originally when Klondike Gold Rush was created through this legislation in 1976, I think it was viewed that Seattle and Skagway would be very connected, and that, you know, they would operate very closely in tandem.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: What changed after that, with ANILCA and so on, was that they eventually opened a regional office in Anchorage. When Skagway -- when Klondike Gold Rush was first created, it was all part of the Pacific Northwest Region that was managed out of Seattle.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

BRUCE NOBLE: And so it was kind of under one regional director management structure, and so I think there was kind of a greater potential at the beginning that it all could've held together like I think it was intended to, legislatively. [02:24:25]But when Alaska became a separate region, I think both parks started to migrate apart. And there was kind of a similar situation, not exactly similar, but there was a superintendent when I got to Skagway who had been at the Seattle unit of Klondike Gold Rush for a really, really long time. And I didn't really know him well, but my sense of him and what I heard from other people was that he was not bringing a lot to the table. You know, he just wasn't highly motivated. He wasn't doing a lot. There just wasn't a lot going on there. And, you know, for a long time there was a -- there was a regional office in Seattle, and then that all got sort of consolidated in San Francisco. But even then, there was a big -- kind of a support office presence in Seattle. So the regional office, and then later the support office, I think really ended up controlling Klondike Gold Rush Seattle. And I think they had certain, sort of, visions for that area that were kind of in the category of a, like a welcome center for Seattle. Uh, yes, it did have something to do with the gold rush and so on and so forth, but, you know, I don't think there was as much joint management as there could have been.

[02:25:55]The superintendent that I was referring to ultimately ended up, I think, retiring, and then they did a management review, kind of like that report that we talked about earlier.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, they did a similar thing at Klondike Seattle, and I got asked to be a part of the review team. And so I went down and participated in that, and they were getting ready to -- they, I think, had just acquired, I believe it was called the Cadillac Building in Seattle, and they were getting ready to move their headquarters into that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: And the building at that time was, you know, kind of unrestored. It was really in almost kind of ruinous condition. But they were working on that. They had an acting superintendent at the time. [02:26:43]Stephanie Toothman, who was like the regional chief of cultural resources in the Pacific West region, ultimately became the park service chief of cultural resources for the entire agency, uh, was really somebody who was a commanding presence, and she had a lot of influence over Klondike Seattle. And uh, I just, you know, I felt like at the time that I left Skagway that, you know, there continued to be an unfulfilled potential for more collaboration between those two parks than what had ever actually been achieved. Now, you know, whether that's kind of progressed in a more, you know, collaborative direction since then, I don't really know.

[02:27:32]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And I was wondering if at the superintendent level, the connections might have been different than, you know, at the staff level.

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, I do -- you know, I vaguely recall that it seems to me I was the instigator of this, or at least I want to give myself credit for it, anyway. I think we started having conference calls between Klondike Seattle, Klondike Skagway, and I believe also, Parks Canada. And I think we were trying to, you know, talk, I don't know, two, three, four times a year and just, you know, see if we could do more to get on the same page. [02:28:14]And I, you know, I think maybe there was a little bit of headway. As I recollect, initially, the superintendent at Klondike Seattle was the one I mentioned who was not overly enthusiastic and so, you know, there wasn't a whole lot going on, but it did seem like, you know, if that had continued into the future long enough under new leadership there at Klondike Seattle, I think there was the potential for more collaboration.

[02:28:42]KAREN BREWSTER: And would the collaboration have been on interpretive and educational programming or -- ?

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah, kind of, all of that stuff. I think in general, at least at the beginning, it was more kind of like just updates. Like, well these are the things we're working on. Maybe you would want to be aware of this, and, you know, just trying to sort of get everybody on the same page. But, yeah, the collaboration, I think, was very much intended to be interpretive in nature.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: And, you know, I think it was supposed to sort of basically mirror the gold rush experience, which for most people started in Seattle.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: And -- and, you know, I guess I would say, in addition to interpretation, or maybe in connection with interpretation, a lot of it was sort of collaborative museum exhibit training.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. That's what I was -- Yeah.

BRUCE NOBLE: And, you know, making sure that we were kind of communicating similar messages and so on, and I think we were doing that. You know, I think there was -- I mean certainly if you came from Klondike in Skagway and showed up in Seattle and walked in the door, you felt very at home.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, you know, they were telling the same story. But I, you know, I think there could be more progress there. [02:30:01]There was a guy, kind of a chief of interpretation in Klondike Seattle. I think his name was Marc Blackburn.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh yeah, and then Sean O'Meara.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. And I didn't know Sean so much, but Marc was there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: And, you know, Marc, I think he definitely wanted to do more between Seattle and Skagway. I think he was feeling like he wasn't getting as much support from higher up in his own organization as he would've liked. But, yeah, interpretively and in terms of exhibits, I think there was pretty good collaboration there. I just -- I just think it was envisioned - I'd have to go back and read the legislation again.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. No, I think you're right.

