

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF SEAN O'MEARA

CONDUCTED BY KAREN BREWSTER

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TRANSCRIBED BY RUTH SENSENIG

[00:00:00]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok, this is Karen Brewster, and today is April 28, 2019, and this is Karen Brewster. And I'm here with Sean O'Meara in Bellingham, Washington. This is for the Klondike National Historical Park Oral History Project. Thank you, Sean, for letting me come visit you today.

SEAN O'MEARA: You're welcome.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so we know you worked at Klondike Seattle for a long time.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: But before we get into that, maybe you could tell me a little bit of your background. You said you grew up in Wisconsin?

[00:00:33]SEAN O'MEARA: I was born in Wisconsin. I grew up in Cleveland, and uh, and my family moved to Virginia. After a few attempts at college, I found myself in the Navy, and a few months later even, it sweetened the pie, they sent me to Vietnam.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: And when I left Vietnam, I was stationed at Bangor, down on Hood Canal, and met a young lady, who's outside gardening right now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Your wife, Mary.

SEAN O'MEARA: That was fifty-one years ago or so. [00:01:06]And so, I did finish college successfully. Graduated from Western Washington, BA, geography.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what year would that have been?

SEAN O'MEARA: '72.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. [00:01:22]And how did you end up then working for the Park Service?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, actually, many years later. I'd done a couple of different things. I was the at-home parent, and uh -- we have two children. And I was the Scoutmaster, and -- locally, and I was working up at the scout camp. And the scout troop from San Juan Island was there one week, and their Scoutmaster said to me, "Well, why don't you bring your troop over to the island, and we'll do a service project for San Juan Island National Historical Park." And we would do that for one weekend in December five years in a row. And the fifth year, I spoke to the ranger, and I said, "Well, how'd you get into this?" And he said, "Well, come along with me, and I'll tell you." And the next summer, I was working at North Cascades as a seasonal.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

[00:02:20]SEAN O'MEARA: And so I did two seasons at North Cascades. Uh, that would be '90 and '91, and then in December -- or -- and then in '92 I worked at San Juan Island. And then December '92, I -- I was hired at Klondike Seattle.

KAREN BREWSTER: And those other ones, the seasonal at North Cascades and San Juan, what were you doing for them?

SEAN O'MEARA: I was an interpreter. Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And, uh --

[00:02:55]KAREN BREWSTER: So how did you fall into doing interpreting? Just 'cause you're good at talking?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, uh, well, I don't know, maybe it's the gift of gab from the Irish side, but uh, I had been a SCUBA instructor and a first aid and CPR instructor, and so I was not afraid of getting up in front of people and talking, and so it was -- I mean, it was really a fun job, talking about natural history and cultural history. And uh, so the ranger I had talked to there the summer of -- or December of 1989, he was my -- my supervisor at San Juan Island, Detlef Wieck. W-I-E-C-K. And uh, later on he would be a coworker at Klondike Seattle. He has a long and colorful story. And uh, but it all worked out. It um, they were all great jobs.

[00:04:07]KAREN BREWSTER: So you didn't need to have a degree in education or something to be an interpretive ranger?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, no. I mean, my -- my supervisor at San Juan Island has a BFA in metal sculpture. And subsequently, over the years and talking with other park people, they've had degrees, everything from the fine arts to hard science. And -- and there's a few historians thrown in, but yeah, the -- the degree doesn't really -- doesn't really make that much difference. You have to have an interest in the subject matter.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, and so, I certainly did.

[00:04:48]KAREN BREWSTER: And so did -- you said you have a BA in geography. Did you ever go on to get more education?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, oh, I did start a program to get an education certificate, but I dropped out of that. And as my boss at North Cascades said -- he had been a teacher. He'd gone to Western also. He said, yes, I started teaching, but then -- then I found something much better. And that was the Park Service. And uh, where you only have to deal with a group of students for maybe a couple hours.

[00:05:28]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so what year did you say you started at Klondike again?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, that would be -- it was December 13, 1992.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And so, what was the other staff, what was the organization there?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, there was a superintendent, an administrative officer, a chief ranger or you could call it Chief of Interpretation, but she was a chief ranger. And her name was Marianne Mills, and I believe she works in Atlanta now. But anyway, so Marianne and the superintendent at the time, Willie Russell, they were the ones who hired me.

