

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF ROY NELSON

CONDUCTED BY KAREN BREWSTER

IN FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

SEPTEMBER 19, 2018

ORAL HISTORY 2017-01-83

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

[00:00:00]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok, this is Karen Brewster, and today is September 19, 2018, and I'm here with Roy Nelson for the Skagway Klondike Gold Rush Historical Park Oral History Project. And we actually are in Fairbanks at the moment, as Roy is passing through town on his way out of state. So thank you, Roy, for finding time today to meet with me.

[00:00:26]ROY NELSON: You're welcome. No problem. I appreciate you getting ahold of me.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, a little investigative work. It was actually thanks to Doreen.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: 'Cause Karl contacted her and traced you down. [00:00:38]Um, so just to get us started, you were born and raised in Skagway?

ROY NELSON: Yes, I was.

KAREN BREWSTER: Tell me about that.

[00:00:47]ROY NELSON: Uh, my dad came up to Alaska during World War II with the army. Helped build the -- work on the Alaska Highway. Then he got transferred to Skagway when the railroad -- when the army took over the railroad, to work on the railroad.

[00:01:04]And in the meantime, before the end of the war, my mom and my oldest sister were already up here, so after the war, he stayed with the railroad 'til he retired in '74.

[00:01:17]And I was born in Skagway at the old Skagway White -- uh, railroad hospital.

KAREN BREWSTER: White Pass Hospital?

ROY NELSON: White Pass Hospital in um, 1956. [00:01:28]And so I was just pretty much born and raised, grew up there, pretty much spent my whole life there. I took two years, two summers, and I came up here in '95 and '96 to work on building the Alaska pipeline, but outside of that, most of my life and my work experience has been in Skagway.

[00:01:51]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And you graduated from high school, Skagway High School?

ROY NELSON: Yes, I graduated from Skagway Public High School in 1974.

[00:01:59]KAREN BREWSTER: All right. And um, so when did you start working for the park?

ROY NELSON: I started in January 1979 with the Park Service. [00:02:11]I'd been working construction, and one of the guys I worked with in carpentry was a friend of Pete

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Bathurst, who was the, um, I can't -- I don't remember what his exact title was, but he was, like, in charge of stabilizing and starting the restoration on the historic buildings.

[00:02:34]So he offered me a job to come in in January to help start stabilizing the Lynch and Kennedy building and doing some other maintenance and everything.

[00:02:47]KAREN BREWSTER: And do you remember when the park started to form and the idea of there being a park established there?

ROY NELSON: That was probably I would say the mid-'70's. I mean, it didn't -- it -- as soon as they, um, beca -- the president at that time -- you know, it was forty-some years ago.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right.

ROY NELSON: I don't remember everything.

[00:03:11]KAREN BREWSTER: No, but I just -- remember what -- being in the community, do you remember what it was like and how people felt about there being a park there?

ROY NELSON: Well, some people were against it. A lot of people were -- a lot of people were for it, a lot of people were against it. It was kinda split, you know. [00:03:26]A lot of the old timers, and a lot of the younger kids my age that were born and raised there were kinda against it because they knew they were gonna -- it was going to take their freedom away from just going out and four-wheeling in Dyea and cutting wood wherever they wanted and doing, you know, doing things that they were able to get away with.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:03:48]ROY NELSON: And, you know, a lot of the restrictions and everything, which comes about with becoming a park.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: You know, federal rules and laws.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:03:57]ROY NELSON: So, you know, when I first started working for 'em, there was a little bit of animosity between me and some of the kids I -- people I grew up with and knew because they kinda thought me as a traitor.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: Because I -- all of a sudden, here I'm starting to work for the government and the Park Service.

KAREN BREWSTER: They were the enemy.

[00:04:16]ROY NELSON: Yeah. Well, they just didn't understand what was -- what it was about. Nowadays, the majority of them people have turned around and realize that the park was good for the city, especially once the railroad stopped shipping, and all the -- you know, all the freight and the ore and stuff going through. [00:04:40]The park helped bring the tourism into town.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: And tourism in Skagway's bread and butter now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:04:48]ROY NELSON: You don't work unless it's -- somehow you're always -- you know, you're involved with the tourism. You know, like, after I got done working with Park Service, I went to work for the city public works department. [00:05:00]It's those tourist dollars, tax dollars, that pay and make the city budget, you know. And um, and so, with

that, you know, the city has gotten money to be able to build up the infrastructure, the new clinic with some -- some uh, grants, new fire hall, police department. They're redoing the streets, they're planning on redoing the streets. Um, put a lot more people to work, you know. [00:05:33]And grant you, the majority of the work in Skagway is seasonal.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: You know, because once the last cruise ship leaves, everything shuts down outside of what needs to be around for the infrastructure.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:05:47]ROY NELSON: But, um, yeah, you know, I had a hard time with a lot of my friends when I first started working for 'em. To them, you know, I just said, "Hey. It's a job. I'm not wearing a uniform. I'm not wearing a badge. I'm saving these old buildings that are part of Skagway." And throughout the time, you know, people learned to accept it.

[00:06:12]And then, um, you know, like I say, after the railroad shut down, the park did start doing a lot more full-bore local hire with especially like, the restoration crew and all, 'cause a lot of guys that worked for the railroad came to work for the park, and a couple of 'em have actually retired from the Park Service.

[00:06:36]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Yeah, because the railroad shut down in, what '82?

ROY NELSON: '82, and it didn't reopen until '96, I think it was.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And yeah, the same skill set would apply for the maintenance and construction kind of jobs.

ROY NELSON: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:06:52]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, given that your friends when you were growing up were sort of against the park, why did you decide to take that job in the first place, if you were kind of already -- ?

ROY NELSON: Well, I had no desire to ever work for -- I'm sorry. I had no desire to work for White Pass. You know, I mean, it was too -- I saw kids, you know, get out of high school or even quit high school when they turned eighteen to go to work for White Pass because it was good money and everything, and they got really dependent on it. And it wasn't -- I just -- I just didn't have the desire to do that. [00:07:31]I wanted to work with my hands. I wanted to work construction. My dad was a carpenter. He taught me how to pound nails, and he never pushed me or anything to go to work for White Pass.

[00:07:43]KAREN BREWSTER: But it was a good job for him?

ROY NELSON: It was a good job for him, you know, back then. Yes. You know, and he -- like I say, he didn't -- he worked for White Pass from after the end of the war until 1974, and he retired like two months after I graduated out of high school.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: But um, he enjoyed it. I just wanted to do something different.

[00:08:07]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And what was your dad's name?

ROY NELSON: Art Nelson.

KAREN BREWSTER: Art, ok. And what about your mom?

ROY NELSON: My mom's name was, uh, Mary Maliece (sp?), but she passed away when I was eight years old. So.

[00:08:20]KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. Did you have a stepmother or -- ?

ROY NELSON: I had a stepmother, Mary Nelson, who my dad married when I was like, uh, thirteen, fourteen. So he went, you know, for quite a few years being a single parent.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: And raising my -- myself and my other -- my sister that who's still alive, Doris.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:08:43]ROY NELSON: And my older sister, Ethel, she already had a family of her own. My nephew Mackey's only a year and nine months younger than me. So we grew up as brothers.

[00:08:53]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Cool. So when you first were working for the Park Service, you started on that historic building restoration, right?

ROY NELSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: So can you tell me about that, what kind of things you were doing?

ROY NELSON: Well, the first project was the Lynch and Kennedy, and they had it totally gutted out. And they had, um, presses and frames on, like big scaffold jacks that we were leveling and re -- you know, because the building was about ready to fall down, so we were actually stabilizing it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[00:09:28]ROY NELSON: And we lifted it up to the -- the height they wanted it, brought it up another four inches, and then we -- the next spring we dug and put a foundation underneath it and then set it back down on the stem walls. [00:09:46]And then, you know, in the meantime, had to sister and replace a lot of the rotten studs and everything, 'cause the secon -- bottom floor was totally gutted out. The second floor was intact. In fact, that's what they used to lift the building with, was the second floor.

[00:10:01]KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. So what was it sitting on before you put in the new foundation?

ROY NELSON: Just dirt and, you know, blocks and pier, just like all the other -- all the buildings were. There was no concrete foundations in the older buildings.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: 'Cause they were built back in the gold rush era or right after.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:10:21]ROY NELSON: In the early 1900's, and they were put up quick, so -- And they didn't use concrete back there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Especially up here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right.

ROY NELSON: Or up in Alaska, so -- or Skagway, so --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:10:33]ROY NELSON: Most of the buildings, you know, were that way, so we were -- at that time we were in more of an aspect of stabilizing and leveling the buildings. As far as restoring, you know, doing the total restoration on 'em.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:10:49]ROY NELSON: 'Cause we started on that, and then the next summer, summer of '79, we started on the Mascot and the railroad depot, which is now the headquarters of the visitor center.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:11:08]ROY NELSON: So my job the first year, summer, I was there was just crawling underneath, digging little trenches, jacking buildings up, cribbing 'em, getting 'em level.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ROY NELSON: So a lot of belly crawling.

[00:11:20]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Were you the young guy on the totem pole, so that's why you got to do it?

ROY NELSON: No, I mean, I was -- I was working for 'em, and I knew what I was doing, you know, 'cause my dad was a carpenter, and I'd helped him out throughout the years doing stuff like that and leveling buildings, so.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:11:38]ROY NELSON: I really wasn't -- I couldn't really say I was the young guy 'cause we didn't have a full-blown crew yet. We hadn't -- it was myself, and then Don Corwin was there by that time, who was the millwright.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: And, uh --

[00:11:52]KAREN BREWSTER: What's a millwright?

ROY NELSON: He, um -- he built all the doors and windows and all the trim, you know, reproduced everything. He worked in the, um -- well, before we had the woodshop that we have now, we used to use the um, the um, oh, not the Mascot. The um, I -- I'll think of --

[00:12:22]KAREN BREWSTER: Here, I have the map of all the buildings on Broadway. It'll spark a few -- jog your memory.

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah. I'm just --

KAREN BREWSTER: You've been out of it a little bit, for a couple years.

[00:12:38]ROY NELSON: The Pantheon.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: Yeah. Now that I look at that, I remember that. But, um, when we first started, our woodshop was a little garage up over by the Peniel Mission. That's where Don and I worked.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[00:12:55]ROY NELSON: And he worked pretty much through the whole until '99 when we all got RIF'ed.

KAREN BREWSTER: RIF'ed, the -- ?

ROY NELSON: Reduction in force. They got rid of the, um, the uh, the uh, what -- at that time -- by that time we were term. Before that we were just seasonals. And they were working like, year-round, getting two-week furlough.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:13:18]ROY NELSON: And then once they did the -- once that 1039-hour act came in, they had to turn all the people that they wanted year-round into either permanent or, um, put

'em on terms instead of making them permanent 'cause I think the way they had it set up there was a goal, and so the whole project, the guys that were working there, was supposed to be done by October of 1999.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:13:48]ROY NELSON: And so they had a term, and I had -- my last few years, I was on a term also until 1999, and then we all got RIF'ed.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:13:57]ROY NELSON: And then they started bringing in new people after that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm. So it was a funding issue or --

ROY NELSON: It was just the way it was set up with Congress.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: For the budget --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:14:07]ROY NELSON: You know, when they first bought the, um -- when they first made the park, they set aside x amount of dollars for each building, and they figured out, you know -- they figured how many -- how long it would take to restore 'em. Well, their estimates were way, way off.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:14:24]ROY NELSON: 'Cause you just don't go in -- it's not like new construction. You just don't throw it up. It takes a lot longer to restore a building than it does to build a new one.

[00:14:31]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And so, I was wondering when you, you know, lifted up these buildings for stabilizing, did you find things down in the ground below?

ROY NELSON: Uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: You said your wife's an archaeologist, so.

[00:14:44]ROY NELSON: Yeah. They were monitoring it and a lot of 'em, especially if we tore out the floor, they'd go in and dig first, you know, and do their field work and their field testing and everything. And then, if we were digging, my wife Doreen or one of her employees would be monitoring as we were digging, and if we saw anything, we'd have to stop.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:15:07]ROY NELSON: And, um -- but they were pretty thorough, you know, and, um -- so, you know, every now and then we'd find something they overlooked 'cause they hadn't dug quite as deep or in the spot we needed for, you know, we needed to go to.

[00:15:23]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, because I was thinking, in all those old buildings, there's stuff under the floorboards.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or still in the buildings, maybe, artifacts and things.

[00:15:30]ROY NELSON: Oh yeah, we found -- Jeff Mull and I one time, we were working on the old Moore House. We were stripping the siding off, and between the first and second floor, because it had been added on like, numerous times, there was a little gap, and we -- we pulled this one board off, and there was a bundle of tied-up letters, love letters from Jack Kirmse to his girlfriend down in California.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ah.

[00:15:58]ROY NELSON: As soon as we saw them, we stopped. It was on a weekend because Jeff and I were working overtime. Got uh, one of the arch -- one of the historians and my wife Doreen, called 'em in. Yeah, we didn't touch 'em. And they got 'em. I think the park still has 'em in their -- their archives.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: All the bundle of love letters.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

ROY NELSON: When he was a -- from when he was a kid.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ah.

[00:16:22]ROY NELSON: And Kirmse was the owners of the Moore House after Billy -- er --

KAREN BREWSTER: Ben.

ROY NELSON: Ben Moore sold it to him.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: You know, Kirmse's Curios, who goes back to the gold rush. Jack Kirmse.

[00:16:39]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, it's a big Skagway name for the business of jewelry and curios and things, right?

ROY NELSON: Yeah. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: So.

[00:16:46]KAREN BREWSTER: And he grew up there. Jack Kirmse grew up there?