BRUCE NOBLE: I think it was envisioned to be more of a seamless partnership than what it's actually has ended up being.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I believe you're correct in that. [02:30:49]One thing we had talked a little bit about when we were on a break is that management of the Chilkoot Trail, and wondering that as superintendent, how much of an involvement you had with that, or were you focused more on the in-town parts?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, I tried to have a lot of involvement with it. You know, I certainly wanted to be personally involved. You know, I would hike the trail every year, and sometimes more than once. And, you know, I was such a goodie two-shoes Boy Scout at the time, I mean, as I recollect, I was hiking it on my own time. You know, I wasn't -- I was like, taking my weekends and going to do it. I wasn't really doing it on work time, which I would have had every legitimate right to do. [02:31:36]So anyway, you know, I just felt very committed to that operation and committed to working closely with Parks Canada. Ken East, who at the time was the regional director up in Whitehorse, became a good friend, still is a friend, retired now, lives in Ontario. But I loved working with Ken. Bob Lewis was kind of my, sort of my direct counterpart. Bob and I, at least initially for whatever reason, you know, didn't really work as closely together as I would of liked, but I think over the four years that I was there, you know, that got to be a closer and closer relationship. And it was kind of unfortunate that I left when I did because I think we would have had a chance to, you know, kind of solidify things even more had I stayed there longer. [02:32:31]But, you know, I think I worked very closely on the Chilkoot Trail. We had a lot of issues with our trail rangers there, who were -- they were non-commissioned trail rangers, so in other words, they weren't certified as law enforcement rangers. They didn't carry weapons. They didn't go to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) to, you know, get all the training that law enforcement rangers get. But, you know, they were an integral part of our trail operation. You know, we had some challenges during the time I was there because the Park Service was getting more and more into the law enforcement business, and a lot of these trail rangers felt like they were going to be required to become commissioned rangers and have to go to FLETC. And some of them really didn't want to do that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: They were happy doing what they were doing. [02:33:27]And so we had -- you know, we had some people who actually left, as I recall. They were all seasonal employees.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: But some of them had been coming back for years and years and years. And we really depended on 'em. And some of them left because they sort of thought, you know, we're gonna have to get a commission. And, you know, as things have played out, I actually don't think they would have. But some of 'em felt like that was where things were going. So, you know, we had to work through issues with them. [02:33:57]You know, we had search-and-rescue kind of things. If we had enough time, I could, you know, tell some great stories. There were some, you know, very vivid recollections I have about some unusual things that happened in terms of people being lost. And then, of course, the maintenance part of it was another huge part of the trail operation. We had the trail crews, and, you know, I don't remember exactly, I think they worked like eight -- eight days on, ten-hour days, and then they had like, four or maybe even six days off. But, you know, during their eight days, they were kinda living up the trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, and, uh, really doing important work in terms of keeping the trail operating and so on. And, you know, trying to make sure that we were doing that in a

collaborative way with Parks Canada. And kind of the quality of the experience that you got on the Alaska side was gonna be matched by the quality of the experience on the Canadian side was, you know, part of what I think we were all after, and I think we did a pretty good job of achieving that. [02:35:00] You know, one of the big things that I remember sort of getting dragged over the coals about by our regional office was that, you know, the Sheep Camp Campground was not a good place to have a campground. You know, it was right along a glacial braided river, and, you know, the river would jump its channel and, you know, change its course, and so on and so forth. And there just wasn't a lot of other places for that campground to be in that particular spot that would have been sort of out of the flood plain. And one year, we had, uh -- we had a flood. And, you know, it created some real issues. There was kind of some new channels cut that sort of ran through what had been the existing trail, and there were people that, you know, ended up having to kind of like ford the stream in order to continue up the trail. And, you know, the magnitude of the problem was not something that really became immediately obvious to me, and it took awhile to understand, you know, that we were actually dealing with a serious situation. Luckily, everything worked out fine. Nobody was injured or harmed or anything, but, you know, the flood definitely created some issues. You know, Rob Arnberger again, regional director at the time, tough guy, and he's kind of like, "Well, you should have been on that. You know, why didn't you tell me more about that? And, you know, why weren't you more proactive?" Well, you know, the reason was, it was twelve miles up the trail, and, you know, I just -- it wasn't clear to me how serious it was until after it had actually gone on a good ways. [02:36:51] You know, I think -- I think I've heard that subsequently they've moved the location of that campground, which really needed to be done for a whole bunch of different reasons. So I think that was ultimately a good thing. But, yeah, I felt like I was really involved. You couldn't help but be. It was a, you know, really big part of the job during the summer season was keeping everything on track with the Chilkoot Trail.

