

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF CLAY AND CLAUDIA ALDERSON, PART 1

CONDUCTED BY KAREN BREWSTER

IN ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

APRIL 9, 2019

ORAL HISTORY 2017-01-90

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

[00:00:00]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok, today is April 9, 2019, and this is Karen Brewster, and I'm here in Anchorage, Alaska, with Clay Alderson and Claudia Rector Alderson, um, for the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park Oral History Project. And we're going to be talking about their work with the park in Skagway. So thank you, guys, for meeting me here in Anchorage. I know you normally spend the winters in Tagish, and now your summers in Bridger --

CLAY ALDERSON: Bridger-Teton National Forest in Wyoming.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. So it's good we could meet up here.

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm.

[00:00:38]KAREN BREWSTER: So Clay, I know you were interviewed before, way back in 1989, but maybe you could just give a little brief summary for people who might be listening to this recording about your background, where you're from, education, how you got into working for the Park Service, things like that.

CLAY ALDERSON: That would be a pretty quick thing to do because I really didn't prepare academically for a career in the Park Service, but my summer work led me into the Park Service. My college roommate and I wanted to work together, and he was dating a girl whose father was in the National Park Service, and she suggested that we find summer work. And we applied at various parks and were summarily turned down until I talked to a fellow that I knew that I'd gone to high school with, and he worked in Yosemite in the summer. And he said, the only way to do it is politically. You have to go to your local, at the time Republican, committeeman, 'cause they were running things in Washington, and when I went to Senator Frank Carlson, and he said, "Yes." He said, "I think we can get you a job." As it turned out, my roommate worked in Yellowstone, and he continued to work seasonally for almost thirty years while he taught school in the winter. And I made a career out of it, and our third college roommate ended up with a lifetime career with US Forest Service in Washington state.

[00:02:14]KAREN BREWSTER: And where did you grow up?

CLAY ALDERSON: In Kansas.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

CLAY ALDERSON: Born in Emporia, Kansas, but we lived a short while in Topeka and then moved to Concordia, and most of -- all my schooling was at Concordia schools, uh, where --

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[00:02:31]KAREN BREWSTER: And -- and then your college, where was that?

CLAY ALDERSON: I went back to the town of Emporia to a little Presbyterian school with an enrollment of about 350 students and went through four years of liberal arts -- liberal arts degree in College of Emporia. And the college no longer exists. They just couldn't compete after nearly a hundred years, and so that was -- that was my academic background beyond high school.

[00:03:02]KAREN BREWSTER: So your first year, that summer work with the Park Service, was what year?

CLAY ALDERSON: 1959.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

CLAY ALDERSON: Worked as a laborer on a trail crew in Grand Teton National Park, and I said, "You know, I really think this is where I want to be and what I want to do." So I kept going back from '59 'til '65. In '60, they moved me up to foreman on a trail crew, and just kept spending my summers and finding things to do in the winter. Included one long year of teaching English in a high school in a little town in southern Wyoming, little town of Mountain View. And finally, it just got to the point where I -- by that time I was married, had two children, and we just couldn't pick up and move, so I gave up on my dream of the Park Service.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, but it came back around.

CLAY ALDERSON: But it came back, um-hm.

[00:04:04]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, let's switch over to Claudia for her little background bio and where you're from.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Well, I'm all-American. I was born in Hawaii and lived there 'til I was ten, and then we moved to Michigan, and I lived there 'til I was twenty. And then we moved to Colorado, and that became the family home, and they stayed there. And I did my undergraduate work at Brown in biology in the pre-med program, but I always had a calling to be a biologist in the great out-of-doors, so.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm-mm.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Then I have a master's of science in wildlife biology from CSU.

KAREN BREWSTER: Colorado State University?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes. Hm-mm. And a master's in environmental biology, which was the botany program, from CU.

[00:04:51]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And so, Clay, how did it that you ended up in Alaska and being superintendent at Skagway?

CLAY ALDERSON: I was working as superintendent at Knife River?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Arches. Uh.

CLAY ALDERSON: Uh, Cedar Breaks.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Cedar Breaks.

CLAY ALDERSON: Cedar Breaks. And I had not really -- I'd always wanted to go to Alaska, but had not really pursued anything, and one of my fellow superintendents called me one day and asked me if I was applying for the job at Klondike Gold Rush. And I said, "No. I hadn't really even seen it." So he gave me the information. He was really excited about the job, and so he sent me the information. You couldn't do it electronically then. You had to put a stamp on it and mail it. [00:05:43]And so I took a look at it and said, "You know, this looks kind of interesting." And so I did the application and sent it off, and kind

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of forgot about it because nothing much happened for quite some time. And I -- it was one of the few jobs that I ever applied for that I actually made a couple of phone calls and said, "You know, if you could put in a good word for me, I'd appreciate it." It happened that the fellow that was kind of my mentor in the Park Service, John Lancaster, was in Anchorage doing an operations evaluation at the regional office. And so I said, "Well, if you could work my name into the conversation, I'd appreciate it." And it was still several months later that I got a call, and Boyd Evison was the regional director. And he asked me if I was still interested in the job, and he offered me the opportunity. So that's how I got to Alaska.

[00:06:51]KAREN BREWSTER: And that year was?

CLAY ALDERSON: '86, I believe.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Yeah, so you weren't the first -- yeah, it is '86.

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: You're right. I have it written down here.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Good job, that was a test.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah, that was a test. Ok.

[00:07:09]KAREN BREWSTER: And then Claudia, you came along with Clay to Skagway? Or no?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: No. Actually, I was married to someone else. We each had divorces before we met each other, so.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And I had worked with the Park Service and Bureau of Reclamation and Soil Conservation Service and many state agencies, doing either contract work or as employees, as a biologist. But as any good biologist would, I wanted to come to Alaska. So I worked a season in Juneau with Glacier Bay as an interpreter and had a chance to go up to Skagway then and get to know the Chilkoot Trail. And decided that's something I would love to stay and work somewhere in Alaska. And then came an announcement that they were looking for someone the next summer to do exactly what I liked to do best, which is to go out in fairly fresh territory and learn what was there.

[00:08:08]KAREN BREWSTER: And so that was the biotech position? Is that what that would've been?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Um-hm. Yeah. And I was lucky to get it. They'd offered it to someone else, and I was the one who came. I came late, jumped in, and had a lovely summer.

[00:08:22]KAREN BREWSTER: Great. Um, so Clay, when you started as superintendent, did they prepare you in any way? What kind of training or briefings did they give you?

CLAY ALDERSON: Not a lot. They did say, it's required reading to read John McPhee's "Coming into the Country" before you get here. And I didn't really have a lot of information about -- you know, I had a lot of information about what was going on in the park. And I had exchanged several conversations with the chief ranger, who was the acting superintendent and had been for about a year.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that was?

CLAY ALDERSON: Jay Cable.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

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[00:09:07]CLAY ALDERSON: Uh, Jay was kind of in a funny situation. When the previous superintendent left, Jay really wanted the job as superintendent. And it's kind of a policy of Mr. Evison that he just didn't think that was a good thing to promote to a superintendency from someone within the park. They offered to swap and send him to my position at Cedar Breaks in return for me coming up here, and he was in kind of a housing situation in Skagway, and he just didn't feel that he could do it. So he said, well, he would stay on as chief ranger. [00:09:57]And I am so happy that he did because he was really what got me on the ground and kept me going. So after I'd been there a year or so, I was visiting with Jay one day in the office, and I said, "You know, Jay, I understood that you were very interested in having this superintendent job, and I came in and kinda took it." And I said, "How is it working out for you?" And he said, "You have done things that I didn't ever -- I wouldn't have even attempted to do, and you've accomplished it." And things are moving along better than he anticipated. So it worked out for him, and he was so totally supportive of not only the programs that we generated in the park, but my presence there as superintendent.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I mean, it worked out for you, too.

CLAY ALDERSON: It did.

KAREN BREWSTER: To have him be supportive.

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: It could have gone a totally different direction.

CLAY ALDERSON: It could have. They had problems there.

[00:11:05]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Well, it was a relatively new park in '86.

CLAY ALDERSON: There had been two superintendents there before.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAY ALDERSON: But as you know, in Bush Alaska, government employees, especially superintendents starting new national parks, have some challenges.

[00:11:23]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And what kind of challenges did you have in those first years?

CLAY ALDERSON: I kind of went in there with the idea that this park has been authorized and established, and it's time for it to move forward. There were programs in place for the historic restoration, and there wasn't much of a -- an interpretative program going yet, although we had had good interpretive people there, and they did summer programs. But they were just starting to get into that. [00:12:01]But the restoration of the downtown historic sites, the historic buildings, was foremost in the public image. And we had the house of a very prominent former citizen, Martin Itjen, that had been purchased by the Park Service and moved to property just across from the visitor center. And there was another old-timer that was Martin Itjen's best friend, by the name of George Rapuzzi.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAY ALDERSON: And I never met Mr. Rapuzzi, but I did hear through Frank Norris that one of the first things that was done, not necessarily that I directed, it was just the next thing to do, was to move Mr. Itjen's house on a new foundation so it could be stabilized and get it ready for restoration. And he said, "Well, this new superintendent must be all right. He's got Martin Itjen's house back on a foundation."

[00:12:55]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that's good. Yeah, George Rapuzzi's a big name in Skagway, so if you had his approval --

CLAY ALDERSON: Yep.

KAREN BREWSTER: That would count.

CLAY ALDERSON: So, and that first winter that I was there, he passed away.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, he did.

CLAY ALDERSON: So I never did get to meet him, but through Frank I was able to kinda communicate with him.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

CLAY ALDERSON: 'Cause Frank talked with him a lot.

[00:13:16]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, then -- but then there's some challenges of a new park. Are there benefits to being a superintendent in a relatively new park?

CLAY ALDERSON: I've had the opportunity to be the first superintendent in two other national parks, and one of 'em was a state park in Kansas. And the -- the Corps of Engineers had established -- they were building a reservoir, building a dam and backing water up on the Delaware River in eastern Kansas, and they designated public recreation areas around the lake. And there were about ten of 'em, and the state was given the opportunity to choose if they wanted any or all of those areas. So they selected two areas, and I was the first superintendent to go in there and really start from just nothing. Fortunately, the Corps of Engineers did all the land acquisition. We didn't have to deal with that and suffer any of the repercussions from it. 'Cause there are always repercussions when you're buying land.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:14:20]CLAY ALDERSON: But I got to be involved with the design and construction of the basic facilities in that park. And then at --

KAREN BREWSTER: So at Klondike, --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Knife River was the next one.