[00:06:14]KAREN BREWSTER: So it was just a superintendent, an admin, and the chief ranger?

SEAN O'MEARA: And about, mm, three or four interpreters.

KAREN BREWSTER: Who were seasonal?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, no. Let me see. There were, uh, let me see. Mike Murphy -- at the time I got hired, then there were three of us, and shortly thereafter there would be another one, and then as someone left, another would be hired. And at that time, the chief ranger was a GS-7, and we were GS-5, but after a couple of years, a program called Ranger Futures kicked in, and uh, so then the supe -- the chief ranger became an 11, and we were gonna become -- well, with a couple of increments, 7's, and then a couple months later, 9's. And the Seattle support office did not want to promote the Klondike rangers, but our superintendent, Willie Russell, went down and he said, "If you're gonna promote the people at the other parks, you're gonna promote these guys, too."

[00:07:32]KAREN BREWSTER: Do you know why regional didn't want the staff promoted?

SEAN O'MEARA: They, I think -- they felt that we didn't have enough responsibilities. But that would change.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, it -- you know, it is a small park, compared to some of the other parks in the system.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: And a small staff. I mean, so how did that organizationally work?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, somebody would be responsible for the education programs, and then there were collateral duties. I became the volunteer coordinator, amongst other things. Someone else would have collateral duties as curator, and uh, so those -- those extras would be divvied up amongst people. [00:08:28]And uh -- but as time went on and other people transferred out, um, and by the -- let me see, about 2002, by the time Mr. Russell passed away, they sent in a kind of a management analysis team. There was another term for it, but they went over the table of organization and -- and made a few changes. And uh, among other things, they downgraded the administrative function to a admin tech, and uh -- oh, and they -- and the visitor center would become staffed more by seasonal employees.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: There would still be a couple of -- couple of GS-9's.

[00:09:32]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I mean, 'cause, yeah, as I say, Klondike Seattle is different, and it's not like they have a big natural resources inventorying program or --

SEAN O'MEARA: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- things like that.

SEAN O'MEARA: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or -- and there was not a historian on staff, was there?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, Marc Blackburn has a PhD in American Military History.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, so uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: That was his "other duties as assigned"?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, Marc was -- Marc is a historian, and he did write a chapter for a book about Pioneer Square, written by a woman named Mildred Andrews. And uh, I believe he -- he had done some other publishing, too, and uh -- but Marc left around the time that Superintendent Russell retired, and so at that time, then, I was the only park ranger. [00:10:44]It would be -- it would be a bit of time, about a year, before Tim Carley was brought on. And uh, let me see.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what was Tim's job?

SEAN O'MEARA: Tim -- Tim was gonna fill in and be the education specialist.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: And at that time, for a number of years we did not have anyone designated as the chief of interpretation or chief ranger. Um, Betsy Duncan-Clark, who had moved on to Great Basin, was the last one, and so I was the one who filled in to that role. And mm, sometime after I retired, they had hired a couple of different people to be chief of interpretation. But, a lot of what I did, you know, in -- in this century was cooperative stuff with partners and outreach.

[00:12:03]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, why don't we talk about, yeah, what you did, starting back in '92 when you were hired as an interpreter. What -- yeah, what was your job? And what does that mean to be doing interpretation for the park?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, largely what we did was, each ranger would have a -- a slide program. Slides are now a thing of the past and turned into PowerPoints, and so each of us would have a program of our own choosing. There would be gold mining or gold panning demonstrations, which described that part of the gold mining process and compare it to the way in which Seattle made a lot of money outfitting people for the gold rush. [00:12:52]And then we also would play a role in working with school groups. It would take about two or three rangers to work a school group. Oh, about a third of the group would be watching a movie. The other third would watch a gold mining demonstration, and then another third would be getting a tour of the museum. And, you know, interpreting the equipment that people would have to take on the gold rush with them, as well as other things like uh, how the gold rush affected Seattle's development and why people would choose to go on the gold rush. [00:13:38]And you get some interesting questions from kids.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, like what?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, well, one of the movies that we show is called "Days of Adventure, Dreams of Gold," and it talks about Frank Reid, the Skagway city engineer having a shoot-out with Soapy Smith. And it said, "Frank Reid was shot in the heart and killed instantly." Well -- no, no. "Soapy was shot in the heart and killed instantly, where Frank Reid was shot in the groin and died an agonizing death eight days later." And so, my friend, Todd Haskell, said, "Well students, does anyone have any questions?" And a little boy puts up his hand and he says, "What's a groin?" And he said, "I think you better ask your teacher that one." Anyway, uh --