[02:37:17] KAREN BREWSTER: You mentioned search and rescue. Can you tell, you know, one of those incidents? The one that stands out in your mind?

BRUCE NOBLE: The one that comes most vividly to mind was -- it was almost kind of an overlap between, you know, a personal situation and people getting lost. Uh, there was a woman who was roughly forty years old who was coming to Alaska. And, you know, was she having a mid-life crisis or was some there reason she was making the trip, I don't really know. On the ferry coming to Alaska, she met up with a guy who was literally about half her age, and, you know, seemingly they became an item. They walked off the trail, and I'm forgetting the name of the location, but there's a place where you can kind of cut out on a little island along the trail where there's a bunch of old --

KAREN BREWSTER: Is that Canyon City?

BRUCE NOBLE: Could've been. Could've been. Yeah. And they -- and when they walked back in there, one of them left their backpack along the trail, which was a major no-no. You were never supposed to leave your backpack unattended because of bears.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: And you didn't want 'em to become a bear attraction. [02:38:40] So one of our trail rangers went by, saw the pack, left a note on it, said, you need to reclaim this pack, uh, and, you know, lickety-split. Well, at the end of the day, the trail ranger was hiking back through there again, and the pack was still there. And he's like, hm, this is odd. Well, it turned out that this couple, if you will, had somehow gotten lost. And the odd thing about it that I never really

totally understood, was that it appeared that the whole time that they were lost, they were kind of right between the trail and the Taiya River. And how they were not able to kinda find their way back to the trail, or even to yell out loud for help and have somebody respond, I do not totally understand. It never made sense to me. But, you know, they were lost at least overnight, and I remember our chief ranger, Reed McCluskey, actually had to call the woman's husband in the middle of the night and basically say, "Uh, we can't find your wife." And he's like, "Oh, well that's not good." "Do you have any reason to know why your wife might be in the company of a male named so-and-so." "Not only do I have no reason to know that, I'm really upset to hear that." Uh, so you know, it became a little bit of a soap opera. Eventually they were found, and, you know, I don't know what happened from there. We got, you know, got 'em back to safety, and that was kind of the end of our involvement in it. But, you know, there were -- there were things like that that would happen.

[02:40:21]KAREN BREWSTER: Helicopter rescues of injured hikers?

BRUCE NOBLE: There were helicopter rescues, yes. There was a -- I remember a story, and I think this happened before I got there, but a helicopter rescue where somebody had not, um, kinda anchored down an oxygen tank when the helicopter took off. And, you know, if an oxygen tank gets the head of it knocked off, I mean, they can explode. You know, it was a huge, big deal. There was a particular seasonal employee who I think was involved with that who didn't continue to be a seasonal employee too much longer, just because of the, you know, the magnitude of the issue there. [02:41:06]But yes, helicopter rescues. You know, some issues with people with dogs on the trail, dogs off leash, and so on, which they were not supposed to be. And, you know, the fear was always that somebody's dog would get out of sight. It would see a bear. The bear would chase the dog. The dog would run back to its owner, and that, you know, you'd have some kind of episode. [02:41:32]The other issue that I remember becoming increasingly problematic during my time there was just the number of kinda ultra-athletes that would basically thru-hike and even run the whole Chilkoot Trail, you know, meaning that they were basically running all night. And, you know, even -- even around the Solstice time in the summer, you're far enough south in Skagway that you do have a little bit of night, and, you know, there's always a concern about that, and people being out when the wildlife are out, and, you know, issues that that might create if somebody were attacked or whatever. [02:42:07]You know, luckily in reality, the number of issues on the Chilkoot Trail, and I'll tell you this since you're planning to hike it, you know, the issues were really minimal. And a lot of the things that people did that went wrong were just like, really, really dumb things that people did. But overall, you know, I think it was a well-run operation that really went along pretty smoothly the vast majority of the time.

[02:42:34]KAREN BREWSTER: You had mentioned something about getting daily trail reports?