[00:14:35]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, but so at Klondike, did you -- like the historic restoration, was that kind of you getting that going, or you got the --

CLAY ALDERSON: The historic part of it was already well under way.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

CLAY ALDERSON: Because with the restoration of historic buildings there has to be a great deal of archaeological work done prior to that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:14:50]CLAY ALDERSON: So they had to have had some really excellent archaeologists and historians working there. They have published books on Skagway in days primeval and things like that that set the ground work for the historic restoration. So at Knife River in North Dakota, I was the first superintendent there. And we did the land acquisition. In fact, that was my job description, was to do public relations work for the Park Service.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, god.

CLAY ALDERSON: During the land acquisition.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Good training.

CLAY ALDERSON: And our primary land acquisition people said it was the most difficult land acquisition they had done in twenty years working with the Park Service. [00:15:51]But here again, you get out and not just meet people, but spend time with people on their terms, deal with their problems, and, yeah, some of the land went to condemnation. And

once it was all over, they had a great big party downtown and burned the Park Service in effigy, but it was not me, it was the land acquisition guys.

[00:16:18]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I was gonna say, is it -- as Claudia says it was good training for working in Skagway and the community issues there.

CLAY ALDERSON: There -- there was a history of animosity in -- in Skagway, to the point where the superintendent lived in a little trailer house in the downtown area, and the locals delighted in throwing rocks at his trailer at night. But I didn't have any of that.

[00:16:46]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, that's good. You said also the starting of the natural resources program, which leads back to Claudia. But do you want to say something about getting that program going?

CLAY ALDERSON: Well, it was such a cultural resources-dominant park because we knew we had these historic buildings, we had the Chilkoot Trail, everything pointed to history, and when I started reading about some of the natural things and listening to people in the regional office and on the park staff, I said, "You know, we've got a tremendous natural resource potential here that really plays into the cultural resources because they tell you why some of these happened, some of these things happened." [00:17:32]So I initially asked for money to hire a natural resources person, and we didn't have the support in region for a natural resources program that I was hoping we'd have, so the first thing I got was some money, and it was a program. And we got quite a little bit of information on that. So what I did is, I took that money, and I went to the Forest Service in Juneau, and asked them if they would come up to Skagway and do a cultural -- or a historic -- natural resources survey of the Chilkoot Trail area, the White Pass area, and here is the report that they generated.

KAREN BREWSTER: So it's --

CLAY ALDERSON: And that has so much good stuff in it.

[00:18:23]KAREN BREWSTER: So it's the "Ecological Inventory of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park and Adjacent National Forest Lands."

CLAY ALDERSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: It's a Forest Service report, September 1994, by Paustian, Trull, Foster, Atwood, Kriekhaus, and Rickers.

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

[00:18:50]CLAY ALDERSON: So they put together this team, and they did a lot of -- of collecting. Claudia could probably tell you a little bit more about the work that they provided.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yeah. It's really an excellent project.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well it looks like a really good inventory of everything.

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm, inventory.

KAREN BREWSTER: Sort of the baseline of what was there.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes.

[00:19:06]KAREN BREWSTER: And so, Claudia, you started with the park in '94, is that correct?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. So the timeline matches.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So this report had not yet been finished, but um, a lot of the information was available. They spent, I believe, just a week in the field.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So their idea was to map from the surface, to get the plant communities rather than the species. And they had some excellent geologists and hydrologists to try and get a sense of the whole area. So that was to be the baseline to the baseline. They actually did some plant collecting, and so there were some specimens to put in the herbarium. [00:19:46]But the best thing they did was to do a list of recommendations of how to go forward. And, of course, the park had hoped to have a resource manager in 1994, but didn't quite make it. So they thought if they could bring in a technician to follow some of those advisories, that they could have some ground work and begin to find out what they had to work with.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So that was my responsibility. And --

(Dog barking in the background)

[00:20:14]KAREN BREWSTER: And you were the first natural resources staff person?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes, I was.

KAREN BREWSTER: And were you considered permanent, or you were seasonal?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: No. I was a seasonal.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

(Dogs still barking in the background)

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Because they -- I was not qualified to be a natural resource manager, a permanent, so they thought they could at least gather some material that could be used in the future program. [00:20:33]And so the responsibilities I had were to collect plants and do a true baseline of the species and a collection to establish the herbarium collection, and also to do some trail mapping. And then I found them very receptive to suggestions I had, so I suggested that we do bird surveys. And so they sent me to the neotropical migrants training sessions that worked with Fish and Wildlife Service and other biologists. So we were able to establish bird survey routes, which they're still doing. And the botanical work that I started, they did a beautiful job of making a permanent collection and database, so that's still alive and well.

KAREN BREWSTER: Great.

[00:21:20]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: I also did butterfly surveys. Started collecting lichens, which hadn't been done before. All in my first season. I brought all my own equipment because they had none. There really wasn't anything in place, but it was wonderful for me in -- because I came very late, everybody scurried around to make sure I could get my equipment on the last helicopter flight. They did everything possible. [00:21:44]And the trail crew always welcomed me in their facilities to stay, 'cause I was working alone. And the trail rangers, Karl (Gurcke), everyone was very helpful. Um, the interpreters included me in all their training so that I would be prepared to know as much as possible about the landscape. And other than that, they just sent me on my way. So that was my first season. [00:22:11]The second -- I spent the winter back in my home in Washington, and then came back to work some with Debbie Sanders, curating what I had collected. And Deb Boettcher came along, as well, and they were great. And then the second season, I started earlier, helped with the training that they gave for the interpreters and the

other crew, and then headed up in the field with the first group that was going in. Did more collecting, continued everything I'd started, and actually started some mushroom collections and just expanding the scope and mapping communities. And so that was my whole season. [00:22:51] And that again, we launched more bird exploration, and the Glacier Bay biologists came over and helped us do coastal studies, because I'm not any sort of marine biologist, and it's really all part of their coast.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Just on the other side.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And so those have continued, as well. They've continued to work with Glacier Bay, which makes sense.

[00:23:11] KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And so for the projects, did you decide where to go and what to focus on?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or was somebody giving you direction?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: No.

CLAY ALDERSON: A lot of it was drawn out of that document, wasn't it?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: It didn't exist yet.

CLAY ALDERSON: Ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: But the -- so the recommendations didn't exist yet?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: No, what they -- what they -- that's right. That came late in the end of '94.

CLAY ALDERSON: Ok.

[00:23:36] CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So my instructions were to get a cross-section to -- and to look in -- there's certain sites that are more likely to have unusual species: high elevation, and also wetlands, and there's certain things that I knew to target. And they had also made that suggestion. But pretty much, I was able to make my choices and always have support. I worked with Bruce Reed, was the chief ranger then. Jay had gone on. And he was extremely supportive.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And then did the region --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: But respectful.

[00:24:09] KAREN BREWSTER: Did the regional office provide any guidance? Were they involved at all?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: No, because they had chosen not to be involved in the natural resource program there, again another year. But I have to tell you the most important thing I did that year, as far as launching the future program, I discovered a quote in a botany book that designated Klondike and Skagway as the center of plant biodiversity for the state of Alaska. [00:24:36] And I'm sure there are botanists who would disagree, but it gave the local program a sense of self-respect. And so I was able to find this 2011 assessment of the program there, and that's one of the first quotes that they use, and they use it throughout the work.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So I think that's what the program needed more than anything else, was a sense of self-respect.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, well, and a bit of a mission.

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CLAUDIA ALDERSON: A mission. And in here, they suggested that possibility. They said --

KAREN BREWSTER: In that report?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes. Once I read this, when it finally came out after my first year, they mentioned the fact that there were very strange plant associations not found anywhere else because the Lynn Canal goes so deep into the interior that you have interior plants growing on the coast.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: As in no place else. And coastal plants growing in the interior because it's so close. The gradient is so steep that they all mix together, things that should never, ever be seen together.

KAREN BREWSTER: Interesting.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And that's a perfect setting for rare plants.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:25:43]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And Alaska's known for having no rare plants because it's so young, the glaciers are so recent, that it's really a gem to find a spot like that that's so rich in diversity.

[00:25:55]KAREN BREWSTER: And what about other, um, resources besides plants?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes, all things. I did a lichen study. I launched a lichen study and an air quality program, which Elaine worked --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Kept going.

KAREN BREWSTER: Elaine mentioned that lichen study.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yeah. Well, that -- that was great, and we had excellent support from the Forest Service. Linda Geiser, the Forest Service lichenologist for the area, had established a protocol for doing air quality monitoring, so we just contacted her, and she set us up. But they went back in a few years ago and did a lichen inventory and found over 400 lichens.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Many of which had never been identified anywhere in the world.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[00:26:38]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So, the message of biodiversity has gone forward, and it adds an excitement to looking for things there because anything's possible.

(Dog starts barking in the background again)

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: They said they really didn't find anything standard. And so they've done amphibian studies, and they've found -- we reported every place that we saw amphibians, but I'm really not qualified to study them. So they went back and checked and found more and found truly unusual and remarkable amphibian populations there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm. Neat.

[00:27:07]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So that was really my discovery the first year, and my intention was to find out what was there and make it clear that it really was a significant study to have a natural resource program there, since I knew there had been some resistance. You know, I had worked with Denali people.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yes.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And it's hard to see something so small, such a tiny piece of landscape, being so important.

[00:27:30]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And then the natural resources program has since -- it took off from there?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Oh, it's been wonderful.

CLAY ALDERSON: It had a bit of a rough start. Um, we got -- we got money for a natural resources specialist. And was that the second year you came?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So I worked the two summers in the field.

CLAY ALDERSON: Right. And the first summer, as a biological technician. And then the second summer, we were supposed to have money for a division head, permanent, and at the last minute they pulled the money and said, "Well, we'll give you enough for another seasonal." [00:28:07]And so we hired Claudia back.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Which I was delighted to.