ROY NELSON: His um -- Jack did, and it was his dad that started the business.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: And he came up -- I think he came up when he was a young kid.

[00:17:02]KAREN BREWSTER: But the love letters were from Jack.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

ROY NELSON: And I can't remember the dates on 'em or anything like that, but --

KAREN BREWSTER: No, but it's just a --

ROY NELSON: I never really messed with 'em.

[00:17:11]KAREN BREWSTER: No, but it's just fun to hear about the kinds of things you might find in all these old buildings.

ROY NELSON: And, of course, you know, like a lot of areas, when we'd start stripping off the interior, there'd be graffiti. People would write names and dates and stuff, you know. So we found a lot of that. [00:17:29]And once we got -- we'd stop, and then they'd come in. The archeologists would come in and photograph it and everything. We wouldn't touch it. We just covered it back over.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok. They didn't like take out those boards and --

ROY NELSON: No, 'cause usually they were on, like the siding or part of the building structure itself.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: And we'd try to -- if we had to take 'em off, we'd mark 'em, you know, and protect 'em, and put 'em back in the same exact spot they came from.

[00:17:55]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Do you remember any of that graffiti, what it said?  
ROY NELSON: Oh, there was some names and dates, and then in the railroad depot, going up the stairwell from the visitor center area up to the office, there was -- there was quite a few derogatory statements about Mike Heney, the builder of the railroad. [00:18:16]In fact, some of them I don't even want to say,. Aren't recordable.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: The blank-blank Mike Heney.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Or Mike Heney is blank-blank.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[00:18:26]ROY NELSON: And then there was a lot of names. You know, people just -- guys working on the building all just signed their names and put the dates on 'em.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: We even did that in all of the buildings when we'd finish 'em. We'd find a closet or something, and before we'd cover it up, we'd put like a -- the day -- a calendar with the day on it. We'd sign stuff.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

ROY NELSON: And put it -- so whenever they're restored again --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: There's another time capsule from the restoration crew from the Park Service that worked on 'em.

[00:18:56]KAREN BREWSTER: That's cool. That's cool. Kinda reminds me of the tradition of like, iron workers, you know, they put up the flag at the end, or they sign their names, I think, on the last beam or something.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: You know, it's neat to follow that tradition.

[00:19:09]ROY NELSON: So yeah, we always did that with all of the buildings, and I mean, after I'd -- I didn't work all the time on restoration. I was also on trail crew -- on the trail crew. And so it was years that I didn't really start or complete the buildings, so a lot of them, I didn't get involved with.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Um.

[00:19:30]KAREN BREWSTER: But as you say, when you first started doing that in '79, it was just to stabilize the buildings.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then later, it was much more restoring, preservation.

ROY NELSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you work on any of those?

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah.

[00:19:47]KAREN BREWSTER: So how did they decide what it was supposed to look like?

ROY NELSON: They took pictures and photos from like, uh, the early 1900's, is basically what they were based around. And, of course, they took paint samples, and so everything was repainted to the original first color.

[00:20:07]KAREN BREWSTER: So the buildings were still in good enough shape that there were still paint in places?

ROY NELSON: The majority of the buildings had been used -- there was only three or four that had sat unused for any amount of years. [00:20:21]A lot of 'em had been used right up until when the Park Service purchased 'em as one thing or another.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:20:28]ROY NELSON: So yeah, there was -- they were, you know, like um, the depot, you know, that had just -- that hadn't been used, but it had up until the late '60's when the railroad built their new depot. [00:20:45]The Pantheon was used in the '70's. Lynch and Kennedy, off and on. The Mascot was used as housing and other things. I mean, a lot of it had been shut down, but it was still being used. There was still people living in the Moore House.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

[00:21:07]ROY NELSON: There was always people in the Peniel Mission, 'cause it was -- it was basically turned into a private home.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

ROY NELSON: Before the park bought it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, I didn't know that. It must've been big.

ROY NELSON: It was.

(Coughing)

KAREN BREWSTER: I'm going to just pause for a second. [00:21:25]Ok. Ok. Um, so like you mentioned the Pantheon. What was it used for? Was it originally a saloon in the gold rush days?

ROY NELSON: Yeah. It was actually, um, the saloon was next to it. It was a dry goods store and various other things, I do believe. [00:21:46]You, um, the historians and all, and like Doreen would know more about --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, yeah. I was just wondering, you know --

ROY NELSON: Year-to-year basis.

[00:21:53]KAREN BREWSTER: -- what you remember from when you were growing up there, what these different buildings were used for?

ROY NELSON: Yeah, when I was a kid, it used to be called the Brownie's Bakery. It was a bakery.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

ROY NELSON: And in fact, the back part -- they had this big oven in it that we had to take apart to even get out of it when the park bought it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:22:15]ROY NELSON: And um, then it was a curios store after that, and I think it was owned by Jack and Margie Brown. And then, um, I think they had a curios store and a little clothing store in there. [00:22:34]And then the last one was Marie Kallstrom, who -- I don't know if she really -- because that was about the time I was kinda gone working up here, if she really did anything with it. She might have just bought it as an investment. But it was -- it had been used up until the mid-'70's.

[00:22:54]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And then like, Lynch and Kennedy, was that always -- isn't that kind of the hardware store?

ROY NELSON: No, Lynch and Kennedy, it probably was. I don't really remember, because that was one of the buildings that actually sat dormant for quite a few years.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[00:23:06]ROY NELSON: Uh, I -- when I was a kid growing up, it was used, and it was probably when I was real little, so I don't really remember, but it was pretty much abandoned, closed building because it was one that was in pretty bad shape when we got it.

[00:23:21]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Um, and then what was the other one you mentioned? Oh, the Moore House, you said people were living in. What was the other one you mentioned?

ROY NELSON: The Peniel.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Oh yeah, that was -- that was the old mission.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And people were living in that?

[00:23:34]ROY NELSON: Yeah. It was a house, you know, mainly a private home.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Seems like a big house.

ROY NELSON: It was, but, hey, property was cheap back then.

KAREN BREWSTER: And you needed housing. [00:23:45]So when you were a kid, did -- you say, these abandoned buildings. Did you guys go mess around in them?

ROY NELSON: Ah, most of 'em were locked up pretty good. We got into a couple of 'em, but we were pretty much told not to, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: And you listened?

ROY NELSON: Kinda. Sometimes.

[00:24:05]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I'd think for a kid, living in Skagway with all those old buildings and history to poke around would be enticing.

ROY NELSON: Yeah, we, you know, we checked 'em out, but a lot of 'em were -- there wasn't really anything in 'em. They'd been cleaned out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, yeah.

[00:24:19]ROY NELSON: And, you know. Um, the um, Mascot, I do remember when that was -- they had, I think they might've had a little store downstairs at one time when I was a kid, but when I was growing up, the upstairs was like housing, and um, the uh --

[00:24:44]I don't know if the company owned Golden North actually owned it, but a lot of the employees would live over there upstairs 'cause they had, like, apartments.

[00:24:54]And especially like where the -- the news depot and all that is, it's the next building to it. And then the Cribs, the Verbauwhedes, that was many different things. It was a -- they had a gas pump out there at one time. It was a liquor store. It was a travel agency, housing, home.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ROY NELSON: You know, I mean, and it was -- it was used up 'til it caught on fire.

[00:25:25]KAREN BREWSTER: And which building is that?

ROY NELSON: It'd be the um, um, Verbauwhedes Confectionary. That would be right -- Let's see, Fifth, Fourth -- right here, Verbauwhedes Confectionary.

KAREN BREWSTER: Figuring out how to spell it. Oh, Verbauwhede, ok. I never knew how to pronounce that. Ver-bau-whede. Ok. Cool. [00:25:57]Um, and so yeah, so you said you -- you raised the buildings, you put foundations under them, you cribbed -- the cribbing was for the raising?

ROY NELSON: Yeah, raising and hold it in place until we put a foundation, put in any -- you know, redid any of the structural work we had to do to set it back up.

[00:26:20]KAREN BREWSTER: How did you raise it? Did you use --

ROY NELSON: Well, some of 'em, like the Lynch Kennedy we gutted out, and the same thing with the Pantheon, but a lot of 'em we just cribbed and jacked because of the -- the floors and the uh, the floor joists and everything were solid enough to be able to do, so we just crawled underneath with hydraulic jacks and set 'em all up and go down lines and jack up, you know, maybe an eighth of an inch at a time. And do 'em in rows back and forth until we had it level and up to the height that they wanted it at.

[00:26:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I was gonna say, did you have a guy on each jack, "Ok! Go!"?

ROY NELSON: No, you just had a line, and sometimes when you were by yourself like I was quite a lot, you go up one line and back down the other and back up and shoot grade on it and see where you're at and see where it was high or low and --

[00:27:13]KAREN BREWSTER: I'm surprised that it's an old building that that jacking at different levels that the -- the framing could withstand that, that the walls and the roof wouldn't collapse.

ROY NELSON: If it was solid, you got -- you gotta look at this is old rough-cut timber, and it was all mainly fir, and it was all straight-grain, tight -- you know, tight grain, tight knot, so it was hard. [00:27:37]And sometimes you had to cut a piece of it, you'd have sparks coming off the blade --

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ROY NELSON: -- of your saw because it was so hard, the wood, by that time. [00:27:45]You know, there'd be rot around maybe at the base or something where it was in contact with the moisture with the -- with the ground, but otherwise, it was solid.

[00:27:55]KAREN BREWSTER: Wow. That's pretty amazing that all the way -- yeah, I would just think everything would twist and shake and the floor would get all wonky.

ROY NELSON: Well, you know, you just wanted to get it up. You weren't worried about cracking anything because it was all going to be restored, and ninety percent of the time, we took all the windows out first.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: And the doors, you know, and just plywooded over the entryways.

[00:28:17]KAREN BREWSTER: So where did they get fir? Did they bring all that wood in?

ROY NELSON: Well, they -- it was -- it was brought in, and it was milled around Ala -- Skagway, you know, 'cause -- Skagway wasn't always all cottonwood. It was all, um, evergreens. There was very few deciduous trees there. And I'm talking old-growth, big trees.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Because they had -- during the gold rush, if you take a look at pictures, both -- all the mountain sides are clear-cut.

[00:28:47]KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, yeah. But wouldn't that have been, like Sitka spruce and hemlock and things?

ROY NELSON: Uh, but there's fir there.

KAREN BREWSTER: There's fir there, too. Oh. Ok.

[00:28:56]ROY NELSON: But, yeah, a lot of it is spruce, but it was old-growth and tight -- you know, tight grain, so it was just as hard.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Especially after sitting there for a hundred years.

[00:29:05]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Cool. Um, yeah, the other thing I was thinking was like, you know, not -- I was thinking, well, cribbing up a building, like just take a crane and lift the whole thing up, but you guys couldn't do that?

ROY NELSON: No. Well, first of all, we didn't have the equipment. And it's just not the way you do that, you know. I mean, you gotta bring it up. And then like, two of the buildings, the old depot and the Mascot, had rock foundations underneath their safes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

[00:29:41]ROY NELSON: And so that's what we brought the level of the building up to because the buildings had sloped away from the safes. [00:29:48]So we just jacked it up to that elevation, and that's where they're at. That's the reason why, like the old depot is so high up in the air, because that's where it was originally.

[00:30:00]KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. And that -- everything sank but the rock and safe area.

ROY NELSON: Yeah, the foundation underneath, because that's a two-story safe in that building.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, really.

ROY NELSON: Yeah, there's one downstairs and one upstairs right the --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. On the same --

ROY NELSON: Yeah, above each other.

KAREN BREWSTER: Vertical. Yeah. Huh.

[00:30:17]ROY NELSON: And so there was no way you were going to do anything with that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: So that's why we jacked -- you know, we leveled it to that and that's -- that's why today when you look at it, it's two feet higher --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: -- than the rest of the buildings in the streets because it was built that high originally.

[00:30:31]KAREN BREWSTER: Huh. I didn't think about that a big, heavy safe would need something underneath it other than just a wooden floor.

ROY NELSON: Um-hm. No, no.

KAREN BREWSTER: They used rock, huh?

ROY NELSON: Rock and mortar and concrete, you know. Made a big base underneath it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow. Cool.

[00:30:47]ROY NELSON: So that's where we -- that was the goal was to jack it up to that, and that's what we did.

[00:30:52]KAREN BREWSTER: Wow, cool. So let's talk about the Chilkoot Trail and your work over there for a little bit.

ROY NELSON: Ok. I started on the Chilkoot in '81 in the fall with Jerry Watson, who was the trail foreman. [00:31:12]He'd came up and then that fall, I helped him out because he -- he lost his crew. And um, I got to liking it 'cause I'd done the Chilkoot when I was a kid quite a few times. I used to trail-guide. [00:31:26]And um, so we -- we were pretty good friends by then, and next year he asked me to come back, so I started on the trail, and we were totally rebuilding the trail 'cause nothing had actually been done on it since the late '50's, early '60's when the state Department of Corrections had crews up there and they built the old log cabins and the shelters and everything. So it'd been quite a few years before it had had any real maintenance done on it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:32:04]ROY NELSON: And the trail crew before us that the park had put out there had really much -- pretty much just surveyed it and laid out the route. Did some temporary trails, and, you know, temporary bridges and all, so we started actually physically building all the bridges.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[00:32:24]ROY NELSON: And I -- in let's see, '82 and '83, I worked on building the two big suspension bridges up there. I was in charge of that. I had my own crew doing that.

[00:32:37]In fact, that was where I got my first achievement award from the park for. I built one over in Canyon City from the trail over to the Canyon City historic island. And then I built the other one up at Eleven-Mile.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ROY NELSON: And one's -- one was 68 foot, and the other one was 74 feet long.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[00:33:01]ROY NELSON: Never built a suspension bridge before in my life.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, so how did you do that?