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: That the rangers were reporting to the headquarters.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah, I think they did like a morning report and then like an evening report. And there was a particular name for the evening report that I'm not quite recollecting right now. But, yeah, that was a, you know, a part of the whole trail operation. And, you know, somebody would call me from the trail center. Somebody would call in from, you know, the Park Service, probably at Sheep Camp. Somebody would call in from Lindeman City. So, you know, you sort of had coverage along the whole -- the whole length of the trail. [02:43:13]And, you know,

you'd get weather information and the number of people that were going to be on the trail in a given day. It was always kind of interesting, and it really was sort of the driving force of the rhythm of the park in a lot of ways during the summer months. So, yeah, I was always kind of really dialed into that. I liked it, and, you know, I missed it when the season would end.

[02:43:33]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Um, another thing I wanted to quickly ask you about was the White Pass Unit.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what, if anything, during your time happened there in terms of management or surveying or -- ?

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, you know, it was always kind of unknown territory. And it was -- in a way, it was kind of ironic because on the one side, you had the Klondike Highway, and on the other side, you had the White Pass and Yukon Railroad route, but in between, you had the White Pass Unit. And it was extremely difficult to get into, you know, even though you had sort of modern transportation all around it. I don't know that I ever really got deeply into the White Pass Unit. I know we would have some trail rangers, Chilkoot Trail Rangers, who occasionally would kinda go on a patrol in the White Pass Unit to see what was going on there. [02:44:38]I do -- and I'm not remembering the details, but I do remember as time went by during my tenure there, I was feeling more and more like, we should have a presence here. You know, there was a lot of archeological artifacts, things that needed to be protected there, and it just never really seemed to me that we had enough of a presence there. I would hear stories that were never actually confirmed, but I have no reason to doubt their veracity, that people were illegally hunting in the White Pass Unit. You know, we never really had enough of a presence there to, you know, address that situation. So, yeah, there were a lot of issues in the White Pass Unit you would have liked to have been able to spend more time on, and generally just because of lack of staff, lack of money, and so on and so forth, you know, we just didn't put a lot of resources into that area, unfortunately.

[02:45:37]KAREN BREWSTER: Is that something you could envision being developed more?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, you know, I mean, if there's a will, there's a way, right? And if there's enough money, it could always happen. You know, I guess I could potentially see something being done in partnership with the railroad if they wanted to work with the Park Service. You know, I know the railroad will make whistle stops, kind of along the way there and drop people off, you know, heading up to Laughton Glacier and so on. You know, I think if you go the other direction, you can get into the White Pass Unit. [02:46:14]And, you know, if there were stairs constructed or something that would make access into the White Pass Unit more viable, you know, I think those kind of things could happen. Would they be good things? You know, that -- that becomes a little debatable. You know, on the one hand, having more of a Park Service presence there could be a good thing in terms of a higher level of protection for the area, but having more of a visitor presence there could be a bad thing. You know, it could be creating more impacts. It could be leading to some of the same kind of commercialization that we talked about earlier that wasn't always a good thing. So, you know, I think you'd -- I don't know, you know, what level of access the public has to White Pass today. I think if it -- if there was a decision made to increase that level of access, I think you'd have to be very careful and deliberate about it 'cause, you know, you wouldn't want unintended consequences to come out of it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. [02:47:14]Well, you mentioned the railroad, and I had wanted to ask you about the relationship with the park and the railroad. You had talked about working with the city. So what was your relationship with the White Pass Railroad and their operations?

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. Uh, can we take a pause real quick?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

(Break)

[02:47:31]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. So we're going to say the relationship with the White Pass Yukon Railroad.

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, I always felt like it was a good relationship. There -- I think I alluded to this earlier. It always seemed like there was a little bit of drama within the White Pass hierarchy, and, you know, people coming into favor, people falling out of favor, so on and so forth. But, you know, that was kind of their own internal stuff that you would just hear about. As far as working with them, you know, I always felt like it was a good relationship.

[02:48:05]When I first got there, the head guy of the railroad was a guy named Fred McCorrison. I know Fred had come kinda from the Seattle area. I don't remember exactly what his background was, but, you know, I think he was kind of a business person basically. And, you know, I liked Fred. He was a good guy to work with. You know, I think my wife and I had a little bit of social interaction with he and his wife, and it always seemed to me -- (cell phone buzzes) Oh, sorry.

KAREN BREWSTER: You have to take that?

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. She's just wondering about lunch and so on.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

(Break while Bruce answers the phone.)

BRUCE NOBLE: So.