[00:14:40]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I was going to say, the -- the -- talking to those school groups, did you have particular objects that you focused on that you thought would interest the kids versus if you were giving an adult program?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, the school -- um, to be honest, they were really fairly similar. The school groups were a little more involved than what you would do for adults. For adults, things shifted a bit in the summer time, and we would do walking tours of the Pioneer Square Historic District. And uh, so we were on a more rigid schedule in the summer time. Movies shown at a particular time, gold mining demonstrations couple times a day, and a walking tour. And uh, so it was a lot of fun to really get to know the history and the neighborhood.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:15:45]SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, but as -- as time moved on, there was more outreach. And Superintendent Debbie Conway made contact with Holland America Lines, and I wrote a program that would be delivered by the rangers and guides, the park guides, on board the cruise ships. It was about a half an hour long, a PowerPoint program, or illustrated with PowerPoint, and uh, so we went on board their ships Friday-Saturday-Sunday. And then more cruise lines were added. And uh, it was very good for our statistics. And --

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you get to count the whole, like, five thousand people on the ship?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: They probably didn't all come to the program.

SEAN O'MEARA: No, we would just count the people who came to our program. And that might have varied, depending on who was doing the counting. [00:16:46]But shortly before Debbie arrived, let me see, it was about in 2001, the park was approached by a fellow named Jim Miculka, that's M-I-C-U-L-K-A, and he was working on a -- he worked on a partnership with Amtrak called the Trails & Rails program. And he was the Park Service side of it, and um, there was a woman in St. Louis who was the Amtrak side of it. And Klondike was picked to put volunteers on the Empire Builder, which goes to Chicago, but the Klondike would have people on the train only as far as Havre, Montana, H-A-V-R-E.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, also, we would put people on the Coast Starlight, which goes down to Los Angeles, but our people would only ride as far as Portland and return, so that was just a one-day trip to Portland. [00:18:02]On the Empire Builder, the volunteers would have their own cabin in the crew car, and meals were provided. And they -- they -- the volunteers came from a couple of existing railway historical societies, and so they had already pretty much developed the program, but um, it was kinda hit and miss across the country, and the Park Service added a little more -- more of a legitimacy to the various programs.

KAREN BREWSTER: They sort of professionalized it?

SEAN O'MEARA: Professionalized it, uh, uniforms and oversight for the programs. [00:18:53]And so, uh, that program was a tremendous boost to our visitor statistics because those people would make announcements on the train-wide PA system, and additionally on the Empire Builder, they would set up in the lounge car. They're two-level cars.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, they would have a PA system that they -- a portable PA system that they would deliver their program in that car. And people would call me, uh, from different parts

of the country, saying that they were going on a train trip from let's say, Minneapolis to Seattle, and were we going to have a volunteer on the train at that time. So they really wanted to see the program.

[00:19:46]KAREN BREWSTER: Hm. And then did they sort of advertise the Klondike Visitor Center in Seattle?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so the people on the train would arrive in Seattle, and they'd come to your museum?

SEAN O'MEARA: Right. Yes. Yeah. King Street Station is only couple, three blocks away from the park, and uh, so we would get some visitors that way.

KAREN BREWSTER: Why was Klondike Seattle brought into that program? What does that have to do with -- the trains? What was the program that they gave? Did it relate to Seattle Unit?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, just a little bit. More, usually what the volunteers would be talking about is what you're seeing outside the train, and making the connection with that for people. Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, and that's what I was thinking, what did that have to do with Klondike?