CLAY ALDERSON: And it worked out for both of us.

[00:28:14]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And so they brought Damian Sedney on in September.

KAREN BREWSTER: Of '95?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Five. Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: As the manager?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes.

CLAY ALDERSON: He was a permanent full-time. Hired him out of Olympic National Park?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: I think so. Somewhere in Washington.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah.

[00:28:30]KAREN BREWSTER: I keep hearing the dogs barking.

CLAY ALDERSON: Well.

KAREN BREWSTER: Are they better -- are they better put away? Are they -- they --

CLAY ALDERSON: Well, they've got a doggie door.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

CLAY ALDERSON: And they -- this one -- I don't know if she'd go in or not, but -- And then the neighbors have sled dogs.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh no, that's -- I'm hearing the small dogs.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Unfortunately, it's either out there barking or in here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, if they're -- That's what I was wondering. If they're in here, do they -- will they not bark?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: We could try it.

CLAY ALDERSON: Hm, this is just --

(Break)

[00:29:00]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok, so now we're back. We'll see if this works better for the dogs. Um, now I don't remember exactly where we --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So we brought Damian on as a permanent person.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, Damian, that's right.

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And I continued to do work, sometimes as a volunteer, and sometimes still as a biotech with Debbie all winter, the second winter, doing plant identification.

[00:29:20]And since I'm not from Alaska, I needed a lot of help to be sure. And also to

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be -- have a stamp of approval on their collection, I went to UAF. We sent all the plants to Carolyn Parker, and then I went up and worked with her.

KAREN BREWSTER: And she's the botanist at the University of Alaska museum.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes, she is. And she --

KAREN BREWSTER: Was. She's retired, but.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: She's never fully retired.

KAREN BREWSTER: No. No.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: She's still doing field work.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:29:45]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: But yes. And so she was wonderful, as far as adding me to all of the groups and the meetings and adding our plants to the collection and letting people know what we were finding because botanists were also surprised to have this glory spot. And then she came down a few years later and did an inventory in Haines to add that to this concept of diversity. So that was the winter work, was working with the museum. And then the next summer, Damian brought in a bio-technician. [00:30:22]The complication had come up anyway. Clay and I had made a choice that we would have our personal lives rather than working together because I'd always be in the chain of command. So I worked as a gardener that next summer, which is my other great love.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. At the gardens there?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes, there's a woman there that had --

CLAY ALDERSON: Jewell Gardens.

KAREN BREWSTER: Jewell Gardens, thank you. I couldn't remember the name.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: That was before Jewell Gardens existed.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: But we just did all the plants around the area and grew all the starters for everybody. And I met lots of people that way.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:30:51]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And then the -- uh, Damian had some health problems and kind of fell apart, so anyway, he and -- his bio-technician came back in '97 and asked me if I'd come and help him put the program back together, and I went on doing biotech work, with everybody's clearance, to try and keep the program going until they could hire Elaine. And then Elaine took over, and we had a wonderful time together.

[00:31:20]KAREN BREWSTER: All right. Yeah, because by this point you and Clay were together, and as superintendent, you would have reported to him?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: I would have reported eventually.

KAREN BREWSTER: So that was a problem?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: But everybody reported to him. I was working under the chief ranger.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAY ALDERSON: She reported directly to the chief ranger.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. But so, but for nepotism reasons --

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Absolutely.

KAREN BREWSTER: It was not a good --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: You know, when there were staff meetings, we were all there together, you could just tell. I mean, it wasn't a good idea, but it was our -- entirely our

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choice, and we started seeing each other my second season, and so Clay talked to Bob Barbee at the time, and he said, well, finish the season out. Get everything done. And then I switched to working with -- as a volunteer with Deb Sanders to make sure everything was wrapped up properly, and remained on call when things were needed, but mostly found other work. And then of course went into ANHA (Alaska Natural History Association).

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Which we'll talk about --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Later.

KAREN BREWSTER: Later. We'll get to that part.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes.

[00:32:18]KAREN BREWSTER: Let's get back to Clay now and his work as superintendent.

Um, so did you have a -- oh, I guess I'll ask this question about your management style. Do you have a way you would describe your management style?

CLAY ALDERSON: Well, uh, management style. It was more nurturing, I think, in that I tried to be involved with things that were going on in the park, in the community, just where the park interfaced with other activities in Skagway. I didn't really have a lot of background as a manager. My background was maintenance.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAY ALDERSON: But I had served in several parks as a manager, and so I drew on those experiences for how we approached things. Like I insisted on having staff meetings every other week, first and third Tuesdays, I think, and people said, "Well, why do you have to have these staff meetings? I don't get anything out of them." And I said, "I don't care what you get out of 'em. I get a lot out of 'em. Because I can't keep track of the park, staff was growing." We had, I think, twenty-two people, upwards of then, and I don't know what people are doing on a day-to-day basis, and every two weeks, I can get involved. [00:34:04]And I know if I -- I -- I tried to get up on the Chilkoot Trail on the summer when the trail crew was there, when the rangers were there. If I was walking up the street and the construction crew was doing a concrete pour, I usually jumped in and helped where I could. And they -- I remember one time they were so concerned because I -- I got some concrete on my uniform shirt. I said, that's not really a problem. We got the concrete poured. That's the objective, and that's what we did. [00:34:36]And trying to -- kind of on a day-to-day basis, like, I would periodically stop at the Sweet Tooth Café because all of the town crew would go to the Sweet Tooth for their coffee break in the morning. And so I would tell 'em, just keep track. Tell 'em it's -- there's no charge today, and let me know, and I'll buy coffee for the crew.

KAREN BREWSTER: Nice.

CLAY ALDERSON: And they kind -- finally figured it out that I was the one that was doing that, but just, little things like that that you do to kinda build friendship and credibility with people in the park. So that seemed to work. [00:35:21]And then, as a family, initially with my first wife, we were -- she was a school teacher, and she got in, I think, initially teaching kindergarten or first grade. Anyway, so she was involved in the school system, and Timothy, whose house this is, was in the sixth grade then. And he was, you know, a member of a class of four students.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yes.

CLAY ALDERSON: So you kinda stand out no matter who you are, but Tim was involved with a lot of things. And as he went through school, he was quite an athlete, and he played on the basketball team and ran cross country, and was named his senior year to the Alaska -- I guess it's junior year -- the Alaska fourteen and under -- or sixteen and under state basketball team. And he went in the summer and played in tournaments with the Alaska team in Louisiana and California. So he was --

[00:36:36]KAREN BREWSTER: So Skagway was a good place to raise kids, it sounds like.

CLAY ALDERSON: It was a great place to raise kids. The two older children were married and gone by then.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAY ALDERSON: But Tim played quite a role, as did my first wife, get through the school. Then just personal things -- [00:36:56]I cook with sourdough.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

CLAY ALDERSON: And every Saturday, I would cook up sourdough, and we'd invite a few people to come in. Well, pretty soon, people in town would know that we had sourdough pancakes Saturday morning, and people would just start showing up.

KAREN BREWSTER: Nice.

CLAY ALDERSON: And it became almost an all-day affair. If it got to be lunch time, well, pretty soon there was somebody out there fixing lunch. And, uh, so that -- and at Christmas time, we opened our house to the community, and now Christmas open houses are kind of a tradition in Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:37:31]CLAY ALDERSON: And uh, just through things like that. We made a concerted effort to try and get school programs -- or park programs into the local schools. And it was a bit of tough sell. So we didn't get a lot of invitations to have our staff come in and talk to school kids, but we did have the DARE program.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Drugs.

KAREN BREWSTER: Drugs.

CLAY ALDERSON: The "no drugs and alcohol."

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. I'm trying to think of what it stands for, but I know it's a school program for no drugs and alcohol.

CLAY ALDERSON: Right. [00:38:08]And the local police department started it, but they said, "Well, gee. Would your law enforcement person be interested?" And we had Tim Steidel, who was a very sharp young law enforcement specialist.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Ranger.

CLAY ALDERSON: And so he said he'd love to do the DARE program. So he took that on, and that was really our first long term commitment to the school, and he did it for two or three years, I believe, and that was a -- how we first -- [00:38:41]Claudia did some plant programs in the school, and we just kind of, a little bit at a time, integrated some things. And I think that they've got a lot of things going on, not only with the school, but through other celebrations that they have. I know they show movies at Christmas time in the Park Visitor Center, so it's something -- it's one of those things, you have to start somewhere. So we were kind of in on getting a lot of those things started that -- Some of them have worked out and gone on. Not all of them, but some of 'em.

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[00:39:16]KAREN BREWSTER: And so when you started, what was the relationship like with the community? Or what had you been told when you showed up there?

CLAY ALDERSON: Well, I -- Jay Cable filled me in on a lot of the problems that the previous superintendent had had, and we just decided that we weren't gonna be pushed around, kinda. And so we went to the community with the idea that, you know, we're the Park Service, we're part of the community, let's be part of it. [00:39:56]And we had the opportunity through local hire to hire maintenance people, clerical staff. There are a lot of Park Service positions like chief ranger that give -- kinda hire people that are already in the system.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or they have very specific qualifications?

CLAY ALDERSON: Exactly.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAY ALDERSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, trail crew. That was local people.

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm. Trail crew was all local.[00:40:22] And -- and we integrated more people all the time through the local hire program. And we used that extensively, and a lot of those people are still there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. [00:40:37]Um, what about the -- all the historic buildings in the Park Service, had they bought all of the ones --

CLAY ALDERSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- that they are currently in possession of?