[02:48:43]KAREN BREWSTER: So about White Pass.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. Fred McCorrison was a good guy. We socialized with he and his wife to a certain degree. He was very engaged in things in the community. You know, I always liked Fred. I think at some level, he ended up having a bit of a falling out. You know, I don't know exactly what that was about. He ended up leaving. The guy who, I think, came in next after him was Gary-somebody, and I'm not remembering Gary's last name right now.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's ok.

BRUCE NOBLE: But I can picture him very clearly. And Gary was a good guy. You know, I always, uh, you know, I always had a good relationship with him. And --

[02:49:26]KAREN BREWSTER: What kind of issues did the Park Service and White Pass work on together? What were your -- I mean, was it their, um, clients coming into the park? I mean, I don't know what you would've needed to work together on.

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, you know, for one thing we were, uh, we were next door neighbors. You know, their headquarters was right next to our headquarters. So, you know, that -- that gave us sort of a connectedness. I also think that, um -- what was I going to say? My brain is starting to get a little tired here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Yeah.

BRUCE NOBLE: But uh, you know, their -- their clients were cruise ship passengers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: And those were our clients, as well. So I think there was a lot of connectedness around that issue, too. [02:50:25]You know, I don't remember kind of any

specific things that we really worked on together, but they were such a part of the history of the community that, you know, before I had gotten there, they had had a Gold Rush Centennial event in 1998 that had been a big, kind of community event, and I know White Pass was involved with that. And, you know, organizing some kind of like, dignitary train rides and things of that sort. And well, of course, the other thing that we would really coordinate with 'em on was the Chilkoot Trail because most of the Chilkoot Trail hikers are going to finish at Lake Bennett, and then they're going to get on the train and come back to Skagway that way. So there was definitely a lot of coordination around the Chilkoot Trail, and, you know, our numbers in terms of the numbers of people that were going over the Chilkoot Pass, and hiking the trail any given day were of interest to them because it had to do with passengers coming back to Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: They needed enough seats on the train.

BRUCE NOBLE: They needed enough seats, exactly. Exactly. So yeah, there was a lot of coordination there. And I think it worked pretty well.

[02:51:36]KAREN BREWSTER: You had mentioned the Rasmuson family and the Rasmuson Foundation was involved with the Rapuzzi Collection.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Were you involved with any of that negotiating and obtaining of that collection?

BRUCE NOBLE: I was. You know, I remember being in Anchorage one time. Again, Rob Arnberger was the regional director, and I said to him, you know, just kind of casually. I said, "It'd really be nice if we could go over and meet -- " Uh, I'm forgetting his first name. Mr. Rasmuson.

KAREN BREWSTER: Was Elmer Rasmuson still alive?

BRUCE NOBLE: I think so. Yeah. Yeah, I think it was Elmer. And, you know, I said -- I said, "I thought it would be good for you as the regional director to have a relationship with him." And Rob was kind of like, "Let's go." And I'm like, "Right now?" And he's like, "Yeah. No time like the present." So, you know, we actually went over and met with him. [02:52:35]You know, as I recall, it was -- it was a pretty cordial meeting, but as I recall, I think Mr. Rasmuson, you know, like a lot of old-time Alaskans, I think he had a lot of issues with the federal government. And so, you know, I think we spent some amount of time hearing about what some of those issues were. But, you know, then eventually -- and I remember Rob Arnberger I think was kind of graceful in how he handled this because, you know, he eventually just kind of turned it around and said, "Well, so maybe we've had some challenges in the past, but let's talk about how we can work together on this Rapuzzi Collection." So it kinda migrated in that direction.

[02:53:20]And so, you know, I think that was basically kind of the very formative stages of the relationship. Some of the other things that were happening during my time there, I mean, Phyllis Brown, who owned the Rapuzzi Collection. I knew Phyllis really well. I liked her. Phyllis was a little bit of a character personality, but, you know, I never had any difficulty working with her. We did an appraisal of the museum collection, and this was kind of, you know, an early step in the acquisition process. And, you know, it's like getting an appraisal of your house. Somebody can always question, is that really the value? How do you know that? You know, we brought in people who were accredited appraisers. They had all kinds of certifications. They came up with an appraised value for the entire collection. And my recollection is that it was somewhere like right around \$150,000, is what they said it was worth. [02:54:24]And it got to a point where we were getting late in the fiscal year, and we were going to have that much money in end-of-year