SEAN O'MEARA: But it was a National Park program, and so that's -- that was kind of the connection there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, was just to the Park Service in general, and we would also mention the other parks in the network.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: That people were passing through. The train passed along the southern border of Glacier National Park. And uh, then it -- once it got past East Glacier, then you're in the Plains. And uh, like Browning, Montana, home of the Blackfeet, and so on.

[00:21:15]KAREN BREWSTER: I could see maybe, well, the gold stampede came to Seattle from all over the country --

SEAN O'MEARA: By way of trains.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- by way of trains, and many probably came from Chicago and the Midwest on that comparable Empire Builder route.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, they did, and a lot of people who went on the gold rush, they got as far as Seattle and said, "Hey, this is the place." As the man said. And uh, or people returning from the gold rush, or who had gotten as far as Skagway and decided, you know what? You can have it. I'm going back down south.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And they would come back to Seattle and stay there, and so the, oh -- and there goes one of my old volunteers outside.

[00:22:05]KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. Um, so they made those connections through that on-the-train program?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. And oh, well, the people going on the gold rush, what would happen in the years following the Klondike Gold Rush, there would be, oh, let me see, there was a gold rush near -- near Fairbanks.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Just near Fairbanks. And then another one at Nome. So three within about a ten-year period, and Seattle was the departure point, the main departure point, for most of them. And Seattle's population tripled in that amount of time.

[00:22:47]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And there had been a fire in Seattle just prior to that, right?

SEAN O'MEARA: That's correct. 1889, the year of statehood for Washington. And that's why the city said, no more wooden buildings in the central business district. You've got to make the buildings -- build the buildings out of brick. And that's why the neighborhood looks like it does today. It's uh, one of the biggest collections of buildings of that architectural type in the country.

[00:23:18]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Um, I was thinking on the rail program that you say there were all these volunteers, and there had to be a coordinator, so maybe that's why they brought Klondike in, that you were there to be the coordinator.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: You recruited volunteers and --

SEAN O'MEARA: I did. And so there was -- there was a little bit of jealousy when I got the nod because one of my coworkers who was imminently about to leave, he -- he thought that would've been a great deal. Well, it was a great deal. I mean, I got to go out on the train many times. Been to Chicago many times in December for meetings and trainings. Ultimately, I and one of my volunteers would be trained as safety instructors for Amtrak, so that we didn't have to call in an Amtrak safety instructor during the training that we provided to the volunteers. And so

I got to go to Mississippi for that. Took the train to Chicago. Took the City of New Orleans down to New Orleans.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's the boat?

SEAN O'MEARA: That's the sh -- that's the train.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, the City of New Orleans is a train?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: I don't know the --

SEAN O'MEARA: What was his name?

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, yeah, yeah. It's a song about the City of New Orleans.

SEAN O'MEARA: Minnesota. The guy from Minnesota.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know --

SEAN O'MEARA: Bobby Zimmerman. Uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: I know the song you're talking about. I hear it in my head.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, we could brainstorm. Who's Bobby Zimmerman? Uh.

KAREN BREWSTER: I don't know.

SEAN O'MEARA: He's very famous, uh, folk singer.

KAREN BREWSTER: Not Bob Dylan?

SEAN O'MEARA: Bob Dylan.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: The City of New Orleans is the song.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[00:25:14]SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, there's a good story about him and Minnesota and his beginnings and singing in a coffee shop.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: The bouncer at the coffee shop was told, "Hey, get that guy out of here." That was my supervisor in San Juan Island, Detlef Wieck.

KAREN BREWSTER: Was the bouncer?

SEAN O'MEARA: Said. "You, you're out."

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, that's a good notoriety, to have been the bouncer to throw out Bob Dylan.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

[00:25:42]KAREN BREWSTER: But so for that train program, then did you develop the --

SEAN O'MEARA: The script?

KAREN BREWSTER: -- the interpretive program and script?

SEAN O'MEARA: No, the script was always evolving, always being improved upon. More and more research was done. There would be key volunteers who were more interested than -- some of the people -- the long-time coordinators would tell you, many potential volunteers were just interested in a steak and a ride on the train. But some of the people were really quite exceptional, and I believe that at least one was one of the first volunteers when the park got ahold of this program. He's still doing it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

SEAN O'MEARA: A guy named Steve Lavell.