ROY NELSON: Well, it was a kit.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: I mean, it was a package thing. You know, everything was done by hand, digging the holes for the anchor blocks for the suspender -- you know, the suspension cables. [00:33:19]We had a one-yard gas mixer that we mixed everything by hand, wheel barrowed it and then poured it in place. Got all of our aggregate we dug out of the rivers and wheel barrowed over into place to make -- to mix the concrete.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[00:33:37]ROY NELSON: So yeah, it was all done by hand. That's why it took us two years to complete 'em.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then did all the supplies and stuff get hauled in on your backs?

ROY NELSON: We flew it in.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, you helicoptered them in.

ROY NELSON: We helicoptered all that stuff in, 'cause it was some big beams and everything, and a lot of concrete. [00:33:52]'Cause most of the time when we had to fly in, if we didn't use on-site material, we'd sling-load it in. And they still do that.

[00:34:02]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. So how many guys on your crew?

ROY NELSON: I had four guys on my crew, and Watson had four on his crew for about three years, and then we went back down to a four-man crew. [00:34:15]'Cause while I was building suspension bridges, he was building the other log bridges and the other foot bridges.

KAREN BREWSTER: So it was five guys, you and four other guys, who -- ?

ROY NELSON: No, myself and three other guys.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, you and three guys who built the suspension bridge?

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[00:34:30]ROY NELSON: And every now and then, you know, Watson's crew would help out when we were doing really, like, doing a lot of the digging or hauling the materials, but, yeah, it was mainly a four-man crew.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ROY NELSON: Myself and three guys.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's a lot of work.

ROY NELSON: It was, but I was young.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: I was still in my twenties then, so it -- it didn't phase me.

[00:34:52]KAREN BREWSTER: It must not. I mean, you said you'd never built a suspension bridge, and --

ROY NELSON: Well, I'd had a -- I'd had some architectural training in high school. I went through a mechanical drawing and architect class, 'cause I was really good in math.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:35:10]ROY NELSON: So I knew how to read blueprints and everything.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, well, that's good.

ROY NELSON: And plus from my experience of working construction, I knew how to read blueprints. [00:35:20]But it was a kit, so I mean, it was pretty much -- you just had to figure out what went where and put it together.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, but still, the foundation, and digging the --

ROY NELSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: With all that material and stuff.

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah, you -- you know --

KAREN BREWSTER: You had to figure all that out.

ROY NELSON: Yeah. But I'd had, you know, like I say, over my life as a kid and everything, working with my dad and all my construction experience, I had -- I had that pretty well figured out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm-mm.

[00:35:48]ROY NELSON: 'Cause I also, you know, and like I say, I worked up here on the pipeline. I was on a lowering-in crew, laying the below-ground pipe the first year. The

second year I was insulating the above-ground pipe. [00:36:00]And then, when I left there, I went back to Skagway, I was a pipe layer laying the new sewer service system in Skagway, so. I knew how to shoot grade, I knew elevations, you know, I could do it.

[00:36:16]KAREN BREWSTER: Cool. And then did you and your crews camp up there all summer while you were working on the bridges?

ROY NELSON: Yeah. Yeah, we had a -- we worked, um -- that time I think we were working four days on and three days off. Then we eventually went to eight days on, eight tens and six days off, so we weren't spending so much time traveling.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:36:40]ROY NELSON: We built a base camp, a trail crew base camp, just above Canyon City. Fact, we even -- same thing, we -- at the end of the day, we'd -- when we first were up there, we just had tents, and a twelve-by-twelve lean-to tarp for a kitchen.

[00:37:00]So every night on our way up, one guy would -- we'd clean our packs out. One guy would take all of our gear, and the other three guys or however many guys were there would take a gunnysack with a garbage bag inside, fill it up with dirt, with gravel out of the river, and hike it straight up the hill, up to our camp and dump it off 'til we had enough materials to -- to make concrete.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

[00:37:25]ROY NELSON: 'Cause we kinda did it on the sly. I mean, it was approved, but it wasn't approved, but we wanted to get it built. I mean, it wasn't in the budget.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: So we just started doing it on our own.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[00:37:40]ROY NELSON: Then it got approved. But, um, yeah, you know, I mean, we were all young, and a lot of the guys were young and in good shape.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, you'd have to be.

ROY NELSON: 'Cause I had a lot -- a lot of the guys were ex-military. First few years, I had a lot of Vietnam vets working on the trail crew.

[00:38:02]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm, um, so when you started -- the -- the years on that bridge were '81-82?

ROY NELSON: Uh, it've been '82 and '83 --

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: -- I do believe. [00:38:14]And they're still standing, but I think the one at Canyon City they're thinking about having to replace, but, you know, they're over forty years old.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And they're made out of wood?

ROY NELSON: Yeah, they're treated wood.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:38:27]ROY NELSON: They're still, you know, I mean, it's taken quite a few hits from floods and everything. I think they've -- from what I understand from the trail crew that are up there now, that I kinda, every now and then I talk to them when I see them in the spring 'cause Kat always tells me what's going on, you know, 'cause she knew I was the one that started building -- rebuilding the Chilkoot.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:38:51]ROY NELSON: And she was telling me that they were thinking they were gonna have to replace the one at Canyon City.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-Hm.

ROY NELSON: But, you know, I mean, that was forty years ago that those were built.

[00:39:02]KAREN BREWSTER: It's amazing. And so what other kinds of things did the trail crew do while you were working with them?

ROY NELSON: Well, we built all the bridges from the trailhead all the way up to the summit, which was like -- I can't remember now, sixty of 'em, I think. You know, some -- some short, some long. Some we did on-site material, you know, I cut big timber. We just drug 'em in and then we -- we, uh, winched in big rocks around the abutments and all, to keep 'em from washing out. [00:39:39]Rerouted quite a lot, you know, course then the annual stuff of brushing and everything. We, uh, redid, uh -- we replaced, uh, moved Pleasant Camp Campground higher up from where it was 'cause it was washing out and flooding. [00:40:00]Um, helped build the ranger -- new ranger station. Built the new campground at Canyon Ci -- at Sheep Camp. Cleared a bunch of avalanches. Big trees had got knocked over in the winter from snow avalanche.

[00:40:19]KAREN BREWSTER: So that was probably every year, you had to clear out -- ?

ROY NELSON: Uh, well, the avalanches, we only had a couple of major ones that really knocked down a whole lot of trees and covered a lot of the trail, and that was all above Cany -- or above Sheep Camp going up toward the Scales, where the big avalanche was back during the gold rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:40:38]ROY NELSON: Um, then we had beavers move into the lower part, and we started - - I started building the boardwalk through the beaver pond.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you remember when that was?

ROY NELSON: See, that would've been, year or two before I left off the trail crew, so that would've been '70 -- probably, or not '70 -- '95, maybe, '94-95.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[00:41:16]ROY NELSON: 'Cause the last four years -- from '94-99, I wasn't on the trail anymore.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: So it had to be, I think, '92, '93, was when we started the --

[00:41:33]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. So yeah, 'cause the notes I hadve from Karl (Gurcke) said you were on trail crew from '80-95, but --

ROY NELSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: You're saying, '81-94.

ROY NELSON: Well, '80 -- actually, I was kinda on the trail crew in '80, but I -- that's the year -- that fall was when I started.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: That summer I rebuilt -- I built the ranger station out in Dyea at the Dyea Campground.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[00:41:57]ROY NELSON: I took -- what they had two tent frames, and I framed 'em in and put roofs on 'em. And then I built another sleeping quarter cabin.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that was in 1980?

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[00:42:12]ROY NELSON: And then '81 -- no, that've been '81 when I did that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Ok.

ROY NELSON: 'Cause '80 I worked the whole summer doing the restoration.

KAREN BREWSTER: Doing the restoration. Ok.

ROY NELSON: The whole year, actually.

[00:42:28]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. So, and then after -- so that would be summer of '82, you went out on the trail itself?

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: That was my first full year on the trail crew.

[00:42:45]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so the beaver pond, that area where the boardwalk is, I've walked that part of the trail.

ROY NELSON: I guess it's gotten a lot bigger.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um, yeah, so before that, that was not all water?

ROY NELSON: No, that was dry.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[00:43:00]ROY NELSON: Then the beavers moved in and started damming a couple of the sloughs and we come up there one spring, and there was water on the ground. We bushwhacked around and saw this little beaver dam, and it just kept growing.

[00:43:15]So they -- we -- they had -- up 'til then, there hadn't been really any beaver around that area for years.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

ROY NELSON: So.

[00:43:26]KAREN BREWSTER: And the decision was -- do you know why the decision was made to just leave it and do the boardwalk instead of going in and destroying the dams and -- ?

ROY NELSON: Because -- well, first of all, you can destroy 'em, but they're just going to build 'em bigger and better, like the Six Million Dollar Man. [00:43:43]And they are a natural -- it is their -- it used to be part of their natural habitat, so we couldn't destroy 'em or remove 'em.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: You know, I mean, that was just --

[00:43:55]KAREN BREWSTER: So beavers had been there historically?

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then they were just re -- coming back?

ROY NELSON: They were hunted out, and they moved -- you know, there weren't as many down there as there were, like up in the Yukon, you know, over on the other side of the -- the border on the other side of the passes, but they had been down there, just not in

quantities. [00:44:19]But um, yeah. You know, the park just couldn't do anything. You know, they were just like -- they're not going to hunt 'em. They're not going to trap 'em and relocate 'em. Just gotta live with 'em.

[00:44:30]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. That's a lot of boardwalk that you put in.

ROY NELSON: Yeah, but it's also made a great wetland ecosystem in there now. We get -- when I was -- last time I was up there, there was blue heron in there, a lot of -- you know, course, the fish love it. You know, a lot of wild -- water fowl, they're coming back. Ducks, blue herons, um. [00:44:54]So, you know, I mean, it's -- it's just part of nature. It's part of the life cycle.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Taking back what was theirs at one time.

[00:45:05]KAREN BREWSTER: But so I can imagine building all that boardwalk and those bridges, were you doing it in waders the whole time?

ROY NELSON: Oh, sometimes, yeah. I mean, that boardwalk was actually real easy to do. It was just two planks side by side on a crib.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: You could go through and (cough), excuse me. We made it so um, as they built it up higher, you could take it apart and add another layer of cribbing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Just keep raising the --

[00:45:34]KAREN BREWSTER: Because, yeah, the water, as you say, it may be higher now than when you built it.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And they just can keep raising it.

ROY NELSON: So. And it's gotten longer, you know. I mean -- Excuse me, I've got to stop for a second. (pause) [00:45:50]But yeah, that was um -- from my understanding, it's almost up to the sawmill now, which is quite a little bit of area, but what they're going to do with it, I have no idea or, you know, how they're going to deal with it because, well, I don't work for the park anymore.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:46:10]ROY NELSON: And it was a good idea to start with because we didn't think they were gonna get that big of a group of 'em and start building that big of a dam across there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: 'Cause we tried to knock holes in it. That was somebody's great idea, not ours, because I tried telling 'em, you know, they're gonna have this rebuilt in a day, and it's gonna be bigger and longer and everything. [00:46:35]They cut out a couple little spillways to try to drain the water off. Sure enough, three days later we hiked back out to it, and it was like a foot higher and probably about twenty feet longer than what it was before.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yep.

[00:46:52]ROY NELSON: They weren't just cutting down -- the beavers just weren't chopping down little alder and little small saplings. They were actually cutting -- chewing down big cottonwoods.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ROY NELSON: I saw one cottonwood that they had chewed that was probably a good foot in diameter.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow. That would take a little bit of time.

ROY NELSON: Little bit of chewing, but it's soft wood, too.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, that's true. That's true.

[00:47:15]ROY NELSON: But yeah, they -- I found their beaver dam on the other side of the slough against the bank, and it's -- that time it was probably, um, off the side of the bank, it was probably a good five foot high and probably twelve feet long.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ROY NELSON: And uh, going up the bank about six feet.

KAREN BREWSTER: They're serious.

ROY NELSON: They were moving in.

[00:47:38]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. So yeah, back -- other trail crew things. I don't think everybody realizes how much work goes into building and maintaining a trail like that.

ROY NELSON: There was a lot, you know, especially when we were there because we were -- it was all -- pretty much restoration, restoring it and everything. And a lot of manual labor. A lot of wheel barrow work. Course, a lot of hiking. [00:48:08]You know, everything was done by hand. You know, when we were building, like, we did on-site material, you know, we peeled the logs, we notched 'em with a chainsaw and an ax, we cut the -- either cut the deck out of 'em, like notch 'em and level 'em, or we uh -- we had three by twelve cedar flown in, and we cut deck for 'em.

[00:48:33]KAREN BREWSTER: Wow. You didn't -- did you have one of those sawmill attachments for your chainsaw to make 'em boards?

ROY NELSON: No. We didn't want to do the logs 'cause most of 'em we used the big logs on were a long span, like forty feet or so. You know, I was cutting big timber.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:48:52]ROY NELSON: We didn't want to damage the integrity of the log by cutting into it. We'd just level a flat plate off of 'em, and then put boards over 'em, or we'd cut um down just enough to make a deck out. We wouldn't cut 'em in half or cut 'em down because that just weakens 'em. 'Specially where they're green.

[00:49:14]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Man, those must've been heavy, big green trees like that.

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah. I used -- I had a portable winch I ran off a chainsaw for an engine.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

ROY NELSON: A leaning winch, and I just winched 'em in. In place across the streams and up the other side. Between winching and rock-barring.

[00:49:35]KAREN BREWSTER: What's rock-barring?