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money. And so I remember calling up Phyllis Brown and basically saying, "Phyllis, we've got the money to buy this from you right now at the appraised value." Well, there were -- there were a lot of issues in Phyllis' mind. I think number one, uh, she wondered whether the appraised value was actually accurate, and there was something that I'm not totally recalling, but there was something that had been, uh, that had been put out in Congress. You know, there's an authorization part of legislation, but then there's the appropriation part of it. So they can say whatever they want in the authorization part, but until they actually appropriate money, well, the authorization language can be kind of meaningless. [02:55:30]And as I require -- as I recall, the authorization language that had come out at some point said something to the effect that the National Park Service is authorized to acquire the Rapuzzi Collection at values up to \$500,000. Well, our appraiser had said that it wasn't worth that much, but Phyllis, at that time, she continued to think that we had \$500,000, and that I was holding out on her. And I kept saying, "Phyllis, this is not an appropriation. We do not have that \$500,000." Well, so it was kind of like a cat chasing its tail, and ultimately that didn't work. And, you know, it was really kind of a shot in the dark. You know, at the time I realized it was a real, real long shot, but I figured I'd take a chance at it and just see if we had an easy solution. [02:56:30]Well, that didn't work out, and I think from there, the relationship with the Rasmuson Foundation continued to develop, uh, to the point where after I left, you know, with help from the Rasmuson Foundation, the park was able to acquire the whole collection.

[02:56:46]KAREN BREWSTER: Do you know whose idea it was to ask the Rasmuson Foundation for the financial assistance?

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, I don't remember exactly. I know there'd been a lot of talk for a long time among a lot of people about the Park Service eventually acquiring that collection. I know that. And, you know, as I said, Theresa Thibault had history with the Rasmuson Foundation. You know, she knew Elmer. You know, she could call him up. Now, um, you know, did she actually kind of -- was she the one who instigated the idea of working with the Rasmuson Foundation, or did that kinda come from a variety of different places? I don't really recall.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

BRUCE NOBLE: I don't recall. I just know that, you know, they had history in Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: With, uh, they'd had a bank there that eventually was bought out by Wells Fargo. But you know, they had connections in the community. It had just been discussed --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: -- that, you know, they would be a potential philanthropic partner.

[02:57:49]KAREN BREWSTER: And so, yeah, your role was during the early days of the negotiations?

BRUCE NOBLE: I would say that, although, you know, it wasn't too much longer after I left that they actually acquired the collection, so, you know, I think that things had progressed relatively far during the time I was there. I just think what -- what ended up needing to happen in a little more depth was the, you know, basically the culmination of the relationship between the Park Service and the Rasmuson Foundation that would allow all that to happen. [02:58:25]And I do not know, you know, what the collection was ultimately purchased for. I would -- I would expect that Phyllis Brown probably did the right thing in holding out, 'cause I think she probably

ended up getting more than the approximately \$150,000 that I was offering her based on that appraised value, but, you know, I really don't know exactly what that value was. I just --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: I just think it was a good thing for the Park Service. And, you know, Phyllis was not really able to manage that collection. It was a bunch of stuff squirreled away here, squirreled away there. Old buildings that she was not in a position to take care of. She was getting up there in years. I think she's still alive. I'm not really sure, but, you know, I think it was good for her, and I think it was good for the Park Service and the American public that we were ultimately able to acquire that collection.

[02:59:18]KAREN BREWSTER: Great. Um, looking at your time in Skagway, are there things you can say or you consider your successes?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, you know, one of the big successes is what I've already talked about. I think our financial position there just improved tremendously during my time there. And I'd like to think that I sort of brought some kind of sensibility about good business practices to the job that ultimately benefited the park. You know, I -- I think laying the foundation for the acquisition of that acreage along the Chilkoot Trail that I talked about, that was huge. You know, laying the foundation for the acquisition of the Rapuzzi Collection. [03:00:04]You know, another thing that I really haven't talked about but that kind of sticks out in my mind as sort of a signature accomplishment was the 25th anniversary celebration that we had in 2001. You know, celebrating the creation of the park.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: And um, what I remember vividly about that is when -- I came from Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, where that was like a park that excelled at hosting events. You know, we were really, really good at it. And I had just sort of come to take that as almost second nature, as something that the National Park Service did and did well. And I remember in a staff meeting saying to our management team that I really thought we needed to start working on a 25th anniversary celebration to acknowledge the history of the park and the town. And pretty much to a person, I was told that is a really bad idea. You know, there's a lot of people here who still have hard feelings about the Park Service being in this community. You know, you're going to give them a voice. You know, that -- that is not a good idea. [03:01:15]And I basically said, "Well, we're gonna do it anyway. You know, we're not gonna shine -- or hide our light under a bushel basket. We're gonna let our light shine." And it ended up just being spectacular. We had a beautiful bluebird clear-sky day in June. We had great attendance. We had good participation by local people, Stan Selmer, Barbara Kalen, who -- I'd be surprised if Barbara was still alive.