CLAY ALDERSON: Well, there -- there have been a couple of acquisitions. We always had feelers out that if a building was -- had true historical significance, we'd be interested. [00:41:00]But there were some that were very historically significant that we passed on, initially, like the Soapy Smith Saloon. It was owned by George Rapuzzi, and when he passed away, and then Mrs. Rapuzzi passed away, it was in the hands of Phyllis Brown, their niece. And Phyllis wanted -- she had an opportunity to sell the land where the Soapy Smith building was, and she wanted us to buy the building and move it to another location. And I got with Karl (Gurcke) and with John Warder, the chief of maintenance, and I said, "Physically, can that building be moved?" And he said, "Well, you know, we can do anything, practically." [00:41:50]But we also decided that that building had been moved at least one other time. A major addition had been built onto it, and structurally, it did not have the integrity that we usually look for. And what we could have done is just scraped it off, and we had enough documentation, we could have -- not restored, but replaced, and that's just not in the policy of the Park Service to replace in-kind buildings.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAY ALDERSON: So we chose not to take the Soapy Smith building. And since that time -- Phyllis Brown was pretty harsh with us sometimes about, "Well, you passed up the most historic building in that town." [00:42:39]Well, we ended up with it. And that's the way it's been with a lot of things. It just wasn't the time to do it. But uh, now the Park Service has done an incredible job of restoring the building, putting the exhibits back in it as they were.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAY ALDERSON: And that was a George Rapuzzi/Martin Itjen project.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

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CLAY ALDERSON: They did a lot of the things in town. [00:43:06]So that's kinda how we went about doing things. As far as, you know, I think the Park Service initially purchased thirteen buildings in the historic district, and we were just taking them as -- they started with -- with two buildings, I think the Mascot was one, and I can't remember what the other one was. And they put those up for bid, for people to bid on 'em as is, with the idea that they would do the restoration to a standard that the Denver Service Center established, and then they could use that building for a period of time to amortize their investment and use it for commercial purposes. And that didn't work very well because tourism had not come to Skagway yet. And, you know, if you restored a building for its historic use, and there aren't any people to come make use of it, it's not going to pay off.

[00:44:16]KAREN BREWSTER: Because that -- those people purchasing, they would've, yeah, put their own money in --

CLAY ALDERSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: To it.

CLAY ALDERSON: They put their money in.

KAREN BREWSTER: And they would have been buying it from the Park Service?

CLAY ALDERSON: No, they would just -- the Park Service would still own it, but they would do the restoration.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

CLAY ALDERSON: And use it for a period of time to recoup their investment. But you know, in ten years with no tourism, you're not going to recoup much investment.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:44:43]CLAY ALDERSON: So the next thing they tried, they took four buildings. And it was the Verbauwhede building, the Verbauwhede Crib, Boss -- the Boas Furriers, which is the newspaper office and bookstore, and was it Boss Bakery? Anyway, there were four buildings. And they went -- I don't think they even bid it. They went to a company in Haines, a construction company, and it was called a cost-plus fixed account.

[00:45:18]And this company would do restoration, and everything they spent, they were reimbursed plus ten percent. And they milked that program something fierce. And that's about the time that I got there, was when we had decided that that wasn't working.

[00:45:39]Well, also in the interim, the railroad had shut down. And it's interesting, when the railroad shut down, how many unemployed carpenters there became in town.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAY ALDERSON: Because people that, on Monday, hated the Park Service, by Tuesday, they were on our doorstep saying, could I have a job? I'm a wonderful carpenter. And we hired a lot of them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

CLAY ALDERSON: And a lot of 'em had already been hired before, but -- and had been involved with things. [00:46:08]But one of the big things that I tried to get established was year-round funding to where we could do a building, and when that one was done, we'd move to the next one. We had a couple of drawbacks. One, we didn't really have a maintenance facility, and we would set up our historic restoration workshop in one of the buildings that was yet to be done. And it was in the Pantheon Saloon for a long time. [00:46:41]And so it was logistically, we weren't in very good shape to do things, but also funding-wise, we were depending on Senator Stevens to get us money, and that money

came in small little tranches that we could maybe keep the program going for the summer, and then we'd have to lay everybody off in the winter. And so I -- and after the debacle with the four buildings that we did the cost-plus fixed account, we hadn't brought anything in on-time or on, uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: On budget.

CLAY ALDERSON: Within the budget. And I said, we need a success, and we need -- we were starting the Mascot Saloon, and we said, we need to bring this in on-time and on-budget. And they did. [00:47:36] And we had hired -- let's see, we had always hired or brought in somebody from the Denver Service Center to be our project foreman, but we hired a local guy, who I had hired to restore the house that I had purchased by then. And so I said, "Jeff, why don't you apply? We're taking employees." He wasn't real keen on working for the Park Service, but he was an excellent carpenter, and he became our foreman.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that's Jeff who?

CLAY ALDERSON: Jeff Mull, M-U-L-L.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. I've heard the name.

CLAY ALDERSON: And he still lives in Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:48:23] CLAY ALDERSON: And has been involved in building a lot of buildings in Skagway, and a lot of restoration. But anyway, we brought Jeff in as a carpenter, and then he emerged as the leader of the crew. And I can't remember all the buildings that Jeff was involved with, but he was pretty much involved with it until the end of the restoration of those buildings was done.

[00:48:45] KAREN BREWSTER: And so then the program switched to Park Service paying for the restoration and then leasing out for business use?

CLAY ALDERSON: Right. And as we would complete a building, we would do an advertisement, and people would bid on it. And they would get a fully restored, state-of-the-art historic building, but you know, it had a lot of the historic fabric still in it, and we were absolutely faithful to the historic design.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:49:17] CLAY ALDERSON: But ADA was saying, you have to have an elevator in some of these buildings. So the Pantheon Saloon has an elevator. They wanted us to put an elevator in the Mascot, but we didn't.

KAREN BREWSTER: And the visitor center building, the old railroad depot, does that have an elevator?

CLAY ALDERSON: Nope. Hm-um. That was -- that was really the first building that was done. I am not sure if that was done on contract, but it was pretty much done by the time I got here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

CLAY ALDERSON: And it was -- it was done very well. And I know a lot of local people worked on that building.

[00:49:59] KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Yeah. So the -- sort of the new plan of Park Service restoring and then leasing --

CLAY ALDERSON: That was --

KAREN BREWSTER: That was through your -- your --

CLAY ALDERSON: That was the standard about the time that -- not that I necessarily started that, but it kinda started. And then what I really pushed for was getting the funding so when we finished on one building and we kept the crew together, and we were really accomplishing things.

[00:50:26]KAREN BREWSTER: Now did that happen in other parks, or is this unique to Skagway and its historic district?

CLAY ALDERSON: It happens in other parks, but when we were done, we had the biggest historic leaseback program in the United States was in Skagway. We were doing more buildings and more vol -- there were agricultural leases that are much bigger and more dollar value. But as far as doing it the way it was done in Skagway, we had the -- and other places, you know, like Ford's Theatre and big places like that, but they are pretty tiny compared to thirteen buildings in a downtown historic district.

[00:51:10]KAREN BREWSTER: And you -- you had talked about, you know, the earlier with the tourism hadn't quite taken off. So, does this leaseback coincide with --

CLAY ALDERSON: It was -- it was starting to take off then. Uh, it used to be if we got four or five cruise ships a week, we were doing very well. And prior to the Park Service arrival, people had buildings that they -- if they heard a cruise ship was going to be in town, they'd open. And as soon as the cruise ship loaded up, they'd close.

KAREN BREWSTER: They kinda still do that.

CLAY ALDERSON: And they'd open the next -- no use selling to your next-door neighbor because they didn't want what you had. But these tourists, they found, were pretty -- pretty fertile field there for --

[00:51:53]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Well, do you know what kinda caused the shift that tourism started on the rise?

CLAY ALDERSON: I think that the cruise industry said, "You know, we've got an attraction there, and the Park Service is behind it. It's going to have clean restrooms. It's going to have decent buildings. It's going to have interpretive programs because the Park Service does that throughout the agency."

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAY ALDERSON: And they kind of built their schedule around that. [00:52:21]But the year I got there -- they would always do surveys. And Skagway was the least desired point -- uh, port in all Southeast Alaska. And by the time I left, it was the number one desired port, so.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and you think those historic building restorations helped attract --

CLAY ALDERSON: I think it had -- well, it helped attract the boats.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAY ALDERSON: And then the boats attracted the people. The Park Service doesn't do anything to attract visitors other than provide an opportunity.

[00:52:53]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I was thinking, I've seen photos of, you know, Broadway in the '70's with lots of boarded-up old buildings.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yep.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that why would that attract tourists? Whereas once you had it looking more restored and historic --

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: It would be more attractive for the cruise industry to bring their visitors to.

CLAY ALDERSON: That's exactly what they built on. [00:53:15]And I even went to the cruise companies a couple of times and said, "You know, we could really use some financial help if we're gonna keep going." And I was looking for a little private sector involvement in some of this work. And I said, "You know, we could put, 'This exhibit is paid for by so-and-so cruise line.'" And they said, "Hey, if you start doing that, we'll buy our own island, and we'll build our own attraction."

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow. Sounded like a good idea.

CLAY ALDERSON: And that convinced me.

[00:53:48]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and I know that in Skagway, there was concern, and maybe there still is, about you know, the Park Service being the building owners, and the -- the -- there's this criticism of that, and --

CLAY ALDERSON: They called it the "Disneylandification" of Skagway. Uh, but Skagway didn't have anything else going on. At the time, they didn't even have the railroad.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAY ALDERSON: And they still wouldn't have the railroad if the Park Service hadn't come along. [00:54:17]I often say that Skagway's interpretation of tourism was the cruise ship comes up, ties up to the dock, they take up a collection among the passengers, put the money on the dock, and then go to Haines. And they have through the years kind of almost begrudgingly said, "You know, tourism is clean, it's dependable. We know that we will have more and more people every year." But it does change the town. There's no doubt about it.

[00:54:52]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, well, and I was going to say, the Park Service as landlord. I guess that was a criticism.

CLAY ALDERSON: That's -- any time the federal government acquires land -- At the time, we were acquiring those initial thirteen buildings, those people were thrilled to have us take them off their hands, and at a highly inflated price. But when I look at some of the other things the Park Service does in Alaska, and the Wrangell-St. Elias Visitor Center comes to mind, we did the entire historic district in Skagway for what it cost to build that Wrangell-St. Elias Visitor Center.

KAREN BREWSTER: In Copper Center. That one. Yeah.

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm. So on balance, I don't think it's all that bad.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:55:46]CLAY ALDERSON: We had one lady that we bought two properties from, and it was the building that was one of the last ones that was to be restored, and she stopped me on the street one day, and she said, "You know, I sold you that building, and you said you were going to restore it, and you haven't restored it. I want it back." I said, "Well, you know, that's not gonna happen, first of all. But secondly, it's in the budget. It's going to be restored as we promised." And we got to it eventually, and she was quite pleased. But at the time, she thought we had hoodwinked her and taken her building away and hadn't really made the use of it we said we would. Things just move slow in the government sometimes.