ROY NELSON: It's a big rock -- it's a big bar you use for, like, moving rock and everything. You have to use it sometimes if the log dug in, you know, you have two guys on either side with these big bars and lift up.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

ROY NELSON: 'Cause I put a point in 'em, but they'd lift 'em up, and get 'em out of the -- from being dug in. And I'd start sliding 'em and they'd put roller logs underneath 'em, and --

KAREN BREWSTER: Like corduroy to push the --

ROY NELSON: Yeah. Well, yeah, but they're just like round -- just a section of the log, you know, small --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: -- four-inch log you put underneath just like rollers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Rolls it over.

ROY NELSON: Rolls it like a piece of pipe.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Yeah.

ROY NELSON: Keep it rolling. But yeah, it was very physical. You know, and um, we had some good healthy guys on the crew.

[00:50:21]KAREN BREWSTER: So the route for the trail, you said, you know, you were restoring the trail because it hadn't had any maintenance. The route, was it obvious? You know, I don't know if it's -- it's not exactly the same route as what the gold miners used.

ROY NELSON: Oh no, it's been totally changed. There's only a few sections that is the actual historic trail, and that's out of Canyon City going up to about Ten Mile. [00:50:47]Um, the southern part, the first hill, the Sainly Hill, the state put that in, and then after you drop down there at Mile One and a Half, the trail is an old logging road that went up to the sawmill up at uh, Four Mile.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:51:08]ROY NELSON: And then it actually goes all the way up to Finnegan's Point, where they -- 'cause they logged that area back in the '50's and '60's.

KAREN BREWSTER: For the sawmill?

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:51:18]ROY NELSON: So uh, that was all -- most of that trail is the old logging road. Um, the original trail didn't actually hit that side of the canyon until up above Finnegan's Point, which is still -- actually, I'll take that back. There is still some of the historic trail above Finnegan's Point up 'til Six Mile. Uh, it's been moved around so much because of either flooding, or alluvial fans moving. [00:51:50]What we did was we tried to stay with what the state had put in in the '50's and '60's as much as possible. But, you know, there's areas you couldn't do it because it was either underwater, washed out, or it was a bog. You know, quagmire, so we'd have to move it. We moved it up to drier areas. A lot of that was just for safety of the hikers.

[00:52:15]KAREN BREWSTER: Did you have to cut a lot of brush for --

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah. We did a lot of brushing. We did hours and hours, and -- I mean, it took us probably two or three years to totally brush the whole trail out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

ROY NELSON: Brush it back, and then you had to brush it annually.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:52:33]ROY NELSON: 'Cause we used to have a -- one or two of the guys, 'specially where it was in the real brushy areas, that was pretty much all they did was brush. At least for a part of the season. And we always -- all of us, all four of us, you know, in the spring, we'd brush anything that was down over the trail, cut it out, you know, and brush back on our way in and out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Or way out in the spring. [00:53:00]We'd take sections, and we'd have two guys to a crew, 'cause you didn't want to be working by yourself with a chainsaw.

KAREN BREWSTER: No. No.

ROY NELSON: One guy cutting, one guy pulling brush, and you'd switch off, and -- Um, so yeah, you know, I mean, there was -- it's constant maintenance on it.

[00:53:18]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that's what I was wondering. By '95, when you stopped doing trail work, was there still a need to constantly do all that brushing?

ROY NELSON: Constantly doing all the brushing, you know, every year something would happen and you'd have to do a reroute, or there'd be a bridge taken out by a flood, or um, snow or something. Um, always maintenance on the campgrounds and the buildings, so yeah, there was always a need for a trail crew.

[00:53:46]KAREN BREWSTER: So tell me about some of the buildings and the campgrounds. I haven't been to those campgrounds, so are there actual little cabins or wall tents for the rangers, or --

ROY NELSON: Well, they have a ranger station up at Sheep Camp, which -- 'cause the rangers, you know, 'specially with the weathers -- bad weather, they have to hike up to the top of the trail to the summit, to the Canadian border, and then the wardens come down just to follow people up and make sure they get up safely and don't get lost or hurt.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:54:18]ROY NELSON: So their base camp is in Sheep Camp. The trail crew's camp was outside of Canyon City. Canyon City had the old log cabin warm-up shelter that the state had built, and the rest of it was tents. And then when we moved the um, campgrounds from Sheep Camp out because they were actually on the historic part or artifacts and old buildings, we had to remove that. We moved it south, and we put in two semi-walled tent frame warm-up shelters, and then, you know, a couple, two or three tent platforms, and the rest is just campsites for tents. [00:55:06]And last year, from what Kat was telling me, the cabin -- the old, uh, the old, uh, log cabin that the state had put in up at Canyon City really wasn't being used because it was an historic site. They rebuilt a cabin down in Skagway last year, and, you know, put it together and then took it apart and flew it up, and were gonna reassemble up there at Sheep Camp this year, from what I understand. And that was -- when I talked to her, that was in April before I left.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: And I haven't been back, so I don't know.

[00:55:43]KAREN BREWSTER: But that would just be so the rangers would have a little bit more of a place to --

ROY NELSON: No, no. This is for the hikers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, for the hikers.

ROY NELSON: It's a warm-up shelter.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, so the hikers could get out of the weather.

ROY NELSON: Dry-out shelter, yeah. No, rangers have a brand-new -- Well, it's an old, you know, it's not brand-new now, but we built 'em a new station in mid-'90's, I do believe. You know, fully -- fully heated.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ROY NELSON: You know, propane. Uh, the only thing they don't have is running water.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:56:17]ROY NELSON: But they got the river right there. And they have sleeping quarters, bunk beds on one side, and there's -- the upstairs attic is kinda like a storage/extra sleeping area, and that's their office and their shelter and their cook -- you know, their kitchen and everything right there. Ken Rusele (sp?) was the actual carpenter that built that. He -- yeah, he worked with us on the -- with the trail crew building that.

[00:56:51]KAREN BREWSTER: Hm. So what did you do in those early days in terms of communications? Like you said, uh, Jerry Watson's crew came and helped you. Did you guys have radios?

ROY NELSON: Yeah, we had two-way radios.

KAREN BREWSTER: And they worked out there?

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah. Yeah. 'Cause there's repeaters, so they worked pretty good. You know there's certain areas, couple spots, if we were real down low they wouldn't work originally 'til they got stronger towers, but you could -- you just had to hike up out of the hole you were in and you could get communication. Yep, we all carried radios.

[00:57:22]KAREN BREWSTER: And then did you communicate back with folks at Skagway?

ROY NELSON: Yeah, we could communicate with anybody on the trail, the office, the Canadian wardens, and, you know, so we always kept talk -- you know, talked to each other and knew where everybody was and what was going on, and --.

[00:57:41]KAREN BREWSTER: So was Jerry considered the head of the trail crew?

ROY NELSON: He was the trail foreman.

KAREN BREWSTER: Trail foreman, ok.

ROY NELSON: Yeah. And I'll give you his number and all.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: Yeah, he -- he was there for, I don't know, fourteen -- I think he was there, like -- well, he -- he was up there until '90, I think '98 was his last year when he couldn't do it anymore.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: 'Cause in '99, my last year, I actually did restoration and I ran the trail crew.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[00:58:14]ROY NELSON: I'd work six days down -- or I'd work six days up on the trail crew. I'd come back. I worked -- we worked Wednesday to Wednesday. I'd come back and I'd

work Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday on restoration. Then I'd take Monday and Tuesday off, and I'd go back up.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ROY NELSON: Did that for that summer.

[00:58:34]KAREN BREWSTER: And you were the -- so, you were the foreman that summer?

ROY NELSON: Yeah, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: But you still went back out on the tra -- the foreman still works out on the trail?

ROY NELSON: Yeah, yeah. It's a working foreman.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: And we pretty much, you know, I mean, I was down to one guy at that time, and so we didn't -- didn't do a whole lot of construction. It was more just the regular maintenance. You know, I mean, I built one bridge, small bridge, by myself, just wanted a little reroute, but it was mainly just being up there, doing maintenance.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, like what?

ROY NELSON: Brushing, had to dig a couple outhouse holes, um, flying stuff in and out when it was needed. Keep an eye on people.

[00:59:17]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I was wondering, in those -- all those years that you were out there on the trail, you know, '81-95, or '99, maybe, did you notice a change in the usage of the trail and the hikers?

ROY NELSON: Yeah, I mean, um, when it first started up there, it was more experienced hikers, you know. Used to be a lot of Europeans and all. And some groups.

[00:59:48]The better the trail got, the more popular it got. it definitely got more because it wound up now where you have to have a hiking permit and you know, you have to -- you have to let 'em know where you're gonna stay at because each camp can only hold so many people.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:00:07]ROY NELSON: And so, um -- and, of course, the Canadians have a -- you have to pay to go into Canada now. They have a hiking permit and a paid permit.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, so you have to get the um, Park Service permit and then you have to get a Canadian permit if you're going to do the rest of the trail?

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, I didn't know that. [01:00:27]But when you started back in '81, was there a need to get permits for the hikers?

ROY NELSON: Not really, 'cause there wasn't that many of them. And it wasn't that -- that wasn't that big of a deal. And then, of course, Parks Canada, you know, they're not like the Park Service here, where they get money from Congress. You know, we get a budget. They actually have to show -- they have to make their own money.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, I didn't know that.

ROY NELSON: Per se. You know, they got -- they've got to have a certain amount of income.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: The Canadian government does throw in money, but --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: -- they have to do something to -- so they charge -- started charging for hiking permits. [01:01:10]And plus, that helps track where people are, and how many are on, and um, -- so yeah, I mean, I can't say about now, but I know there's more and more people going up, and getting a lot of less experienced hikers, 'cause now it's -- they think, you know, "Oh, hey, there's people up there. It's this nice, easy trail." It's not easy.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm-um.

ROY NELSON: I don't care how well we maintain it and got it fixed up. It's still a tough trail, especially once you get above Sheep Camp.

[01:01:43]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, well the -- the step section sounds rather intimidating.

ROY NELSON: Um-hm. It is. I've had a few people freak out up there.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that -- is that even really trail, or it's just --

ROY NELSON: It's just rock.

KAREN BREWSTER: It's just rock.

ROY NELSON: You know, I mean, you have cairns along it to keep you where you're supposed to be going and where the trail is kinda so you don't get lost.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:02:05]ROY NELSON: But, you know, once you get up there -- And the safest route, too, of course.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: You know, because it'll change from year to year.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, really?

ROY NELSON: Well, yeah, it depends on what happened, if there's been an avalanche, or --

[01:02:17]KAREN BREWSTER: So the trail crew will go out and remark it in the spring?

ROY NELSON: Well, the rangers do that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: The rangers and the wardens, 'cause they're the ones that go up. We -- our job mainly was never -- was always up to timberline, you know, 'cause there wasn't much we could do anything outside of -- up there -- you know, above there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: Because it's whatever Mother Nature does is where --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. [01:02:40]Well, I -- I say, I haven't been up to that point on the trail, but I read that they -- from -- not only do they have, you know, rock cairns, but they would paint like orange triangles or something. Do they still do that?

ROY NELSON: I have no idea.

KAREN BREWSTER: But did they used to do that?

ROY NELSON: Not really. We try to get away from that 'cause that's just kind of intrusive.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. When I read about that, I was a little bit -- that doesn't sound like the Park Service.

ROY NELSON: No, I mean, I don't ever -- unless it was just for emergency reroute around something, or something like that, we just -- they always tried to use cairns, or something natural.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[01:03:18]ROY NELSON: Um, just like if we flagged anything, you know, as soon as we could take the flagging down, we would.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: But, um, 'cause you know, I mean, when you're out there, you want to experience nature.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: You don't want to see this modern paint and plastic hanging out.

[01:03:37]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Um, so did you ever have to help any hikers? You know, you said like the rangers go up to make sure people get over the pass, and I'm sure they've had to rescue people. What about you?

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah. We have. We've -- you know, we've had a couple incidences down in Sheep Camp, but, you know, we always checked on people. Like if we were -- if the weather's foul, we were around like Canyon City. Excuse me, you know, we'd check in on Canyon City because that's five miles for the rangers to have to come down every day. [01:04:14]You know, we did some first aid, some splinting ankles and all. We had one guy chop the end of his finger off, and we got him out of there on a medevac. But down in the lower part, we really didn't have that many serious injuries. [01:04:32]Our biggest thing was, a lot of times I'd come through camp or through Canyon City, and you could tell the guy -- the inexperienced people 'cause they just bought all this stuff from Eddie Bauer, North Face, or something. Had never set their tent up before. Had never put their camp stove together. It's pouring down rain, they're wet and tired, and they're sitting there, trying to figure out how to put a tent together. So, I'd show 'em.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's nice of you.

ROY NELSON: You know, I'd put their tent up for 'em and say, "Watch." And you know, sometimes there were tents I had never dealt with before, but I've put enough tents up, it was easy enough for me to figure out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: You know, next time I would've done it, it probably would've taken me a quarter of the time it took the first time, but, you know, we always did that and made sure everybody was ok, and warm, and nobody was hypothermic. [01:05:26]Um, you know, our job really wasn't to take care of the hikers, but it was part our job. I mean, it was still part of our responsibility to assist.

[01:05:39]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, that's kinda why I asked about it. Is like, yeah, officially, you weren't there as support.

ROY NELSON: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: But if something's happening.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: You know, you're not going to walk away, I wouldn't think.

ROY NELSON: No, we can't, you know. We had to take care of it.

[01:05:51]KAREN BREWSTER: And then on your crews, the trail crews, were there times when people got injured?