KAREN BREWSTER: She's not. She's not.

BRUCE NOBLE: Because she was definitely up there in years at that time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

BRUCE NOBLE: Our regional director was there, Rob Amberger. Ken East was there from Parks Canada.

[03:01:59]KAREN BREWSTER: What kind of events did you do?

BRUCE NOBLE: We -- the Chilkat Dancers were there from Haines. What we basically tried to do as much as we could was to sort of follow the order of events that was used when they originally dedicated the park. They had kind of a ceremony at that time. And we had copies of the agenda for that, and so we tried to, you know, do some of the same things. Like the Chilkat Dancers, for example. They'd have been involved in that original park, sort of, dedication event,

so we brought them back. And, you know, it was just basically to sort of highlight the role that the park had played in the Skagway community. And it was just spectacularly successful. It went off without a hitch. [03:02:51]And I was -- you know, I was so glad about it, partly because I was met with such skepticism at the beginning, but partly because I thought it actually built good will for the park. You know, rather than the reverse, which I think is what some people were fearing. So yeah, just a really spectacular thing.

[03:03:11]KAREN BREWSTER: Did you feel any of that animosity while you were living in Skagway, that, oh, you're a Park Service -- we don't like the park?

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, you could look at that in different ways. There was one member of the community who had a license plate that said, "F-T-N-P." And it was basically "F-word" -- No, F-T-N-P-S. "F-word," the National Park Service. And he was a big, scary guy that you would see around town. You know, I don't think I -- I would say hello to him. I don't think I ever had a more in-depth conversation with him than that. You know, there was some vestiges of that. [03:03:54]I do remember one time we had our car parked out on the street and it got vandalized. Uh, I remember one time somebody took like a gallon -- a glass gallon jug and broke it on our driveway. You know, Skagway in the summer time was kind of a party town. So were there people who had just had too much fun and just kinda happened to do this stuff? Maybe. Was it directed at me as park superintendent? Maybe. You know, I don't know. It's kinda hard to know. [03:04:30]But, to me, those kind of things were really isolated. You know, there were still I guess what you might call old-time Alaskans who did harbor ill will towards the federal government, but politically speaking, Skagway was a pretty progressive place. You know, I would say much, much more so than Alaska as a whole. And, you know, I think we always felt pretty well-accepted there. And that was the nice thing about being there, was that for the most part, you felt supported.

[03:05:05]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that's good. Um, looking back, anything you think of as failures or regrets or things you wish you had been able to accomplish and were not able to?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, uh, you know, nothing catastrophic, and, you know, really nothing that we haven't talked about already. You know, I would have liked to have seen a little more harmony among the management team of the park. That certainly would have been one thing. I definitely would have liked to have never had to move that Ice House, and to really feel like, you know, the business community was more accepting of the absolute necessity of preserving the historic character of Skagway, Alaska. You know, that was something that I would have liked to have seen more progress on, for sure. [03:05:58]You know, I'm sure there are other things here and there, but, you know, when I think back on my time in Skagway, I think positive things. You know, I have a really good feeling about the time that I spent there and fond memories of the, you know, the beauty of the place and, you know, all the work that we were able to do there. You know, I think about the good things.

[03:06:27]KAREN BREWSTER: And then, after Skagway you've gone on to do other superintendencies?

BRUCE NOBLE: I have, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: So what did you do -- did you come directly here to Black Canyon?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, no, I came directly to Colorado National Monument.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

BRUCE NOBLE: Which is kind of, you know, right outside our door here.

KAREN BREWSTER: So backyard.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh, and, you know, I loved Colorado National Monument. It's a fabulous place, and I felt very grateful to be able to come here. I think sort of in other ways, it almost felt a little bit to me like a step down. You know, we did not have the budget here that we had at Klondike Gold Rush. We did not have the level of visitation. We did not have the number of employees. You know, there's political challenges in this valley.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BRUCE NOBLE: You know, there are people here who are as unsupportive of the federal government as they are in Alaska. And so, you know, it's not necessarily an easy ride here at Colorado National Monument. But I felt like it was an easier ride, you know. It to me was like, "Geez, I'm ready for something more." So, yeah, I was here for like three years. [03:07:43] I ended up going to Chickasaw National Recreation Area in Oklahoma. And in that job, I was -- I also oversaw the Park Service staff at the Oklahoma City National Memorial, and I supervised the superintendent at Washita Battlefield National Historic Site out in western Oklahoma, so I was kind of over everything that the Park Service did in Oklahoma. So that was kind of fun. Oklahoma's definitely a hard place to work. You know, the politics there, in my mind, were tougher than the Alaska politics in terms of doing federal business in the conservation arena. So it was a hard place to be, but, you know, a rewarding place. And then from there, I went to Black Canyon of the Gunnison and Curacanti National Recreation Area.