[00:56:40]KAREN BREWSTER: That's true. Now how is it -- how is it to operate a park like Skagway that sort of seems to have a dual mission. It's historic -- or a triple mission.

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History, preserving the history with the buildings, and now it seems like the park got into the business of tourism a little bit, and natural resources.

CLAY ALDERSON: Well, the biggest tourism thing -- the thing we do are these guided walks through the Historic District. And we had a commercial person that just threw a fit, and he didn't think we should be doing those walks through the Historic District. Free, no less. So I said, "Ok, we'll start charging for 'em." However, I talked with him, and I said, "You know, that's -- " [00:57:34]You have to give back. You can't just take from tourists. So this is something that the Park Service can give back, that can provide those clean toilets. We can provide a downtown Historic District. We can provide structures that are the basis for why Skagway continues to exist. And then you guys that are commercial can do the taking, and we do all the giving, and it makes a good balance. [00:58:02]And at the time, we were providing pretty much all the public restrooms in town. And when we restored the Mascot Saloon, it was going to be a leaseback. And I said, "You know --" we were kind of saturated. And we were getting some pushback from people. I got a letter from a guy who had a jewelry store in town and said, "How can you justify bringing in people to -- to compete with me and other jewelry stores?" I said, "Well, you know, we put it out there, and the best proposal is the one that we select. And if they happen to be a visitor -- a jewelry store, then you're going to have another competitor." But I said, "Look at some of these private buildings that have leased recently. Every one of 'em's been leased to a jeweler." [00:59:00]So, the Verbauwhede's building, we leased to Casey McBride, who was a local guy, member of the volunteer fire department, you know. True blue Casey McBride was a jeweler, self-taught, and he had a very thriving business there. And when we did the Hern-Clipper building, Bud Rauscher, who was a long-time jeweler in Sitka, came over to Skagway. He wanted to give it a try. He told me one time, he said, "I figured if I could break even by the third year, it was a good investment." And I think he had a four or five-year lease. And he made money in the first year. So he did well.

[00:59:43]KAREN BREWSTER: So how -- how was it decided as to what -- who would get the bid?

CLAY ALDERSON: Um, we convened a panel. Usually some from the regional office -- the chief ranger, Jay, was active on that, and then later Reed McCluskey was very active in that. But we would set out parameters that needed to be met, and we gave bonus points to local people that bid, people that would stay open year-round, people that had a -- a product that was a good tie to the gold rush and the themes of the park. And those were all premiums. [01:00:36]And for the most part, we hire -- we selected local people. Jeff Brady was the newspaper editor. He was one of the first. Glenda Choate was a local. She had the Verbauwhede's Crib. Casey McBride, and then Bud Rauscher was at least from Southeast. And as we have continued -- um, there are some buildings that we formerly leased that have now become Park Service attractions because tourism is so big that we can't accommodate 'em all in that visitor center in the depot.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAY ALDERSON: So now, the Pantheon is our junior ranger place. [01:01:24]And then a big change was when Parks Canada wanted to start charging. And I know in our outline, that was one of the topics. Do you want to get into that now?

KAREN BREWSTER: Sure.

CLAY ALDERSON: Ok. Um, Parks Canada was mandated nationally to start raising more of their operating expenses to cover within the park. And they saw a pretty lucrative opportunity to start peop -- charging people for going over the Chilkoot Trail. And I was really against it. And held out, and didn't charge on the US side. Because their initial fee was \$25, and at the time, even overnight camping wasn't costing \$25 in national parks anywhere.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAY ALDERSON: We got into the fee demonstration program and started charging an arm and a leg for walking through the door.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:02:29]CLAY ALDERSON: Um, so um, we said, ok, we're restoring the Martin Itjen House. It's right across the street from our visitor center -- They actually wanted desk space, front desk space, in our visitor center, and I said, "No. We can't do that. But we will dedicate the Martin Itjen House to the Chilkoot Trail permits." And we put some exhibits in, but asked them to do most of the exhibitry. And I think we even provided some staffing over there.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes.

[01:03:14]CLAY ALDERSON: And so, they issued their permits, we issued information, and it worked much better than I thought it would. I think, initially, they remitted either a percentage of their income or we just leased the building to them. We didn't give them a free ride on that building. And since then, that building has been, I see, turned over to the Natural History Association, and they've moved the trail center up to the old Boss Bakery building.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:03:55]CLAY ALDERSON: And that leads us into another controversy that -- when we first finished the Boss Bakery, we had photographs of it. We knew exactly how it looked. Plus, we knew how that sign on the front of the Boss Bakery looked. And the historic architect said you have to put that sign on the false front. Well, if we didn't lease the building to a bakery, which we didn't, it made it a little awkward. And we did lease that to a local fellow who was able to buy heirloom jewelry from estates and things and then retailed it out of there, so it was a jewelry store. And he said -- [01:04:47]No, that's not right. The first person we leased that to was a local school teacher and his wife, and she was a beauty operator, and she had a beauty shop in there. That's right. I'd forgotten about them. Bryan and Debbie Ritter. And so Debbie was running a beauty shop there, and people would go up and say, "Oh look. A bakery." And then they'd go in, and they saw we were selling curlers and not crullers, they didn't like it. And they -- they -- I got feedback from Bryan Ritter. He said, "You know, people were really quite put out, actually." But -- and they had it for four years, and then we sold it to the guy that had the heirloom jewelry, and he said, "You know, I just can't make it with that sign up there." And the historic architects were adamant that that sign had to be there. And I said, "So, ok, we'll leave the sign there." And we built a façade exactly replicating the façade up there, and we could put anything on it we wanted. And I think to this day, the old Boss Bakery sign is behind the façade on the front of that false front. But it's --

KAREN BREWSTER: It's not visible?

CLAY ALDERSON: No. [01:06:04]And now, they've gone into the Martin Itjen House, and on the wall, the front wall of the building, they've got a huge hand, you know, painted black sign on that blue background, "Alaska Geographic" on the front. And that certainly isn't historic.

KAREN BREWSTER: No.

CLAY ALDERSON: So that -- that's an example of changing times.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that's the Historic District Commission, perhaps, that makes those decisions?

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah. Yeah. So anyway.

[01:06:31]KAREN BREWSTER: But it's interesting that the paying to hike the trail came about through Parks Canada.

CLAY ALDERSON: Absolutely.

KAREN BREWSTER: Because US National Parks charge entrance fees.

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm. But not in Alaska.

KAREN BREWSTER: Not in Alaska. Well, sort -- yeah. At the time, not in Alaska.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yep. Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: So what year was that, about, when they started?

CLAY ALDERSON: Mm, '90, early '90's.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Well, I think it was '94, when I was there.

CLAY ALDERSON: Was it?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: That it was being negotiated.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: See, I have a narrow window I remember.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Well --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So I think it was in place by '95.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah. That's about right. So -- [01:07:14]And Parks Canada defrayed a lot of their expenses on the trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAY ALDERSON: And in their parks. So, and it's, I'm sure, helped Klondike Gold Rush now that they're, I don't know, fifty-fifty on it or something.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

CLAY ALDERSON: But you'll have to --

KAREN BREWSTER: So they did --

CLAY ALDERSON: See what's happened since.

[01:07:33]KAREN BREWSTER: Yes. Well, anyways, so some of the money now does go back into Klondike for the trail use?

CLAY ALDERSON: Yes. See, that's another thing is that leaseback buildings, leaseback of historic buildings, that money goes back into the park operations.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAY ALDERSON: And I couldn't -- you know, the park was not self-sustaining quite, but it was self-sustaining enough so that if I went to a budget meeting, and they wouldn't give me the money, I'd say, "Ok. I'll build it myself." [01:08:07]We operated autonomously down there quite a bit because we had -- you know, we -- we established what they called

a cyclic maintenance program. And in the Park Service, you say, "Ok. I'm going to need to put a new roof on that building every twenty years." And you put money in your cyclic maintenance, so every twenty years, you have enough money to build that roof. You have money to paint the outside. You have money to paint the inside. You have money to do whatever needs to be done to that building. [01:08:43]And we established our own cyclic maintenance program, so that we knew when we needed something in one of those historic buildings, that we would have money available.

KAREN BREWSTER: So normally, that cyclic program is through the regional office?

CLAY ALDERSON: It's national.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or national. Ok.

CLAY ALDERSON: And pretty much run through the region.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

CLAY ALDERSON: We -- we had that pretty much lined up to where we had money in our leaseback account.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:09:15]CLAY ALDERSON: But we could also spend that on other programs in the park because, like, the maintenance took care of the maintenance of those buildings, so we could put -- you know, we needed to hire a secretary just to deal with the maintenance accounts, and we were able to put her on the leaseback account. [01:09:37]The other thing that really moved the park into the 21st century was establishment of a maintenance building. And we were able to get money through the historic restoration, and we were able to move out of the idea of having our maintenance shop and our historic restoration shop in one of the buildings that was waiting to be restored. And we got the money and contracted it out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, yeah, I can't imagine the maintenance and restoration crew moving every time.

CLAY ALDERSON: Every time. Yeah.

[01:10:10]KAREN BREWSTER: You know, ok, we're in this -- now this building's going to be restored. We gotta go someplace else --

CLAY ALDERSON: That's right. Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- for all our equipment and stuff. That seems crazy.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yep. And the maintenance, or the historic restoration crew, played a big role in designing that building. And I said, "You know, I want to have a building that will support the kind of ongoing historic restoration and maintenance." And we -- we built the main building, and then we built foundations for two attendant buildings, mostly for storage.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:10:58]CLAY ALDERSON: And uh, I said, "One of the things I want to have is a warehouse where we don't run to the hardware store every time we need a pound of nails. We go to our warehouse. We might buy 'em, but instead of buying a pound, we'll buy a keg, and we -- we've got nails that we can go get." And we did that, but then by the time we got it all done, GSA went defunct. I was always used to working in parks where, once a year, we would sit down with the GSA catalog and buy what we needed for the coming year. And it would come into a central warehouse, and as we needed it, we'd go get it.