ROY NELSON: Not really. We were always really safe. You know, like I did the um, all the chainsaw instructions and safety instructions with a chainsaw, how to run a chainsaw and

how to use it and everything, you know. I mean, that was -- we got new guys on, I'd train 'em. I did the same thing with the rangers 'cause they really didn't use chainsaws, but for a while they were when they had to cut their own wood and everything, but they just had a small one. [01:06:26]But I was in charge of the training. Of course, I did all of the maintenance on the equipment and all.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: But um, we always had -- we always seemed to get pretty savvy guys up there for the crew that --

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that's good because, yeah, you're kinda far out there if something major happened.

ROY NELSON: Yeah, no. We -- you know, sure, there was a few bumps and bruises and stuff like that, but never anything that involved a medevac or anything. Um, yeah.

[01:06:57]KAREN BREWSTER: And now you were -- when you were a kid growing up there, you said you kinda went up the trail. Was it -- yeah, was it used by people?

ROY NELSON: Not real often. There was a lot -- a lot of times in the fall, people would hike up. There was a family -- their name was Nelson also, not related to me, but he had a hunting and guiding -- uh, because he had horses and all. And he'd go up to Canyon City and go up the Norris and all goat hunting and bear hunting and take people up.

[01:07:29]There were certain groups -- people still used it. What I did when I was like, in my teens, I used to work for the State of Alaska Department of Juvenile Corrections, and well, I didn't work for 'em, I kinda contracted with 'em, and I'd take a couple groups of kids over every year.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

ROY NELSON: That were in trouble, but not hardened, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Kids -- you know, kids that had a little run-in with the law or were on probation or something. And I'd work with the probation officer, Neal King, who's gone now, out of Haines, and he'd bring, like, a couple groups a year over. And I'd do the guiding for them because I was their age, and so it was kinda like a thing to show them, you know, what -- what they could be like, I guess.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:08:21]ROY NELSON: You know, and then I did -- I used to do some for like, Boy Scout groups, and Girl Scout groups. I never took like a group of just individuals over. You know, I was never into the uh, sherpa packing, you know, type of groups that we have now. But I'd do, uh, let's see, my sophomore, junior year. Didn't really do it my senior year. I think my freshman -- all through high school, basically, I'd do like, anywhere from four to five hikes a year up over the trail -- up over the trail up to -- all the way into Bennett.

KAREN BREWSTER: You'd go up to Bennett and then take the train back?

ROY NELSON: Take the train back. So you know, it was a little extra income for me, and it was something I enjoyed.

[01:09:08]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, it's interesting that the Department of Corrections had that idea to bring kids over there.

ROY NELSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Because, you know, nowadays, you know, it's a very in thing, you know, the taking kids out into nature and reconnecting and that can be very healing and helpful.

ROY NELSON: Yeah. Well, Neal, he was -- you know, like I say, he was from Haines, and he was an outdoors guy, and he believed in it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: And um, so we hooked up, and so, you know, he just kept using me until I quit doing it when I started working.

[01:09:42]KAREN BREWSTER: So where -- where was the kids coming from, an Anchorage facility?

ROY NELSON: Pretty much Southeast.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

ROY NELSON: And they weren't from facilities. They were kids that were just, like did something stupid. They weren't -- they weren't like in detention centers or anything. They were just kids that either had a --who were, you know, from messed up families or, you know, did something stupid like get caught drinking or doing drugs or maybe petty theft.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

[01:10:08]ROY NELSON: And what the whole idea was to stop 'em before they started doing some really violent crimes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: You know, really getting to be hardened.

[01:10:17]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, well, I was just wondering how they found those kids and brought 'em together. They must've --

ROY NELSON: Through the court, you know, juvenile courts and all.

KAREN BREWSTER: The court, yeah, sort of like being, um, sentenced to community service. They were sentenced to --

ROY NELSON: Well, it was -- it was -- they weren't made to do it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: It was something they -- it was voluntary on their part.

[01:10:36]KAREN BREWSTER: What a great experience for them, though.

ROY NELSON: Yeah. And that'd be like, oh, anywhere from -- my average groups were like fifteen to twenty people. And um, you know, they had -- always had to make sure they had good equipment. We'd meet at my house in my dad's woodshop, and I'd go through their packs, show 'em how to pack 'em. You know, some kid might have a whole bunch of cans of Beane Weenee, it's like nope. You're not going to make a fire with them. Here, we gotta get you some dried food. You know, of course, the state supplied most of that type of thing

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: And I did the same thing with the other groups, you know, I checked through and I -- you know, I made them break up the meals. So like, you -- you're packing breakfast tomorrow for everybody. You're lunch, and you're dinner.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:11:30]ROY NELSON: Set it up like that, you know. The kids enjoyed it. And so, you know, I mean -- and then, of course, the Boys and Girl Scout groups, you know, I took over were pretty good. I used to have more problems with the adults than with the kids.

KAREN BREWSTER: Because you were -- is it because you were a teenager yourself or you -  
- ?

ROY NELSON: No, the kids, you know, they -- uh, sometimes I'd get adults that like, "Oh, it's wet. I'm tired. My feet hurt." You know, the kids, they just like, "Yeah, ok." Basically, you know. But most of the kids, you know, I mean, I -- most of the people, even the adults, were experienced enough. You know, they had never done the Chilkoot and everything, and it was just a safety factor for them to have somebody that knew the trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: And knew where to go, 'cause like I say, lot of times bridges would be washed out. You had to know how to bushwhack up around, find a place to ford the streams.

[01:12:25]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, because in that -- this was in the '70's, right? So the trail wasn't obvious in places like it is now?

ROY NELSON: It was pretty brushed in, and there was a lot of places, you know, a lot of the bridges were damaged, you know, 'cause the state really hadn't done anything there since the early '60's. The only maintenance that was kinda done was like, from Wes Nelson, who did the guiding up there, and I think um, the state forestry did a little bit of work, but they never -- you know, it was like, a couple people come up for a week here and there, you know, every summer and do a little bit, but there was never actually any trail maintenance done until the Park Service took it over.

[01:13:07]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, well, since -- You know, nowadays, everybody's heard of the Chilkoot Trail.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Because, you know, the park and it's advertised, and it's so popular, but back then, if it was sort of grown in and not so used, how did people know about it?

ROY NELSON: Well, a lot of it was from history, you know, because, you know, if you ever study Alaska history or you know, US history, you're gonna hear about the Klondike Gold Rush and the Chilkoot Trail, and there's always been that picture around of that --

KAREN BREWSTER: The staircase.

ROY NELSON: -- that line of ant-looking-like line of men going up and over the Golden Staircase and all.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:13:46]ROY NELSON: And it's always been, I think, a fascination to people. It just wasn't very popular because it was hard to get to.

[01:13:53]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And, you know, you did mention before how Skagway now has, you know, become such a tourist-based economy, but there were tourists coming through all along?

ROY NELSON: Oh yeah, there've been tourists since the gold rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: But not as substantial. I mean, when I was a kid growing up, you had the Princess Pat, the Prince George, were the two main cruise ships, and they, you know, they'd come in once a week.

KAREN BREWSTER: And they were small?

ROY NELSON: They were small.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:14:23]ROY NELSON: You know, and then you get a few other little ones that come up, but nothing like nowadays when you've got four big uh, 3000-people ships coming in and docking.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And at one point, there was that Golden Circle route that the tour companies kind of promoted, and I don't know if that went through Skagway.

ROY NELSON: Uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: I can't remember. That was like, in the '40's, '50's, '60's.

ROY NELSON: Yeah, it did. I think it did. Um, also people, you know, 'cause that time, they really didn't have a lot of tour buses going up 'cause the Alaska highway was dirt and rough.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: And um, so most of the time, the ships that came up then were affiliated somehow with White Pass, so they'd come up and go up on the White Pass.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: And either go up to Whitehorse, because at that time, the rail -- the train went all the way to Whitehorse.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, and then they would take the boat down the Yukon.

ROY NELSON: Yeah, that was in the '50's, then they -- you know, when they still had the riverboats going.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right.

ROY NELSON: '40's and '50's. They stopped that, I think -- like I say, Doreen would know more about it than I do. She knows more about the history than I do.

[01:15:38]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, before we get off the guiding, I want to just follow up on a couple questions about the guiding, that why didn't you continue into the guiding business. It sounded like you enjoyed it. Did you not?

ROY NELSON: Um, I enjoyed it, but, you know, I mean, at that time, I didn't see any future in it because they really hadn't started it. You know, that was before -- right when I started finishing up, that was right about the same time Klondike Safaris came into effect in Skagway, and Skip Burns was the owner of that. And he did the guiding over the trail, and then the river raft, you know, the river rafting down the Yukon to Dawson. And he was into it. I really -- I was doing it because I enjoyed it, and it was something to do, but you know, I didn't -- I never foresaw it as a -- as a, um, financial or business venture. I was young, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:16:46]ROY NELSON: I wasn't thinking about being the age I am now. I wanted to do something different. I wanted to pound nails and dig ditches, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: But I did it 'cause I enjoyed it, and it was a good opportunity. You know, I made -- I made not big bucks, you know, but I made some money off each trip.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: You know, usually about \$150, which for a fourteen-year-old is pretty good money for four days.

[01:17:10]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. So why did you stop working on the trail crew and go back to restoration?

ROY NELSON: Uh, I started -- you know, my knees were starting to go bad by then, or I was starting to feel it. My wife, you know, I mean, we were doing it, but I -- and plus the restoration was year-round.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: Where the trail crew was at that time was seasonal. It was 1039.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: And , you know, so even if I worked there, I couldn't go back on restoration.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, 'cause you'd done too many hours in a year?

ROY NELSON: Yeah. Because, you know, that was after -- at that time, they made 'em term, so I decided, ok. I might as well get in there and get a little, you know, some of the retirement, the insurance.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: For a few years.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, 'cause seasonal, you don't get any of that.

ROY NELSON: No. And um, I just, you know, fourteen years was enough.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[01:18:09]ROY NELSON: And I wanted to -- you know, 'cause I really enjoyed the restoration part, too, you know, because I like -- I'm a carpenter and all, and I like to do that. It came up and I took it. 'Cause I could've gone into the maintenance department quite a few years before that, but I was single. That was before I met Doreen, and one of the guys that was on the trail crew, Pat Moore -- John Warder was our boss then, the chief of maintenance, and he offered me the job as a -- with maintenance, you know, the maintenance part of the park. You know, I was single, and I was still into doing the trail, and I -- I turned it down and told him to give it to Pat. 'Cause Pat just got married, and they were expecting a baby, so he gave that job to Pat, who's gone now. He passed away early '90's from ALS.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm.

ROY NELSON: But uh, I just, you know, I mean, I just like, no, I'm enjoying what I'm doing. I'm happy, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: So I turned it down, which I shouldn't have, but I did because I didn't really need it that time because I was also working -- I wasn't working for the park in the winter. I had my own little business going on, doing plumbing and carpentry and all, you know, doing little repair jobs. I did a lot of plumbing because I was the only plumber in Skagway at the time.

[01:19:38]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, so seasonal work for the Park Service wasn't enough to live off of all year round?

ROY NELSON: Not really, and if it was, I was -- I wasn't into sitting around doing nothing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: I'd rather be doing something, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: But um, so -- it was, you know, you could, but it was pretty tight.

[01:20:01]KAREN BREWSTER: So most people did something else?

ROY NELSON: Yeah. And a lot of kids -- you know, a lot of people that were seasonals, which was mainly the trail crew and the rangers were -- had another job or were college kids.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: Going to college.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, they went someplace else in the winter.

ROY NELSON: Yeah. But yeah, so --

[01:20:21]KAREN BREWSTER: So yeah, so you were the first -- is that right, that you were the first local person hired by the Park Service?

ROY NELSON: Actual local, local person. There was people that were hired before me that had been there, you know, they had a couple little projects going on, but as far as a resident of Skagway, yeah, I was the first actual local resident to be hired.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow. Pretty cool.

ROY NELSON: Yeah. I just took it because it was -- I had -- you know, I had no inclination I was going to spend that long with the park. I just got offered a job for the winter.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: The construction job I was on had finished in December. [01:21:00]Well, in fact, I could've gone in before that, but I told Pete, you know, I need to finish up with this construction company. We were remodeling the old high school. And um, I said, "As soon as I'm done here, yeah, I'll come to work." So I -- once we were done there, you know, and I got laid off from the -- the construction company I was working for 'cause we were done, I went to work for the park, and, you know, I hadn't planned on staying with 'em.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: I planned on just doing it for the winter or something and then going back, you know, to construction again, but --

[01:21:35]KAREN BREWSTER: Since you were hired as a local, since then, do you have a sense of how much there has continued to be local hire?

ROY NELSON: Um, well, like I say, right after the railroad shut down, they -- they pretty much supplemented a good majority of the restoration and maintenance crew from people from Skagway. They gave them a little -- Pretty much like a local hire preference.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:22:01]ROY NELSON: And um, a lot of guys stayed, like uh, Dicky Brown, who was there, he worked up until '99 with the park when he -- when we all got RIF'ed. And he went back to White Pass, which he coulda done years before when White Pass started back up.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: And worked for White Pass for another three or four years to get his retirement from White Pass. But he waited until he got done with the park.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Before he went back to work for White Pass. [01:22:35]And then um, another guy, Mike Collier, he came to work, and then he advanced on. He went to Harpers Ferry and got, uh, restoration training and all, and then he wound up over in Glacier, Montana, and I think he's retired from the park now. And, of course, Andy Beierly, who was --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: Um, same thing, you know. He -- when he left White Pass and it shut down, 'cause he was a carman. He used to work as a helper for my dad when he was young. He stayed with -- he just stayed on with Wh -- er, with the ra -- with the park.

KAREN BREWSTER: With -- right.

ROY NELSON: He retired from the park.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:23:16]ROY NELSON: And there's a few other guys that worked off and on a few years and moved on, you know, but those three guys, they pretty much stayed with it.