[00:26:37]KAREN BREWSTER: So they would add to the script and change it along the way?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yes. Yes. And sometimes they would even take the train out to um, hm, places in Montana or further, and we would have -- I remember for Glacier National Park Centennial, one of their rangers came to Seattle and gave the volunteers a presentation about the park. And oh, there's a place in Montana. I'm trying to think of the name of it. Cut Bank. Cut Bank, Montana. Uh, you know, they go talk with the local historical societies and get as much information as they could about -- because you look out the train window, and what do you see, these wheat fields.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: You know. Uh, it was nice to be able to embellish on that and tell people what happened there.

[00:27:35]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And were all -- so the volunteers from Seattle, they went as far as Montana?

SEAN O'MEARA: They'd get off the train and it'd be an hour or two, and then they'd get on the westbound train and do the program in reverse.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then what about between Montana and Chicago? Or same with the -
- with the --

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Coast Starlight.

SEAN O'MEARA: There were --

KAREN BREWSTER: Where did those volunteers come from?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, it changed a little bit over time. There's another park just east of Havre called Bear Paw Battlefield in Chinook, Montana. And so, there was a ranger there who would get people mostly from Havre.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: There's a university there, a small university, and so they'd get a lot of faculty people, and they would be on the train to Malta, Montana. And then the next stop down the line would be Fort Union Trading Post, Williston, Montana. They put folks on. And then beyond that would be Knife River Indian Village in -- Well, that's south of Minot.

KAREN BREWSTER: North Dakota.

SEAN O'MEARA: North Dakota. [00:28:55]And uh -- and so both of those programs would put people on the train, but it's very sad to say that the program on the Empire Builder no longer exists, really. Some of the volunteers would go as far as Leavenworth, Washington, and then return somehow fairly recently. And -- and that's because of the administration of Amtrak. The president said, "Hey, we're not giving volunteers space in the crew cars anymore, and no more complimentary meals." And so that effectively did away with that because, you know, where -- where are these people going to stay to do that?

[00:29:47]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And if you're a volunteer, you don't want to pay for your own train trip.

SEAN O'MEARA: No. But the program on the Coast Starlight, all you have to do is bring your own sandwich, or typically, people would go out and buy their own lunch in Portland, and then swsh (sound effect).

KAREN BREWSTER: So that one still exists?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yes, it does. Yeah. So that exists. And then uh, on the Coast Starlight, there was another group of people in Klamath Falls, Washington, and then some people from Santa Barbara would get on the train. Yeah, the folks in Santa Barbara, they'd put on several people and only one of them would do the program because the train consist -- would have a first-class lounge car.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And they'd have a wine and cheese tasting party. So when this program became a part of Trails & Rails, they were told, "Hey, when you're wearing the NPS uniform or the volunteer uniform, a green polo shirt, you're not going to be drinking wine on the train."

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: So a lot of their people packed it in at that point.

[00:31:04]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. So where did you recruit your volunteers from for that program?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, many of them were rail enthusiasts, and I would also open it up to the people who were volunteering for me in the visitor center. And many of them became Trails & Rails guides as well.

KAREN BREWSTER: So where did your visitor center volunteers come from? The people just walked in off the street and said, I want to volunteer? Or you --

SEAN O'MEARA: Oftentimes.

KAREN BREWSTER: You would seek them out?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yep. Uh, we would -- this really sounds a little bad. It's -- I really have to rack my memory back. We'd -- on the park website, we would have a volunteer announcement and so on.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: But uh, occasionally, we would go to different events and announce that, you know, we were looking for volunteers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And a lot of it was word of mouth.

[00:32:15]KAREN BREWSTER: And what were -- I'm sure you had all kinds of people as volunteers at the park in Seattle. Is there sort of a typical background that they had, or what would make somebody want to be a volunteer at a park?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, you have to like people. You have to like the history. Uh, you have to be fairly articulate, willing to stick with the program. I mean, by that I mean, not going on and on about where you went to high school and so on.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Follow the script. Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: It's not about you. Yeah, it's about the programs in the museum and on the train. And uh, but I would say mostly they were fairly well-educated people.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:33:07]SEAN O'MEARA: I had -- had a couple retired Coast Guard officers, a retired journalist from, mm, The Wall Street Journal and the John Deere Company. Let me see, a gal who was an environmental biologist, who now works for the Bureau of Reclamation down in California. Um, a Boeing executive, and attorneys. They were a terrific bunch of people. Very sharp.