KAREN BREWSTER: GSA's Government Service -- ?

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CLAY ALDERSON: Government Services Administration. [01:11:48]They used to handle all of the automobiles and -- leased automobiles. We had automobiles that were assigned to the park, but then in the summer time, we'd often lease additional automobiles, and that was done through GSA. So I don't know what they're doing with that area that I designated as the warehouse, but it's gone to good use. And then one of those outlying buildings, we built several years after we built the maintenance building, and it was used, I think, by the rangers as a ranger storage. And then the other one, the foundation is there, but it's never been built on.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:12:35]CLAY ALDERSON: And I -- I envisioned that as being for natural resources, I believe. So that way, we'd have the big maintenance building, then a ranger and a natural resources. And all of our major in-park activities were covered.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, it seems like a good thing to have a big maintenance building for a park like that.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah, it was -- it was a good building.

[01:13:06]KAREN BREWSTER: Uh, we were talking a little bit about relationships with the community.

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: That, being superintendent and how you tried to nurture those connections.

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: So I kinda want to turn to Claudia, who was, you know, an employee, and um, how that worked. And did you get involved in community things?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: I did.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what was -- what were you hearing in relation to the park?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Well, people tend to like a biologist, so I found it very easy to mix in the community. And I was encouraged to participate in things, so I spent a lot of time in the library and got to know all the people in that system. [01:13:45]And as Clay said, worked some with the schools. Did some field trips out there, and just talked to them -- Dyea about the history and also the natural history of the area. So that was very successful. I also joined the volunteer fire department, and usually was a victim, 'cause that was my strength. So I found I was very welcome. I went to city council meetings, and so people -- you know, the railroad called me one time and said "Hey, everybody's complaining about brown trees when they go out on the, you know -- what's wrong with them?" [01:14:19]And so, I found that I was very welcome and comfortable. Even the -- there was a group that invited me in to do plant programs for their groups that were coming. Elderhostel had me come and do stories of the wildflowers of the area. So people did not complain to me about the Park Service because I was a seasonal, and I was just a botanist.

[01:14:42]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And then when you -- you and Clay joined forces, then you started working for Alaska Geographic, so you were now no longer associated with the park in people's minds? Or you guys were married, maybe it --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: No. I continued to do some programs for the park. You know, I had launched the bird counts, and it took 'em awhile to get people who could do those, and so

I was still associated with the park in that sense. But I had made a lot of friends in my gardening year, and so they just saw me as part of the community.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Doing all things, Christmas celebrations, whatever. [01:15:22]And there was some resistance to bringing a bookstore in because there was a bookstore.

KAREN BREWSTER: Jeff's bookstore. Yeah.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes. So there was a little -- but not very much. For the most part, people appreciated the fact that we didn't have any souvenir items. And we actually added some materials that hadn't been available before.

[01:15:41]KAREN BREWSTER: So you started to work for Alaska Natural History Association, ANHA, and Alaska Geographic, in '96?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: So there was not a outlet for their materials before that?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: That's right.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you started it?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: That's right. And I had managed a Natural History Association in Colorado in the Colorado National Monument. I worked there for thirteen years, and eight of those years, I was managing their cooperating association. So I was well-trained and well-experienced.

[01:16:11]CLAY ALDERSON: I didn't really support the Natural History Association.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

CLAY ALDERSON: Whole-heartedly.

KAREN BREWSTER: And why is that?

CLAY ALDERSON: I didn't want to be in competition with local business people. Especially, we would lease a building to somebody, and then go in competition with them. So I just said, "Nothing doing. We're not going to have that." Well, you know, Michelle Bartlett. You know Bill Holman.

KAREN BREWSTER: No, but I know Michelle, yeah.

CLAY ALDERSON: Ok, well. I don't know if Bill and Michelle are together anymore, but they were at the time. And she was doing Elderhostel programs, and Bill was working with her. And he became the head of the Alaska ANHA, and he said, "You know, that is gonna be such a lucrative place. Won't you please put in, at least a limited -- ?" And I said, "Ok. We will put in a cabinet, and it will have ANHA materials in it. And it will set in the visitor center, and when there are cruise ships in town, we will -- which became every day -- we will open that cabinet, and we will have our rangers at the desk sell things out of that." And that was -- your job was to make sure that cabinet stayed stocked and to do the accounting.

[01:17:41]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And I also, because I had worked in the park, worked at the desk as an interpreter, so I was able to fill in and be both things.

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm. And, but we didn't hire, other than Claudia, any --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: 'Til the second year.

CLAY ALDERSON: Other people the first year.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yeah.

CLAY ALDERSON: And it just -- it caused some problems. We had a guy in town that circulated a petition among the business people and brought it to me. "These people are

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all upset about your being in competition with 'em." So I went and looked at the people on the list. I went and talked to every one of 'em, and the answer I got mostly, "Oh, he's bringing stuff in here all the time. I just sign it and don't even read it or look at it." And I said, "Well, you know, if you're really upset with the park, maybe we can work something out?" And it didn't seem like they were really that upset, so we didn't do anything. And we're still there.

[01:18:43]KAREN BREWSTER: And it expanded from a -- what made it expand from the cabinet to the building next door? Across the street.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah, we -- we set up a place across the street in the Martin Itjen House with the trails. And it just kinda grew. And it was after I left that they moved back into the visitor center and took up, what I thought was pretty valuable exhibit space.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yeah.

CLAY ALDERSON: And turned it into a Natural History Association place. [01:19:16]And then I had the same kind of a problem with the Natural History Association in the APLIC's. And you came in, and there was the Natural History Association, and you had to find your way through them to get to the APLIC exhibits. I said, "We're not going to have it this way anymore. APLIC goes to the back of the room. The exhibits come to the front of the room." Charlie Money was not happy with me, but he came over himself and spent a whole weekend moving his stuff where I told him he could have it.

[01:19:50]KAREN BREWSTER: And APLIC is the Alaska Public Land Information Centers that they have in Anchorage and Fairbanks.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yes. And then they call Fairbanks the FAPLIC, which I thought was kinda silly, but anyway. So I've had a checkered past with the Natural History Association.

[01:20:08]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and the reason the Natural History Association kind of exists, you correct me, Claudia, is because the Park Service itself can't sell that kind of material.

CLAY ALDERSON: Exactly.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: So it's a non -- a separate organization that has to do it.

CLAY ALDERSON: Right. I think that the public -- the Natural History Associations agency-wide do a great job. I just didn't think that it was appropriate to do it in Skagway at that time. I think Skagway has matured to the point where it's not a problem.

[01:20:42]KAREN BREWSTER: And now we hear Claudia's side of it.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: I was very resistant to carrying any souvenirs.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And we actually were able to get the rights to the movie that they showed there in the visitor center and produce it.

CLAY ALDERSON: That's a good point.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And happily sold it to anyone in town that wanted to carry it. It's a great movie. Um, and so we tried to seek out sources that other people didn't have. Make it available and always be happy to share it any place else. And so the bookstore figured that out. At first they were resistant, and then we produced a whole line of postcards. Again, they could sell them. So we didn't try to be money makers, 'cause that took care of itself in Skagway, but rather to actually be adding to people's experience and choosing things that would supplement what we wanted them to know about the gold rush and

about Skagway. And so we ran a really, really tight ship, and then I watched in the years afterward, the natural progression of more and more tourist souvenirs, and that's how it grew.

CLAY ALDERSON: We didn't sell any t-shirts.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: T-shirts.

CLAY ALDERSON: No baseball caps.

[01:21:52]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I think of ANHA as books and maps and things.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah, that's what I think of. And that's what we sold a lot of.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Well, and that's what we did.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Things particularly that it would be hard for them to get elsewhere.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And particular to Skagway and that area.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Very strictly, yes.

CLAY ALDERSON: We were able to acquire the rights to that video, "Days of Adventure, Dreams of Gold." And that was kind of our flagship there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAY ALDERSON: And, uh --

[01:22:16]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I didn't realize that ANHA -- they do, they sell t-shirts and souvenir-y kinds of thing?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Oh, yeah.

CLAY ALDERSON: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, they do?

CLAY ALDERSON: Sleeve patches with each of the parks.

[01:22:24]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: The thing is, it's up to the superintendent, so you put together your pitch, what you'd like to sell, after having cleared it with ANHA or --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Alaska Geographic. And then the superintendent has to ok it. So really, what's in the store reflects the superintendent's stance on it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Interesting.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Which makes a big difference. And you involve the interpretive division, of course, in your applications. And they can come to you and say, could you add something on the geology, we really -- and this is our favorite. So it's all cooperative, but ultimately, it has to have the superintendent's signature.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

[01:23:01]CLAY ALDERSON: And if we had a summer seasonal that did a program --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Right.

CLAY ALDERSON: On some aspect --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Photography. Historic photography.

CLAY ALDERSON: That we didn't have a book that covered it, then we would introduce that book to our sales list.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. [01:23:14]And I know, like in some of the parks, I'm thinking like Denali maybe, they may sell some things made by local people?

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes.

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KAREN BREWSTER: And now, did you do that in Skagway, or you considered that a conflict, a competition with the -- ?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Well, yes. We did. When we celebrated the centennial, we had a local artist who was also an interpreter on the staff, a seasonal interpreter. Did a magnificent commemorative pin, and he also did some postcards for the celebration. So he's a local artist. He's gone on to do extremely well, so we were available for events to use local talent, but otherwise we didn't because everything was available around town.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:23:56]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So we were trying to have things that were a part of their experience there visiting the park, going to the park programs, doing the walk-around, and not readily available elsewhere.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. That you were trying not to be competition.

CLAY ALDERSON: Right.

[01:24:11]KAREN BREWSTER: 'Cause that's the criticism that the park got as the landlord, that you were being competition for local businesses.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: But we did sell the most popular books that were the most important to the experience.

CLAY ALDERSON: But they also --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Because not everyone shops. They really came to see the park.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:24:28]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So we weren't afraid of competing, but not competing unnecessarily. It had to really and truly support the program.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So that the person at the desk could say, "You know, the most important thing for your interests would be all in that book."

CLAY ALDERSON: They -- they complained also at the post office because the post office sold postcards, and in certain occasions, they sold t-shirts.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Really, at the post office?