[01:23:26]KAREN BREWSTER: And Si Dennis, he's worked for the park.

ROY NELSON: And Si, Si --

KAREN BREWSTER: I don't know if he worked for White Pass.

ROY NELSON: Yes, he worked for White Pass.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: He was with the ore terminal, a longshoreman.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, and his dad obviously, yeah.

ROY NELSON: Yeah, that's right. Si.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: He's still working. I think he's got another year or so, I think, before he retires. Same thing, you know, they all got hired when the railroad shut down.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: And they stayed.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[01:23:49]ROY NELSON: And any one of 'em coulda gone back to work for White Pass as soon as they reopened, and they didn't.

[01:23:54]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Well you, and as you say, you didn't expect to stay with the Park Service as long as you did.

ROY NELSON: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: So why did you stay?

ROY NELSON: Because I enjoyed it. I enjoyed what I was doing, you know. I mean, like I say, I love carpentry, and I really got into restoration instead of new construction, 'cause it's totally different. It's interesting. It takes patience and time and, gotta know what you're doing. It's totally different than throwing up a new building.

[01:24:19]KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh. With the restoration, are there things you had to learn specific for restoration?

ROY NELSON: Um, well, we had trainings for different things, you know, the way they wanted stuff painted, how to refinish stuff, how to strip it. Uh, we learned brick-laying. A lot of it was general carpentry knowledge, of course, and then I learned from Don (Corwin) -- helping Don, you know, how to build doors and windows.

[01:24:48]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Yeah, that's what I was thinking, is that it might be more interesting 'cause it's more challenging. You're learning new things than just putting framing up all the time?

ROY NELSON: Yeah, or you know, going to Home Depot and buying a door and a window and the siding and all the trim.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: You rebuild everything 'cause it's gotta -- you gotta duplicate what it -- what it was for that era.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Or the time period you were rebuild -- you know, restoring for.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[01:25:09]ROY NELSON: And then, you know, I mean, then I got to enjoy the trail crew because I loved the outdoors. I loved hiking. I always did. When I was a kid, I used to take off and just go up the mountainside and camp. Me and my dog, Yogi. I'd just tell Dad, I'd say, "Ok, Dad. You see that cliff over there? I'm going to be up there tonight." You know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

ROY NELSON: I'll be down tomorrow.

KAREN BREWSTER: The benefit of --

ROY NELSON: Or the day after.

KAREN BREWSTER: The benefit of growing up in a place like Skagway.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: You could do that.

[01:25:33]ROY NELSON: So, you know, I mean, it just -- after I started working for the park, the -- that style of work and ideology started appealing to me.

[01:25:47]KAREN BREWSTER: And you were -- how did you feel about working for the government and a bureaucracy? How did that work with your style?

ROY NELSON: It never bothered me. I was never, you know, I mean, I wasn't -- I knew what was going to happen. You know, I could see the writing on the wall before I even went to work. You know, for the park. you know, how things were going to change in Skagway, but there was nothing anybody could do about it. It's there. [01:26:14]Got to learn to live with it and accept it, and work with it, you know. And the park did. It has done a lot of good for the community and for people in town.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: And um, I just -- no, I never had any problems with it. You know, I mean, it took me a while to get used to the bureaucracy.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: You know, all the paperwork, or, you know, like, "Ok. This has to be done this way 'cause this is the way it's written down." You know, it's like, so -- you know, it

took me a while to get used to that part of it, but I -- you know, I learned it. I learned to live with it.

[01:26:52]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and as you said, your example up on the trail, well, we couldn't do it this way, we just did it our own way.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. The Alaskan way.

[01:27:03]ROY NELSON: Yeah. Well, you know, we had -- we had pretty much -- 'cause you know, they had no -- like, with the restoration, it was all blue-printed out and everything from Denver.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: So you had to follow 'em, and then if you had to do a change order or if all of a sudden it looked like it wasn't going to work, you had to get a hold of them and get their blessing and do an as-built. [01:27:24]Where up there, we just -- each fall when we submitted our budget, we just put our projects for the next year, you know, what our goal was to get done for the next year.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: And it was never any drawing out or, you know, getting permission to build a bridge this way, or whatever. It was just what we -- what our goal was for the next year and how much it was going to cost in man-hours and materials and stuff like that, and they just let us do it.

[01:27:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I would think at the restoration, as you say that, "Ok, now we gotta get permission." And did that stall projects and -- and was that frustrating?

ROY NELSON: It was to some of the guys, especially the guys in charge, you know, but -- yeah it was, but you learned to work around it. And normally, we could see it gonna happen and -- or early enough in the progress to be able to address it before we got to that point.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: And either get it changed, or, you know, get the as-builts or change orders. And that didn't happen very often. They were -- [01:28:33]The architects and engineers at the Denver Service Center were pretty good. We had some good guys. And like, uh, the majority of 'em had all spent time up in Skagway when the park first took over and were going -- getting ready to restore the buildings. They pretty much all of 'em had come up and went through 'em and worked hands-on to physically see what was going on, what needed to be done, and everything. And they'd come back here from time to time. [01:29:03]Like, we had one guy, Dave Snow, who was the project architect, and he -- he lived in Skagway for -- He came in, I think, right after Pete Bathurst left, and they -- him and his wife and two kids, they lived in Skagway for quite a few years before he went back down to Denver Service Center.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:29:29]ROY NELSON: And he was a nice guy, you know. He knew what he was talking about. He knew what he was doing. Um, he could work with his hands, he just didn't -- he wasn't just able -- you know, he wasn't -- he was -- he could do more than just draw it on paper and say, "Here. This is what it's supposed to look like."

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. He had the practical, hands-on experience to translate.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: And so did Pete Bathurst. [01:29:55] And a few of the other guys -- some of the other guys after that were the same way. And once the ball really got rolling and buildings started being worked on, they kinda pulled away and left the restoration crew to do it. And, of course, we've had some good hands, like Jeff Mull -- or I mean, yeah, Jeff Mull, who was the last head carpenter, lead carpenter. He still lives in Skagway. He was really good, you know. I mean, that guy could do anything with a piece of wood.

[01:30:28] KAREN BREWSTER: Hm. So how many people might be on a restoration crew each summer? I assume you only did it in the summer. Did you do that -- oh, no. You said that was year-round.

ROY NELSON: That was year-round. Uh, there was normally four to five people year-round, and then they would hire sometimes laborers and all in the summer, depending on what they were doing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: If they were doing excavation, or, you know, ground work, they'd hire more seasonal people, just guys to use a shovel.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm-mm. Right.

ROY NELSON: You know, but um -- [01:31:01] 'Cause normally it was like, uh, you know, when they first started, they had a lot more restoration crew. You know, I mean like, when we did the old railroad depot, I think there was twelve of us, but they were also doing -- there were aspects of the other buildings going on at the same time, especially like, stabilizing, getting roofs on, getting 'em weather-tight, stuff like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you might be working on multiple buildings in a season?

ROY NELSON: Sometimes, at the beginning, yes. Then the last, probably I'd say the last ten years, it was individual buildings. But yeah, 'cause the big goal when we first started was, like I say, getting 'em stabilized, roofs on 'em, getting 'em sealed up.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: And then they started their going to, you know, restoring each building as they went. [01:31:54] Like when one was getting close to being done, couple of the guys on the crew would stay back and do the finish up work, and the rest of the crew would start on the next one. Like, we did the -- my first one after I actually got on the full-time crew was the Moore House.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: And so, towards the end, it was Dicky Brown and I that stayed back and like, did the flooring and the trim work and did all that while the other crew was starting on the Pantheon by that time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: The tearing down what they needed to, digging, stabilizing. 'Cause that was the actual -- 'cause we used the Pantheon, like I say, as a woodshop and everything up until they built the new shop.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Which they didn't really build until there was like three buildings left. Of all the buildings, they finally got it built.

[01:32:48]KAREN BREWSTER: So do you have a favorite building that you worked on?

ROY NELSON: The Moore House.

KAREN BREWSTER: Why?

ROY NELSON: First of all, it was my first -- well, I liked 'em all. I liked the depot, too, but um, that was one of the orig -- the buildings they pretty much had to take apart and put back together.

KAREN BREWSTER: The Moore House?

ROY NELSON: Yeah. And everything we took off, that Moore -- that building is like ninety percent original.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ROY NELSON: From the flooring and the wainscoting to the uh, to the trim. [01:33:23]I spent one winter -- three months one winter doing nothing but stripping the paint off of all the siding, the wainscoting, the trim. You know, over and over again, just this big circle. And, of course, it's lead-based paint, so I had to have all this suit on and a respirator. This is in the Pantheon after we, what used to be the woodshop part, but we -- I mean, had plastic on the floor, the wall, the ceilings. Had plastic double through the doors. Nobody could come in without suiting up, so I was in there basically by myself for ten hours a day just doing it, and uh. I was never so glad to take a vacation. I mean, it was monotonous. But it was -- it was interesting to do 'cause it was -- but it was very meticulous work.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[01:34:14]ROY NELSON: So yeah, from the aspect of doing all that, I think the Moore House was one of my favorite ones to work on. 'Cause I started from start to completion.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, you got attached to it.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: In a way.

ROY NELSON: Yeah, and like I say, I -- I don't know if me or Dicky was the last one to drive the last nail in, but it was one of the two of us.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

[01:34:40]KAREN BREWSTER: So how do you feel when you go and you walk around Skagway and you see these buildings that you helped restore?

ROY NELSON: Proud.

[01:34:51]KAREN BREWSTER: And what about the trail, that work?

ROY NELSON: Oh, I'm proud of that, too. And people still talk about it, you know. The trail - like I say, the trail crew nowadays is always telling me, you know, how much -- how great our work was, and how it's still doing, and they'll ask -- they'll still ask me advice and stuff like that.

[01:35:17]KAREN BREWSTER: And do they say, "Why the heck did you do it that way?"

ROY NELSON: Like you built stuff to last.

[01:35:25]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so just to finish up, you know, you left the park in '99 --

ROY NELSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Because you had to -- or was it your choice to go do something else?

ROY NELSON: No. We got RIF'ed, and put some feelers out, Doreen and I, to different parks and everything, but um, we never really got anything back. [01:35:47]And then um, so I had my own business going on at that time. We both did. We -- she was doing archaeological contracting. I was doing maintenance and plumbing in Skagway, and then so I put in an application with the City of Skagway Public Works Department 'cause they were, you know, hiring. And I got hired on there in 2000, and you know, the guy I worked with, my boss, Grant Lawson, I grew up with. You know, we were kids. He's a year older than me, so we knew -- we'd known each other pretty much all of our lives. He came to Skagway, I think, when he was about eight or nine. And um, we never really got anything that -- response, from any of the parks that we wanted, and um, plus, we were getting older, so there was the age factor.

[01:36:57]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Well, and you have a long connection with Skagway. Maybe you wanted to stay there?

ROY NELSON: Oh, I was willing to move. I really didn't want to, but, you know, if I wouldn't have gotten the job with the city and I got offered a job with the park someplace else, yeah, we woulda gone.

[01:37:15]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. So what kinds of things did you do with public works?

ROY NELSON: Well, I was in charge of the streets, which meant I was in charge of all the boardwalk, you know, Broadway, all the signage. I did all the concrete work. I did their, um, sewer and water installations and repairs. Did garbage. Did, you know, a little bit of everything.

[01:37:42]KAREN BREWSTER: Snow plowing?

ROY NELSON: I never did do any of the equipment stuff.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

ROY NELSON: 'Cause my vision and all, I just wasn't comfortable with it. Um, did all the maintenance, you know, on buildings and everything. I was their carpenter.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: Basically a maintenance guy.

[01:37:59]KAREN BREWSTER: So was that wooden boardwalk that's now on Broadway?

ROY NELSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Has that always been there since you were a kid? Or --

ROY NELSON: No, it used to be when I was a kid, it was all concrete. When it came apart, they tore all the concrete out and put boardwalk back in to make it historical.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

ROY NELSON: And uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: But then you had to maintain it. The park didn't maintain it.

ROY NELSON: No. No. The city --

KAREN BREWSTER: The city put it in.

[01:38:23]ROY NELSON: The city put it in. The park maintains, like, the boardwalk around the visitor center, around the Itjen House, or part of it up to the Itjen House. It's kind of a joint thing around the Mascot, and then like, where the Moore House is now, and they did

the boardwalk off of the uh, Sixth or Fifth Avenue into there and around the back, around the old buildings and all, that little um, interpretive exhibit.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:38:57]ROY NELSON: That's -- they do all that. But any of the other boardwalk, I maintain and rebuild and everything. In fact, when they started doing a lot that stuff around the Moore House and all, they were coming over to me and asking me how to do it, 'cause I rebuilt -- [01:39:13]With the city, I rebuilt an average of uh, well, depending on the weather, first of all, when we'd get into it, because you can't put it down when the ground's frozen. It's gotta be thawed to be able to compact and stay where it's supposed to be.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: But I always shot for anywhere from 600 to 800 feet of boardwalk. And that's, you know, not only Broadway, that's all the avenues.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: With all the boardwalk, down to the uh, city hall, down to the McCabe Building. So yeah, I've -- I've pounded a lotta nails on that boardwalk.

[01:39:51]KAREN BREWSTER: So, a lot of boardwalk. And then, as you said, you couldn't work on it in the summer time?

ROY NELSON: No, too busy. Too many tourists. And in the fall, we always seemed to be -- that's when we did a lot of the water and sewer services 'cause that's when people would start -- companies and people that would want to start building or redoing something, so we'd have to get their systems in because they had to be done before the ground froze.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: And in the spring, you know, it was the boardwalk and repairs on other stuff.