[03:08:33]KAREN BREWSTER: And so you've been superintendent at Gunnison for how long?

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, I got there at the -- let me think, now. It would've been the tail end of 2014.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And then you're getting close to retirement, I guess?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, you know, you never know what else might come along. But, you know, we love this area, and, you know, it'd be -- I've moved so much during my career, and I've had to leave places that I really loved, and that's hard to do. And even -- I think we'll probably end up making a commitment to staying here, rather than looking at moving somewhere else.

[03:09:16]KAREN BREWSTER: So are there things that you learned at your first superintendency in Skagway that you were able to apply to your other positions?

BRUCE NOBLE: Well, you know, I think mostly just being community-oriented because it seemed to me that that was really what was needed so much when I first got to Klondike Gold Rush, and tried to be involved in the community. Uh, you know, not just in terms of Park Service things going on, but just as a citizen. You know, being involved in community clean-ups, and, you know, being a member of the Elks Club, and, you know, going to dinners. You know, bringing food to dinners, and, you know, just sort of being a part of the community. You know, that was something that really seemed like it was a necessity at -- at Klondike Gold Rush, and, you know, I've tried to maintain those things during my subsequent time as a superintendent.

[03:10:13]And, you know, I think it really helps. I think in some places, those things are met with more receptivity than they are in other places, but, yeah, I think being community-oriented is probably the biggest thing that I -- I got out of the experience at -- at Klondike Gold Rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, great. [03:10:33]Is there anything else that we have not talked about that you had in mind from our emails and questions I'd sent you in advance?

BRUCE NOBLE: Uh, I mean, only just that it was hard to leave. It was extremely hard to leave. I've never been back to Alaska since we got on the ferry right around Memorial Day in 2004.

You know, I've always said I was an Alaskan long before I got there, and I'll still be an Alaskan long after I leave. And I -- you know, I still feel that way. [03:11:05] You know, I -- I've alluded to it a little bit, but, you know, I did not feel a high level of support as time went on from Rob Arnberger as regional director and then Marcia Blaszak, when she came -- became regional director. It just -- it kinda began to seem to me that even though Alaska's a huge, big state, it was a little too small. And, uh, so, you know, it seemed like it was the time to make a move. But it was a really hard thing. [03:11:36] If I went back to Klondike Gold Rush, and I will someday -- if I went back there today, I'd have a really hard time going to the park headquarters. I do not know if I could do it. It would be extremely difficult 'cause I put so much emotion into it, and I worked so hard to try to do the right things there that I've sort of got a memory of it as it was, and I kind of want that to be how I always remember it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

BRUCE NOBLE: And if I walked into the building and saw oh, well, this is different, and that's different, and they moved this and did that, it would be like, it would be hard to take.

[03:12:11] KAREN BREWSTER: But it's not a question of not wanting to go back because you felt like you were mistreated.

BRUCE NOBLE: It was not wanting to go back 'cause I loved it so much. And, you know, wanting it to be just exactly how I remember it. And, you know, having a little bit of a hard time wrestling with the idea of it maybe not being exactly how I remember it. So, yeah, it was a hard decision to leave there. It was a -- it was a great place. You know, I understand why my predecessor stayed there as long as he did. [03:12:47] Mike Tranel, who just recently left there, I think he was there for a good long time. You know, it's an easy place to be comfortable.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

BRUCE NOBLE: It's a -- it's a very nice community, and it's a great park. So yeah. My memories of Skagway are overwhelmingly positive.

[03:13:05] KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I appreciate all of your time today. I've had you talking a long time, and I know it's -- it's lunch time now.

BRUCE NOBLE: Yeah. Well, thank you, Karen.

KAREN BREWSTER: So unless there's anything else you want to conclude with.

BRUCE NOBLE: No. No, I think we've covered the landscape. I appreciate it.

KAREN BREWSTER: All right. Great, thanks.