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah. See --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yeah. They did a stamp, a commemorative stamp.

CLAY ALDERSON: We did a commemorative stamp to commemorate the centennial of the gold rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAY ALDERSON: And we had the first day of issue, both in Skagway and at Nome.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And that makes sense the post office would be involved in that.

CLAY ALDERSON: Right.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Coffee cups, everything, for that celebration.

CLAY ALDERSON: But people in Skagway were really opposed to the post office getting into the commercial sales of things that they thought were their territory as far as tourism provided.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAY ALDERSON: The post office just kinda wrote 'em off. They were a little stronger position than we were, 'cause we were trying to be responsive to the needs.

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[01:25:45]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And we really were just one wall behind an exhibit in the entry into the visitor center.

KAREN BREWSTER: At the beginning, yeah.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yeah. And that -- that was very successful. It really did make a lot of money.

CLAY ALDERSON: And really, there's not that much write-up -- mark-up in books. If -- I think Jeff Brady and his place was the only one that was depending a lot on books for his income.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

CLAY ALDERSON: And I talked to him. I said, "You know, are there titles you would like for us not to carry?" And we would abide by his needs.

[01:26:24]KAREN BREWSTER: So when did the Alaska Geographic/ANHA store move into the Martin Itjen House?

CLAY ALDERSON: I don't know. It was long after we left.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So it wasn't there in '99 when we left.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

CLAY ALDERSON: Well, didn't we have just another --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: I thought it was just the Chilkoot. I don't know.

CLAY ALDERSON: Little exhibit or little literature stand about that wide in there?

[01:26:52]KAREN BREWSTER: So you left in '99?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: We left in '99. So I worked the two years with ANHA.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And then we left, and I finished with them, I think, in April. March or April, with them. And they brought someone else in. And we left in early May to go to Mongolia for three years.

[01:27:13]KAREN BREWSTER: Hm. And what did you do in Mongolia? Why Mongolia?

CLAY ALDERSON: We went on loan to the State Department. I was sitting there at my desk one Friday afternoon, and it was when they had just said, "Here. Here's a computer. See what you can do with it". First time I'd ever looked at a computer. So after it'd set there for several weeks, one Friday afternoon, I said, "Well, let's see what this does." And it had "Bulletin Boards." So I clicked bulletin boards, and it was just line after line of what's going on in the Park Service. [01:27:51]And so our lady that was our computer specialist said, "You can just block." And she showed me how to do that, and then push delete, and that'll all go away. And you should kind of keep the stuff that's not of interest, and delete all the rest of it. [01:28:11]So I was just going through, block a whole page, delete, a whole page, delete, and I don't know how many pages of stuff. And as I did that, I just -- my eyes fell on a line that said, "Detail opportunity in Mongolia." And I thought, hmm. That sounds interesting. So instead of pushing delete, I read that. And I pushed print. And I took it home and put it on the kitchen counter, and that was on a Friday. And about Sunday, Claudia said, "What's this about a detail in Mongolia?" And I said, "Oh yeah. Would you be interested in going to Mongolia?" We weren't even married. And she said, "Yeah, I would." And I said, "Where's Mongolia?" I thought it was in Africa. [01:29:05]Anyway, I said, "I'll call." So that Monday, I called Washington and talked to Barbara Pitkin, who was in charge of recruiting for various things, and I said, "You know, I'm kinda interested in this. What does it involve?" She said, "Well,

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we're -- we're trying to send somebody from the Park Service on a long-term detail to help the government of Mongolia to develop a national park up on the northern border with Siberia." And she said, "You sound like the perfect person." But she said, "I'm not -- I'm not doing the recruiting for this one. Chris Snipes is, and he's not in today. But he'll be back later in the week, and I'll have him call you." So end of the week, Chris Snipes calls me up, and I said, "Yeah. I said, my wife -- well, Claudia and I have talked a lot about -- " And so I said, "What -- what is involved?" And he said, "Well, we've got several people here in Washington that are interested in it, but you're kinda the first person from the field." But he said, "I really think you're the person we're looking for." And so he said, "Let me talk with Barbara." And so he called me, and he said, "Can you come to Washington for an interview?" I said, "Sure." [01:30:38] So he sent me a plane ticket. And off I went to Washington. And was there for about a two-hour interview, and his screen-out question was, "Do you like mutton?" And I said, "I don't eat much mutton, but I can certainly learn to." So he said, "Well, you know, we've got other applicants, but we are pretty impressed with the fact that you've lived in a remote area and seem to have some of the things that you'll be dealing with." So I flew back to Skagway, and about three days later, I got a call from the post office, and they said, there's a registered letter here for you. And I went and picked it up, and it was an airline ticket to go to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[01:31:31] CLAY ALDERSON: And I called Chris, and I said, "Isn't there some things we need to talk about?" And it was several months -- or a month or more, anyway. I said, "Don't you want me to come to Washington for some training or something?" And he said, "No." He said, "We'll do the training on the way over there. I'll meet you in Tokyo."

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[01:31:53] CLAY ALDERSON: So I said, "Well, what about Claudia? She's a natural resources specialist. And a lot of the stuff that you've got in this outline of work you want to do certainly is within her purview of being able to fulfill." And he said, "Nope. No spouses. We just can't do that." And I said, "Ok. Well, not my spouse" -- but any -- close enough. Anyway, so I said, "Well, can she travel with me on this?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "It's all at your expense." So I said, "Ok, she'll -- she'll come along." And so then we talked to each other again, I said, "You know if we were married, you'd be on my insurance."

[01:32:41] CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And also, they counseled us that we should get married because if there'd been a problem --

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: We'd have a passport that -- if he'd need to be rescued, and I wouldn't --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So there you go, how romantic.

KAREN BREWSTER: How romantic.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah. So --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: We had our honeymoon --

[01:32:57] KAREN BREWSTER: You'd been together how many years?

CLAY ALDERSON: Couple years.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Couple years, yeah.

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CLAY ALDERSON: That's -- we were collectively known as C&C Alaska.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: I guess it'd been three years.

[01:33:07]CLAY ALDERSON: And so, we made arrangements and got married in the historic Bernard Moore House in the Skagway Historic District.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And his son, Tim, did the service for us, and the whole community turned out.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Nice.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: It was great.

CLAY ALDERSON: And our marriage license is signed by everybody that was there.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: All the park staff. It was really nice.

CLAY ALDERSON: And we had a nice reception in the visitor center. It was pretty fun.

[01:33:36]So we go off to Mongolia.

KAREN BREWSTER: Now, and so, because this was a detail shift --

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- did you stay on -- was your job title still you were superintendent?

CLAY ALDERSON: I was still superintendent of Klondike Gold Rush, and they brought in an acting superintendent, with the idea -- this was a two-year assignment, two-summer assignment. Ran about six months each year. And um, so off we went, and indeed, we met Chris Snipes in Tokyo and flew on to Seoul. And overnights in Seoul and got weathered in for a day. And so we toured around Seoul and flew on to Ulaanbaatar. And we hadn't gotten our suitcase unpacked in Ulaanbaatar, and Chris Snipes knocked on the door, and he said, "We need to hire Claudia." So that worked out.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: They contracted with me.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

CLAY ALDERSON: And so it was just three of us, then, were that team. Claudia and I, and Dr. Clyde Goulden, who was from the Philadelphia Academy of Sciences.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: A hydrologist.

[01:34:49]CLAY ALDERSON: And he was the one that got the whole thing started. And he had been doing study tours for Mongolians to come to the United States and taking academics from the United States to Mongolia. So he, in the process, married a Mongolian woman. And he wanted to have a program over there. And so he went to -- he was from Philadelphia, so he went to Arlen Specter, and he was quite a salesman. Everything was critical.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Critical.

CLAY ALDERSON: Critical. And Arlen Specter put in a line item in the budget for an environmental problem in Mongolia --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Project.

KAREN BREWSTER: Project.

CLAY ALDERSON: -- to be run by the US Agency for International Development.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:35:35]CLAY ALDERSON: And they said, but we don't do environmental programs. We do banking, we do self-help, we do everything but environment. And it was in the budget. It wasn't just in their budget. It was a line item.

KAREN BREWSTER: So Arlen Specter was a Senator?

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CLAY ALDERSON: Senator.

KAREN BREWSTER: At the time? Ok.

CLAY ALDERSON: And so, USAID said, "Ok, we will do Mr. Goulden's program, but he won't be in charge of it. We will -- we will turn it into something else." So they went to International Affairs in the Department of Interior and came up with this need for a park program, of which Dr. Goulden's water quality program was a part of it. [01:36:27] And we worked very successfully with him, and he was certainly the one that knew the -- knew his way around.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAY ALDERSON: And Claudia had traveled a lot more internationally than I had. And I was in charge of the program and was probably the least knowledgeable of the three.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: But you knew all about parks.

KAREN BREWSTER: You knew all about parks.

CLAY ALDERSON: All I knew about parks.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: You stepped right in.

CLAY ALDERSON: So um --

[01:36:53] KAREN BREWSTER: So you guys got a park established there or trained --

CLAY ALDERSON: It was already established, but they needed somebody to help them get from the bare essentials of establishment to accommodating international visitors and building an infrastructure that would sustain the operation of the park.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAY ALDERSON: And so Chris Snipes and a couple of other people went over, and they did public meetings in Ulaanbaatar and Hatgal and Murun, and took comments from people through interpreters, and came up with a -- a plan for what this park -- they called it the Park Management Improvement Plan. So whatever the PMIP had in it -- and we very shortly learned that, as is often the case when you have a public meeting, people tell you what they think you want to hear.

[01:38:00] CLAUDIA ALDERSON: You'd say, do you want a visitor center? Ok.

CLAY ALDERSON: Uh-huh. So they -- they wanted us to write a management plan to develop a visitor center, and they had a cadre of local people that offered guided tours, and they wanted us to kinda put some organization there. There were two Peace Corps volunteers, one in Hatgal and one in an adjoining community, and they wanted us to coordinate things for them. A part of our budget was to go to them. [01:38:36] And just, they had some things -- And so we sat down with the USAID mission director. We went out to Hatgal, and we sat down with the park staff, and at the end of the couple of days of meetings, we said, "This isn't what these people want." So we sat down with our interpreter and Tumursukh, the park director, and we said, "What do you really want?" And he said, "We want to be able to talk to each other electronically with" -- because they had recently had a ranger attacked and left for dead, but tough as he was, he was able to get on his yak and ride several miles home, and his wife stopped the bleeding from where he'd been stabbed in the leg.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: It was a poacher.