[01:40:23]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, you -- you mentioned before we were recording about one of the things you got called to do with the boardwalk was when a tourist dropped something down through --

ROY NELSON: Through the boardwalk.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- Through the boardwalk. Did that happen a lot?

ROY NELSON: Yeah, you know, some days. There was days I'd get called three or four times. Sometimes it would go a week. It all depended. [01:40:44]And uh, normally, like I say, it was in the afternoon after they've done with all their tours, so they're all down on Broadway, you know, all 10,000 of 'em, uh, doing their shopping. They're buying their trinkets and jewelry. And somebody would drop something down, either a piece of jewelry, a credit card, something that wasn't just a little five-and-dime trinket they didn't care about.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Or it wasn't worth pulling a board for. [01:41:10]And so, I'd have to go down, and a lot of times, I was able to get the little pinchers and get it out, but nine times out of ten, it hit and rolled underneath a board, so I couldn't reach that without popping a board up. [01:41:22]But like I say, soon as I did it, it was like a car wreck. Everybody was over to see what I was doing. And then they all wanted to take pictures of me, you know, doing it and afterwards. And uh, toughest part was, 'specially if it was something

expensive, they'd want to give me a reward or a tip for doing it, and I can't -- you know, I'm -- I was -- just like with the park, you know, I was a public servant, so I can't take gratuities.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:41:51]ROY NELSON: And especially the foreign people, it was really hard explaining to 'em. They really couldn't speak English, that I couldn't take it. You know, and sometimes they almost got offended, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: And luckily there was always somebody in the group or somebody around that could speak their language and explain to 'em that I just legally couldn't do it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:42:10]ROY NELSON: So I got to a point where I'd just tell 'em, well, if you want to do something, almost every local establishment, the restaurants, the grocery store, the liquor store, there's, you know, any of the clubs and some of the -- some of the businesses have donation cans for different things.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Like Paws and Claws, the animal shelter.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Or somebody's sick or cancer awareness. Just throw some money in there.

[01:42:35]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, that's what I was going to ask is, could you take it and not keep it? And could you have done something -- ?

ROY NELSON: No, I couldn't even --

KAREN BREWSTER: You couldn't even physically take it?

ROY NELSON: I couldn't physically take it. I'd just tell 'em, go drop something off.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[01:42:46]ROY NELSON: And, you know, I said, "You know, there's plenty of 'em around, do whatever, you know -- but if you feel like, you know, 'cause I -- I honestly, I'm getting paid to do this. I'm not -- I'm not pulling this board out of the kindness of my heart. I'm getting paid to do this." And if it was after 4:00, I was getting paid overtime to do it.

[01:43:02]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, as you say, for tourists, it's a novelty to see someone come and pull up sidewalk to help 'em, you know.

ROY NELSON: Of course, then the -- especially the little old ladies, always wanted to get a picture of me after I rescued whatever it was they wanted. And so I got my picture -- it's probably all over the world.

[01:43:22]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And you said, you know, with all that foot traffic there, you kind of had to block things off so they wouldn't --

ROY NELSON: You'd try, and they'd still go through. [01:43:34]Normally, I'd always try to get one of the -- have one of the other guys with me to run interference, but a lot of times, it'd be after hours or nobody'd be available, so I'd have to do it. [01:43:43]And like I tell you -- told you that one time, I was setting -- nailing another board down. I'm left-handed, so I had my right hand out right next to the building with a big picture window. This lady slides through to look at something in the window and stands right on my hand.

I had to ask her to please get off my hand. [01:44:04]And I've almost nailed a couple people with my hammer on a backswing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, yeah.

ROY NELSON: Because they'd walk up right behind me to see what I was doing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, and you didn't know they were there.

ROY NELSON: So, yeah. [01:44:15]In that aspect, I'm -- I'm -- I'm glad I don't do that anymore 'cause it, you know, it got frustrating. Course I had to be nice to 'em, 'cause I am a public servant.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: Or I was a public servant. You know, I couldn't actually say what I wanted to say.

[01:44:31]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, and as you say, tourism's the bread and butter of the community.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you do have to be careful, probably.

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

[01:44:39]KAREN BREWSTER: And so you retired in 2016?

ROY NELSON: '16.

KAREN BREWSTER: From the City of Skagway?

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

[01:44:45]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, and now you're just volunteering as a carpenter.

ROY NELSON: Yeah. Basically. Yeah, I spent the last two years for BLM up in Coldfoot. So did Doreen. And next year, we're not sure if -- when I was talking to Bill when you came up.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: If he -- they get that money for the interpretive display they're doing up there on the mining around the Coldfoot area, Doreen's kind of involved with it, and I did some work on the cabin display and everything they have. So if they get some money ahead, we might come up for a couple months and work on that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

[01:45:24]ROY NELSON: But right now, it's all up in the air, you know. I mean, it depends on family and family health. And --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Um --

ROY NELSON: -- what we felt like doing next year.

[01:45:36]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Well, that's great that you're still involved and contribu -- you know, you want to contribute, and -- and --

ROY NELSON: Oh yeah, I don't just want to sit around and do nothing, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[01:45:45]ROY NELSON: Even though I'm retired, it's nice not to have to get up and go to work every morning at seven o'clock in the morning and be there all day.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: You know, from Monday through Friday, and stuff like that.

[01:45:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Or be out hiking on the trail every day in the rain.

ROY NELSON: Yeah. But at the same time, I like -- I want to stay active.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: I don't want to just sit around and do nothing because I've seen that happen to too many people, and they don't last that long.

[01:46:10]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Um, so, anything else about the restoration or the trail or growing up in Skagway that you wanted to talk about when I mentioned about doing this interview?

ROY NELSON: No. You know, I mean, I just want to try to remember, you know, give you names of some of the people that you might want to try to contact.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: A lot of them I don't know how to, but, you know, I'm sure Karl can come up with that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: That information. [01:46:45]Well, like I said -- You know, I just want to say that I really enjoyed the twenty years I worked for 'em, even though it wasn't full time most of the time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: I didn't -- I got a little stipend of a retirement from 'em, but not much.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: And that was my own choice at the time, you know.

[01:47:02]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Well, and not everybody can say that they -- twenty years that they enjoyed with the same employer.

ROY NELSON: Hm-mm. And um, no. You know, they treated me good, you know.

[01:47:15]And I was always doing something. You know, a lot of stuff was repetitious, but each building was a little bit different. Every one was a different challenge. The same way with the trail, you know, everything was a little bit different challenge.

[01:47:29]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Now were you with the park -- there was that -- was it in the mid-'90's where they had sort of this big, uh, administrative kind of kerfuffle? I don't know the right word. Where the -- with the superintendent left, and --

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Were you there at that point?

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

[01:47:50]KAREN BREWSTER: Did it -- I don't know exactly what happened.

ROY NELSON: Well, that you know --

KAREN BREWSTER: Or if that affected you.

ROY NELSON: No, well, see. Clay (Alderson) left, and then um, it didn't really affect us that much because, you know, ours was -- we were pretty much -- the restoration crew was pretty much run by Denver Service Center.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: You know, I mean, and the chief of maintenance in Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Who was?

ROY NELSON: That was John Warder at that time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[01:48:22]ROY NELSON: John was there for quite a few years. Before John came, we went through a chief of maintenance quite often. About every year for quite a while, we wouldn't have anybody. And um, or you know, they'd come for a season and then decide they didn't like it there and move on. [01:48:39]One guy, even went home for vacation and never came back. He hated Skagway so bad.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ROY NELSON: He was from Texas. But um, yeah. That -- he was a nice guy, he just -- I don't know what happened, he just got down there, went on vacation, and I think it was family thing or something, and he just said, "No. I'm not even coming back to get my stuff. Just ship it to me. I'm done."

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow. Wow.

[01:49:07]ROY NELSON: But um, you know, the inner -- the inner, uh, governmental works really didn't affect us that much. I mean, the only thing it might have affected was budgetary, you know, at times. Sometimes you'd get one guy in there, and you'd have it all planned out. And then you'd get a new person in there, and they'd have a totally idea of how things should be ran, like "No, you don't need this. You don't need to do this. I want you to do this instead." But I was low enough on the ladder that it didn't really affect me that much.

[01:49:45]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, but the trail crew, did that happen, and were there frustrations with that or -- ?

ROY NELSON: Not really, 'cause they pretty much listened to us. I mean, John had his own ideas, but a lot of times, we'd all, you know, the three of us would sit down. We could talk it out and then come to a mutual agreement how we should be doing something or what needed to be done. [01:50:08]But even him, pretty much, 'cause he'd come up every now and then, you know, couple times a year, a season maybe, to just come up and do things or see it. Clay would do the same thing. [01:50:22]But, you know, they pretty much trusted Watson and I to make the decisions and decide what needed to be done. You know, if we wanted to do a reroute, yes, we had to get permission from the archaeology 'cause we had to have --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: The archeo -- the trail archaeology crew go through first and then get permission from John and from Clay and all that to that's where we could do it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: 'Cause we were varying off of what was the actual corridor course.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:50:53]ROY NELSON: And, you know, I mean, nine times out of ten, they would realize what we were talking about. Like "Ok, the trail's washing out here. You know, it's right against the river. River's moving this way. We're gonna lose this by mid-season next year, then we'll be crunching to try and do a temporary reroute. Let's do it now before it happens." You know, so -- We always tried to get our ducks in a row first.

KARE BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Before we had to do something on an emergency thing, 'cause --

[01:51:19]KAREN BREWSTER: And then budgetary-wise, did you always get what you needed?

ROY NELSON: Pretty much.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or did you have to fight for budget?

ROY NELSON: Not really, 'cause, you know, we -- trail crew wasn't fighting against anybody else, and it was -- the Chilkoot Trail is a historic, important part of the Park Service. So we pretty much got what we wanted, you know, and when we wanted it. [01:51:46]And they always were a little, you know, pretty generous with the budget.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: You know, we wouldn't -- end of the season, we wouldn't be down to nickels and pennies. We'd have money left over to buy equipment and, you know, for the use or lose, but, I mean, we wouldn't have tons of money.

KAREN BREWSTER: No.

ROY NELSON: We never -- we never went over budget or had to. [01:52:15]And then, you know, they always had contingency -- we -- contingency monies for something happening in the winter like an avalanche or unexpected flood taking something out that had to be um, addressed right away the next year, that got -- that got pushed through right away.

[01:52:33]KAREN BREWSTER: And then for the restoration projects, that budget was above your pay grade, I'm sure.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: You didn't have anything to do with that?

ROY NELSON: No. And like I say, they had a -- the way it was originally done, and now don't hold me to this, 'cause it could've changed over the years, Congress, you know, and the Department of Interior and the Park Service had set aside the amounts of monies that they figured it was going to cost to restore these historic buildings.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. That's what you said. Yeah.

ROY NELSON: And, of course, you know, as inflation goes, and things change, and once you start to actually getting into it, things change. So they -- I'm sure they had flexibility in there for that stuff. [01:53:17]So you know, I wasn't in the budgetary finance part of that -- any of that aspect, but -- We never, that I can think of or ever remember, we never got stopped once by the progress because of lack of money and funding.

[01:53:36]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, as you say, it also was a priority for the Park Service to get those buildings maintained, so you'd think that would've --

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: --meant they had the money for it.

ROY NELSON: And, you know, you gotta remember, too, a lot of those buildings were leasebacks, so as soon as they could get 'em done and get 'em done right, they could lease 'em back to the public and start --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, using them?

ROY NELSON: Making money, you know, paying.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

ROY NELSON: 'Cause, you know, they have to -- the park had to -- whatever the going rate for square foot of retail lease space in Skagway is what the park has to go by.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: They can't undercut the private sector.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, right. That's right.

[01:54:15]ROY NELSON: So like, you know, most of those -- most of the buildings, I think, if I'm correct, like I say, this is out of my realm, too, were five-year lease, three to five-year leases. And then they renew 'em or you look at 'em after that. And then if it's -- if the cost of real estate has gone up, they have to readjust for that, just like anybody else.

[01:54:39]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And then I'm assum -- I know this again this is off -- I know there's the whole regulations from the Historic District about maintaining those buildings a certain way and all that that they probably look at how the leaser is using the space as well maybe?

ROY NELSON: Yeah, they do, and the Park Service always has -- one member of the HDC is always one of the upper people of the Park Service.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right.

ROY NELSON: You know, so, the park has a say in it, and the city, they kind of agree on it.

[01:55:14]And, yeah, you know, there's certain things that they don't want in those buildings because it just doesn't fit.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: And um, you know, the colors, you gotta be certain. You know, like, there's one little store, it's not even -- it's a privately owned building on, um, would it be Third and -- Third and Broadway, right across from the Golden North.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: Next to the Sweet Tooth Café, going north. [01:55:45]Um, it's privately owned, and the guy, I can't remember, the guy that owned it either released it or he sold it, but these people come in and they painted it this bright godly gold yellow. I mean, it hurts your eyes to even look at it when the sun hits it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ROY NELSON: And somehow they, uh, they over --

KAREN BREWSTER: The Historic Commission allowed that?

ROY NELSON: Well, I don't know exactly what happened there, if it was an oversight on their part, and they didn't realize what the actual colors were going to be or what, but there was a lot -- this was like two years ago when that happened.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ROY NELSON: Maybe -- no, three, 'cause I was still working for the city. [01:56:29]There was a lot of yelling about that but it was too late, you know. It was already done. They couldn't make 'em repaint it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. [01:56:36]The other -- quickly, before we finish up, I appreciate all your time.

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah. No problem.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um, is do you -- does you -- are you the Nelson family that has a connection to Nelson's Slough in Dyea?

ROY NELSON: No. No.

KAREN BREWSTER: It's a different family?

ROY NELSON: There's -- at one time, there was three different Nelsons, and -- the families.