CLAY ALDERSON: And he survived. And -- [01:39:32] We need to be able to talk to each other. No -- well, there were phones, but --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Limited. There was one.

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CLAY ALDERSON: Three phones. Yeah. Three phones in the whole town of Hatgal, one at the post office, one at the mayor's office, and one at the park headquarters.

[01:39:47]KAREN BREWSTER: And what was the name of the park?

CLAY ALDERSON: Lake Hovsgol National Park. And about a million acres, and it surrounded Lake Hovsgol, which is the fourteenth-largest freshwater lake in the world.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: (inaudible)

CLAY ALDERSON: And at one of the headwaters, of the rivers -- one of the main rivers that feeds Lake Baikal.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

CLAY ALDERSON: And it runs all through central Mongolia and then goes north into Lake Baikal. [01:40:13]And the park, I guess, was about ten years that it had been established. And it was kinda out there, but -- and -- and they had had a superintendent there that was an alcoholic and pretty corrupt, and so just before we got there, we -- they appointed Tumursukh, who was a bright, young chemist who had a college degree in chemistry. But his family had been the hunters for the Bogd Khan, which was the religious leader of the country. And whenever the Bogd Khan came to the Hatgal area, why, Tumursukh's family was the one that took 'em hunting and hunted for them. And so he -- he was a bright young guy.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: An incredible wildlife biologist.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yes. I would think so.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: A natural one.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

CLAY ALDERSON: And his wife was a trained, um --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Economist.

CLAY ALDERSON: Economist, kinda like a -- uh, anyway.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Anyway.

CLAY ALDERSON: Accountant.

KAREN BREWSTER: Accountant.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah. And they had several children and an extended family.

[01:41:32]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And then Claudia, what was your role? 'Cause now you got hired to participate in this project.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So first of all, I was the administrator, because one of the problems they had not anticipated because they'd never done a long-term project before was that they couldn't send money. The idea was that you would do all the projects and be reimbursed at the end, but you can't do that for a year. And the first year, that's what we did. Clay can tell you. We paid for everything, 'cause they were really at a loss how to get money to us.

KAREN BREWSTER: USAID couldn't figure out --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or the Park Service?

CLAY ALDERSON: Well, the Park Serv -- the Department of Interior.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: The Department of Interior. So we just wrote checks at the embassy, which they didn't deposit, and then we used the cash to pay for everything, all the programs that we did there.

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CLAY ALDERSON: At the end of the summer, the government owed us \$30,000.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

CLAY ALDERSON: That we had pulled out of our --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Fortunately, Mongolia is cheap.

CLAY ALDERSON: Fortunately, we had a little put away.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And then Clay filed --

CLAY ALDERSON: I got paid every penny of it on travel vouchers.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And they were good.

CLAY ALDERSON: I bought a visitor center or a building that became a visitor center on a travel voucher. But we got every penny.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that's good.

[01:42:50]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: So the first year, they hadn't set that up, so I was working as a natural resource person, and wonder of wonders, they had -- the original three members of their staff was a ranger, and a botanist, of all things, and then --

CLAY ALDERSON: A driver.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: A driver. Yes, a driver for the car. That was their whole staff. So the botanist had been there the ten years, and she had been educated by the Russians in their institute at the north end of the lake. They had an international scientific institute, and also the college in town. And so she was an awesome botanist and had grown up there. And her grandmother was an herbalist. And she was a photographer.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: I learned so much from her. So I worked with her and with other groups, and particularly with Nara (sp?) in helping to get things -- just to get us established there. [01:43:44]And then the second year, I actually was effective contractor, handling all the finances and things like that, and continued the botanical work that Yuma (sp?) and I did together. We ended up helping her get her PhD. Clay worked with our interpreter to get her her master's degree in environmental biology. So that was my role. Work with the communities. [01:44:07]And then another program that developed on its own -- the first winter they asked for some money to do some folk art and set up a little center and have them work together. And hire the best seamstress in town, the best painter, the best woodworker, and improve the quality of their crafts for the tourists that were coming. So that was my other job.

[01:44:33]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, it sounds like it was a successful three years.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Absolutely.

CLAY ALDERSON: It seems like everybody was well pleased. And not only for the three years, but a lot of it carried over. And we went back five years later, and the things -- a lot of the things that we had established, or the USAID mission director said, "Yeah, the minute you turn your back, that stuff will all disappear." Well, it didn't.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that's nice.

CLAY ALDERSON: And, uh --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And we also invited them -- we had help in Santa Fe from the International Folk Art Market to bring some of their artists to the market each year.

KAREN BREWSTER: Nice.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: They made a fortune.

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KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: And it was a great way to be able to give back to the community again.

[01:45:18]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, it sounds like you made some nice friendships and connections with people.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Oh, yes.

CLAY ALDERSON: Oh, yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Being there for three years, you get to do that.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes. Still keep in touch all the time.

CLAY ALDERSON: We became very much involved with families.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: I got to sing at one of the weddings, and I don't sing. Yes.

CLAY ALDERSON: We attended weddings and funerals while we were there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yep.

[01:45:39]CLAY ALDERSON: Their -- their belief -- the funeral isn't the big thing. Forty-nine days after the death is when they have a big celebration of the life. And so we got involved in some of those forty-nine days.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Well, it sounds like a great experience.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Absolutely.

CLAY ALDERSON: It was.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Probably was our happiest for both of us in our careers was that time there. Everything we'd ever learned and ever done, and everything we wanted to accomplish, it was available to us there because the program they'd set up initially really offered us very little guidance, which is sometimes great.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. You could do whatever you wanted.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Yes. And they were very supportive of our suggestions.

KAREN BREWSTER: Great.

[01:46:25]CLAY ALDERSON: But we also had access through the internet, not so much the first year because they gave us a SAT phone but didn't tell us how to use it. They didn't know how to use it.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Well, they didn't set up an account for it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, yeah.

CLAY ALDERSON: So when we came back during the winter to Anchorage, we went to one of these mining supply places, and they set it all up for us, and from then on, when we were in Mongolia, we could hit a satellite over the Indian Ocean, and talked -- or we could have talked. We usually just sent email messages.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAY ALDERSON: But it made it possible for us to, like, get money.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAY ALDERSON: As Claudia was mentioning, she took care of the administrative because she could get money in advance, and I couldn't.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Because I was a private citizen.

CLAY ALDERSON: So I would go to her and say, "Ok. These are the things we're going to do for the next month. And this is how much money I need." We would send a message through the satellite from the Indian Ocean to Washington, DC. They would approve

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what we were going to do. They would transfer money to our personal account in what was then the National Bank of Alaska in Skagway. We had a bookkeeper that took care of all of our things.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAY ALDERSON: Because being gone, the bills don't stop.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

CLAY ALDERSON: And she picked up all our mail and anyway, so she would move that money to the Trade and Development Bank in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. We would come 800 km from Ulaanbaatar, and we would pick up our money. And their highest denomination was a 10,000 tögrög bill, which was the equivalent of a \$10 bill. So we would sometimes --

KAREN BREWSTER: That's a stack of money.

CLAY ALDERSON: Take five --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Just take pieces of paper and wrap 'em up into bricks.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

CLAY ALDERSON: Um-hm. [01:48:15]We would takefrom between five and ten thousand dollars back in these little bricks in bags we carried over our shoulders underneath our clothing.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Never lost a penny.

CLAY ALDERSON: And we would fly to the town of Murun, and then it was sixty-two miles and usually at least one, and usually two vehicles, from the park because they never sent a vehicle that far that they didn't bring passengers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:48:41]CLAY ALDERSON: Anyway, as Claudia said, never a threat that any problems with that much money. And then Tumursukh had a kinda of a primitive little steel safe in his office.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

CLAY ALDERSON: We would put it in there.

[01:48:56]KAREN BREWSTER: And now, so you did come back to Alaska in the winters? Did you go back to Skagway?

CLAY ALDERSON: Uh --

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: The first winter.

CLAY ALDERSON: The first winter we went back to Skagway. And we had so much that we were going to be doing in the off-season for Mongolia, I told Bob Barbee, I said, "You know, I think we're gonna be more involved in this than what I can logically deal with. Why don't you just go ahead and fill the job at Skagway? And then we'll figure out what to do with me when I get back." And as it turned out, the program evolved into a third year because we did have a lot of things going on, and USAID came up with the money. And they said, we really kinda want to see if you get all this done. And we did. And -- and then --

[01:49:52]CLAUDIA ALDERSON: You were detailed, sometimes.

CLAY ALDERSON: Hm?

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Weren't you detailed for some winters?

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah. Um, one winter -- the second winter, I was detailed to fill in at Buffalo River in Arkansas. They had a vacancy for a superintendent there, so we went

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down there. And then another winter, we went to Apostle Islands and filled in there when they were vacant. Their position was vacant.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: Anybody that had a problem.

[01:50:20]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, I know superintendents get moved around a lot, and then they have some temporary openings 'til they fill a position.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yep.

KAREN BREWSTER: But the Skagway one, they filled that as a temporary three-year --

CLAY ALDERSON: Two -- two -- two years, and then after the second year, when it looked like we weren't gonna get that out of our system, why they said, "Well, we'll find a place for you." And that's when they put me at Fairbanks to run --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, the APLIC?

CLAY ALDERSON: Public Land Centers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. All right. Well, I think this is a good place to stop.

CLAY ALDERSON: Ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: Now that we're done with Mongolia.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yeah, that's kind of a -- a whole program.

CLAUDIA ALDERSON: We should have warned you.

KAREN BREWSTER: No, no. No, it's interesting. It's super interesting, and it fit in timeline-wise.

CLAY ALDERSON: Yes, it does.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's why we started talking about it. And so, we concluded that, and so then we'll come back around to more about Klondike and the years there, and some of the specifics.

CLAY ALDERSON: Sure.

KAREN BREWSTER: When we meet again tomorrow.

CLAY ALDERSON: Sure.