And Nelson Slough, I think, even is before any of our families were there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: That goes way back.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: 'Cause um, yeah. There was -- yeah.

[01:57:10]KAREN BREWSTER: So your dad was the beginning of your Nelson family in Skagway?

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: And then there was another individual, Sammy Nelson. He was a fisherman.

And then Lee Nelson, who had three sons, whose one son was the guy that had the outfitters that --

[01:57:30]KAREN BREWSTER: You said his -- Wes, what that the guide? Is that what you said his --

ROY NELSON: That was the son, yeah. Wes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wes. Ok.

ROY NELSON: And he's -- he's gone now, too. He drowned in a boating accident.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, that's too bad. And then you guys are the third Nelsons.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

[01:57:43]KAREN BREWSTER: And then I read that there was a Chuck Nelson who was one of the first, uh, Chilkoot Trail -- I don't know if he was a ranger or a -- ? I don't know if I have that. He's not a relation to you?

ROY NELSON: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Oh, here it is. Um, what was he? Uh, '72 -- yeah. Yeah. He was one of the first Chilkoot Trail rangers with the Park Service.

ROY NELSON: Ok, no. I don't know him.

KAREN BREWSTER: But it's not a relation?

ROY NELSON: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[01:58:17]ROY NELSON: No, that was right when they started even doing anything up there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: They really hadn't even started maintaining it and I -- I had -- '72, I was still -  
- I was still in high school.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Ok.

ROY NELSON: And I had -- that was way before I even had any inclination I was going to go to work for the Park Service.

[01:58:35]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, but as you say, you know, when you were growing up, you said you went out into the woods. Did you and your friends -- did people -- local people go hiking out there? And go out to Dyea?

ROY NELSON: Oh yeah, we spent -- 'cause we used to have a little cabin out in Dyea, but um, we thought we were on state land, us and there was like, four or five other people that were all kind of in a group. And lo and behold, when the Kopanskis sold the Pullen property to the Park Service, when they resurveyed it, whoever surveyed it in the '50's had messed up, and we were actually on the Pullen property not state property, so we all got kicked off.

[01:59:22]KAREN BREWSTER: You couldn't just move your cabin?

ROY NELSON: No place to move it to.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

ROY NELSON: 'Cause we were right against the mountainside. It was -- right in the park, you know. Just north of the um -- we were all on that road -- you know where the Slide Cemetery is?

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh --

ROY NELSON: Out in Dyea?

KAREN BREWSTER: Sort of, I guess I've been past there 'cause I've been to the trailhead.

ROY NELSON: Ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's as far into Dyea as I've been.

ROY NELSON: Oh, if you've only been to the trailhead, you haven't been over, down in the flats.

KAREN BREWSTER: No.

ROY NELSON: Ok. Well, the Slide Cemetery's over there against the West Mountain.

[01:59:52]And um, there's a road that goes north -- anyway, there was like four or five of us, or families that had cabins back in that area, you know. But it wasn't -- we were -- they thought at the time they were just off of the Pullen property. Because Pullen owned a lot. Ma Pullen owned quite a little bit of Sk -- er, Dyea at one time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[02:00:21]ROY NELSON: And um -- and um, so when they resurveyed it anyway after the park bought it all, they found out that we were on there. There was no place to move it. Um, you know, everybody -- nobody really tried to fight it because they knew, you know, it was a losing battle. [02:00:40]Um, my dad was already gone by that time, and I was working for the park, so I couldn't really contest it. And um, so we got kicked off, but then like the Pattersons, when they sold their property to the park, they offered um, parcels -- portions of it to the public, to the local people, who did buy a bunch of it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

ROY NELSON: Like McDermotts did, the um, Kalviks, the Hosfords, one of the Burnhams and all bought, you know, like an acre or two, whatever, you know, however the size they were selling from the Patterson estate or the family before -- then after they --

[02:01:33]everybody, you know, bought what they wanted, you know, and I think they gave the -- I think the Pattersons gave the public, you know, local people a year or something like that, then they turned around and sold the rest of their property to the Park Service.

[02:01:49]KAREN BREWSTER: And so the Pullens could have done that? They could have --

ROY NELSON: Yeah. They just sold it lock, stock, and barrel.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: Everything.

[02:01:54]KAREN BREWSTER: So those other -- other families who had those cabins out there who lost them with the resurvey, --

ROY NELSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- what was their reaction?

ROY NELSON: Oh, they were all, you know, some of 'em were pissed, but, you know. And then a couple of them that were there, they had moved on, had retired. [02:02:11]You know, just like friends and all, or you know, people were using it. [02:02:17]Uh, couple of them just like, yeah, ok. You know, I mean, they all realized that they didn't have a leg to stand on because it was a bad survey, I guess, to start with.

[02:02:31]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Yeah, I guess I wonder why the Park Service didn't sort of grandfather those in and let them be used.

ROY NELSON: I don't know.

KAREN BREWSTER: You know, as inholdings.

ROY NELSON: Yeah, I -- don't ask me.

KAREN BREWSTER: But who -- No, ok.

ROY NELSON: You know, I mean, I have no idea. That's -- that was a decision that probably wasn't even made on the local level. I'm sure that was kicked way high up.

[02:02:50]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. So when you were growing up and your family had that cabin, when would you go out there? What would you do out there?

ROY NELSON: Oh, we'd go out in the summer. We'd spend time out there. We always -- my mom always had a big garden out there 'cause she was a great gardener. We'd, uh -- [02:03:05]I spent a lot of my summers out there, you know. We'd go out there for weeks at a time. I'd just go out and play, hike around.

KAREN BREWSTER: Fish? Was there fishing out there?

ROY NELSON: Not really.

KAREN BREWSTER: No.

ROY NELSON: You know, I mean, you could fish in the river, but only when like, uh, the dollies were running and everything, but I really wasn't into fishing. I was more into just hiking and climbing the mountainside.

[02:03:30]KAREN BREWSTER: Did you go hunting?

ROY NELSON: I did a little bit, but my dad -- by the time I was old enough to hunt, my dad was getting up there in years, so we really didn't do much hunting. And I -- Um, I like looking at live animals. I mean, I have nothing against hunting.

KAREN BREWSTER: No.

ROY NELSON: I'm just not into it, you know, I mean, I'm --

[02:03:51]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, and then so we know your dad worked for the White Pass. Your birth mother, did she work outside of the home, or she raised you guys?

ROY NELSON: No, she was just a homemaker.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then your stepmom, what about her?

ROY NELSON: She worked a little bit as housekeeping at the Golden North, but she was more a homemaker, too, 'cause she had two -- she had a son and daughter, twins that were almost exactly --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

ROY NELSON: Just about a year and a month older than me, so they were kids, too.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. So she had her hands full with you guys.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

[02:04:29]KAREN BREWSTER: And now, is she the one who had the garden?

ROY NELSON: No, no.

KAREN BREWSTER: That was your mom? Yeah.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

[02:04:34]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, well, I've heard Skagway's good for gardening.

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah. It's great. Of course me, I can't --

KAREN BREWSTER: You didn't inherit the --

ROY NELSON: I didn't inherit it. I inherited my dad's trait for pounding nails, not my mom's trait for growing vegetables.

[02:04:47]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Um, ok. Well, as I say, anything else?

ROY NELSON: Um, I can't think of anything. Pretty much covered my experiences with 'em, you know. I mean, I enjoyed it, you know, like I said, but --

[02:05:05]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I -- I have one more question, I guess, because you were -- thinking about, you've talked about all these good people you worked with. Were there difficult times or challenging times with --

ROY NELSON: Well, there was always employees that were, yeah -- I mean, not necessarily with the supervision. I mean, John and I, sometimes, and Watson and I, we didn't get along with him at times, 'cause -- but, you know, it was more -- his ideas weren't quite what we wanted, and he thought he knew everything. Um, I really shouldn't say that because I like John, but -- Yeah, you know, there was times you'd get a guy that looked good on paper, and you know, I mean, who wound up not knowing anything, or you know, lazy. [02:05:56]But like with us, with the trail crew, once we got down to just the four of us, we always had a pretty good crew 'cause we had guys that'd come back for three or four years in a row, you know, or longer.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: And we -- we were able to pick our own crew.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ROY NELSON: We didn't get -- you know, we just didn't get told, "Here., you're -- This is who you're gonna hire."

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[02:06:21]ROY NELSON: But it's like any other place, you know. Yeah, they're gonna -- especially in the higher echelon, they're gonna wanna get -- somebody that just wants to get rid of somebody but you can't fire them, so they're going to tell you how great of a guy he is.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: You know, person he is, male or female, just to get you to hire him, you know, so he can transfer over.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: And then you find out, "Oh, this guy isn't worth anything."

[02:06:45]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, when you were working on the trail crew, it probably was all men.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: But nowadays, it's mixed?

ROY NELSON: It's mixed. There's one female. Um, the first year Watson was here, his trail crew -- the two laborers he had were both women.

KAREN BREWSTER: What year would that have been?

ROY NELSON: That would've been 1980 -- let's see, '81.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Wow, that's pretty early.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

[02:07:13]KAREN BREWSTER: And then the restoration crew, were there women involved in that?

ROY NELSON: Yeah, we had a couple women. We had one, LC, that actually stayed on. Lisa Cassidy is her real name. And she's working at the Presidio now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: But she -- she came in -- she was a laborer, and then she went to a -- back east to um, some woodworking school and everything one winter, and learned how to do some woodworking and painting and all. So she came back to the park. This was after we were all RIF'ed.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: And she was working maintenance and being one of their painters.

[02:08:03]And then we had Eve Griffin who started off as an archaeologist, and then she wound up being a painter for the park. She worked there, what years? But she finally wound up -- she had to quit and go back because her mom had gotten ill back in North Carolina, so she left a couple years ago to take care of her mom. [02:08:29]Um, had quite a few female archeologists, of course.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Right.

ROY NELSON: Doreen had -- one time she had two women, then a guy, and then -- she seemed to always have at least one female on her crew.

[02:08:48]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Well, hopefully, maybe we'll catch Doreen, if you guys go back up to Coldfoot, maybe I can catch her next summer.

ROY NELSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: 'Cause it would be fun to hear her experiences as an archeologist.

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah. I know she'd love it. She's very intelligent. She knows more of the history. You know, I was born and raised in Skagway, but she knows more about the whole history of that and Alaska than I do, but then, that's part of her job.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right. [02:09:14]But it sounds -- do you think Skagway was a good place to grow up?

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah. I enjoyed it. You know, I mean, I couldn't -- well, I can't say for any -- you know, everybody, but I enjoyed it. I liked it. I can't see myself having grown up in a big city, you know, 'cause, well, I have never had the experience, so I wouldn't know what it's like. [02:09:37]I liked -- I've always liked being in the outdoors, you know, being outside. Hiking and camping. And um, yeah, for me, it was the perfect, you know.

[02:09:52]KAREN BREWSTER: And being in a small town was ok?

ROY NELSON: Yeah. I -- I had no problems with it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Where you know everybody.

ROY NELSON: Yeah. Everybody knows you. Everybody knows each other's business.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ROY NELSON: That's the only bad thing is, you know, you can't get away with too much in a small town.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[02:10:06]ROY NELSON: But, no, it was good. And, you know, growing up, everybody looked out for each other, you know. And still do. People that live there year-round, somebody's sick or needs help, everybody pitches in.

KAREN BREWSTER: Nice.

ROY NELSON: You know, one way or another. Not everybody, you know, there's always help there. Like my -- when Pat got sick with ALS, he was just trying to do some remodeling of his house and add on a beauty shop 'cause his wife was the local Skagway beautician -- you know, hair stylist there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[02:10:40]ROY NELSON: A lot of the guys from the Park Service went in after hours on weekends and day offs to help Pat get his place done.

KAREN BREWSTER: Nice.

[02:10:48]ROY NELSON: And then my wife -- my niece, um, the mother of my niece -- my grandniece, is living here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ROY NELSON: Going to school here. Her husband died from ALS, too, about five years after Pat did.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

ROY NELSON: They were both about the same age, mid-forties. And their house needed work and um, needed like a handicapped room and everything for Lou.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ROY NELSON: The town pitched in. The contractors pitched in. They had it --

KAREN BREWSTER: Nice.

ROY NELSON: They had it redone within a week.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow, nice.

ROY NELSON: You know, I mean, just kicked in like that. [02:11:26]People that are financially strapped or have some major medical bills that don't have any insurance or any, you know -- are hurting for money for some reason, you know, like be it cancer or major medical incidents, there's always fundraisers that go on.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, you said there's the jars that are out, and, yeah, they have auctions and all kinds of things.

ROY NELSON: Oh, yeah. The Elks and the Eagles will put on functions. You know, they'll have a dinner, or dance, stuff like that. [02:11:58]And then the Elks during the winter on Fridays, they have the hamburger feed, and it's for the school kids for different groups.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

ROY NELSON: You know, be it maybe boys basketball --

KAREN BREWSTER: Basketball trip.

ROY NELSON: Track, DDF, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: What's DDF?

ROY NELSON: It's debate.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

ROY NELSON: Drama, Debate, and Forensics. It's like a debate thing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

ROY NELSON: In fact, Kara, my niece that's here, she won state year before last in DDF.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

ROY NELSON: For her presentation on ALS, and she went to nationals.

KAREN BREWSTER: Good deal. Yeah.

[02:12:40]ROY NELSON: So yeah, there's always stuff that goes on there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Nice.

ROY NELSON: So that's what makes it special, too.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Nice. All right, well, thank you very much.

ROY NELSON: You bet.

KAREN BREWSTER: Took up a lot of your time today.

ROY NELSON: Oh, that's all right.

KAREN BREWSTER: I appreciate it, and we --

ROY NELSON: Oh, no problem. I just gotta wait for an airplane.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.