[00:33:43]KAREN BREWSTER: Were they -- did they tend to be older people?

SEAN O'MEARA: For the most part, there was one -- one of the volunteers had a -- a teenage daughter, and then another one had a teenage son, and those two youngsters, as -- as older teenagers, they -- they got into the program as well for -- for a limited time. For the most part, they -- no, they were mostly older people. Still working, a lot of retired people, too.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And people who had been volunteers in other programs, uh, like programs that were at historical parks, state parks, and so on.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Who liked doing that sort of thing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And, uh.

[00:34:43]KAREN BREWSTER: And there certainly are people in the world who like doing that sort of thing, but there aren't so many jobs to do it, to get paid, so being a volunteer is a way to go.

SEAN O'MEARA: Right. And it's pretty enjoyable. And, you know, you meet a lot of nice people. I mean, most of the public is pretty nice. It's the colorful ones you get to talk about.

[00:35:09]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, I will ask you about that in a second, I just want to finish on the volunteer thing. What kind of training did those volunteers have to go through, like how many hours, or what -- how did you train them?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, there would be a several-day training about the program and how -- how to deliver the script, so to speak.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And exactly how much leeway you would have. And there was a safety aspect of the Trails & Rails training, too. And then there would be experiences on the train under supervision of uh, particular mentors. We had volunteer -- volunteer coordinators who would do

the scheduling, and we had really fairly good coverage, almost daily coverage during our operating season, which was, let's say, May through September.

KAREN BREWSTER: That was for the train part, or --

SEAN O'MEARA: The train.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. [00:36:13]So in the visitor center, those volunteers, what kind of training did they get?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, it would happen about once a year. Background of the National Park Service and what you are trying to do as an interpreter and getting to know the -- the -- the facility itself and what the expectation was. There was quite a lot of background that they had to acquire in gold rush history, Seattle history, neighborhood history. Some of them would do the walking tours and gold mining demonstrations, and uh, in a way, it depended on what they were willing to do, as well.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And that was similarly a couple days of training? Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then they were expected to do all that research on their own?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yes. Yeah. And the -- the park has a library that's pretty much focused on the gold rush and Seattle history.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: As well as interpretation and how to do that. And there were -- beyond that, there were little courses that people could do to improve their interpretive ability and skills.

KAREN BREWSTER: Like online courses?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And then did they sort of shadow you and the other more experienced interpreters?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, they would be assigned to some -- be working with somebody, and uh, additionally, for a number of years, the -- the cooperating association was located right in the visitor center at -- at the park on Main Street, and so there was the operation of the cash register, too, and that -- that had its ups and downs.

[00:38:18]KAREN BREWSTER: So the cooperating association is the group that runs, sort of, the bookstore?

SEAN O'MEARA: There's a bookstore. The bookstore people.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. That's like, in Alaska, the national parks, it's the Alaska Geographic.

SEAN O'MEARA: Alaska Geographic. This is called Discover Your Northwest now. And the name has changed over the decades.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. But it's the same idea that the Park Service doesn't sell things. It's this cooperating non-profit who does that.

SEAN O'MEARA: Right. For a long time, the only thing we sold were the park passes. The Golden Eagle Pass, the Annual Pass, the Senior Pass, the Disabled Pass. But now, I believe the cooperating association has taken over that as well. So the volunteers or the park staff don't have to worry about that. The -- in the Cadillac Hotel, there's a bookstore now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And -- and the Discover Your Northwest, they're the ones who staff that.

[00:39:22]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And that is because there must be some law that the Park Service as a federal government can't do sales or they can't take the money 'cause what would you do with it or something like that?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, well, the money has to be separate from the passes versus the bookstore sales, and uh, mm, I'm not sure about the regulations.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Because it's interesting why the bookstores, they're not run by the park. They're run by these outside -- there must be some regulation.

SEAN O'MEARA: There --

KAREN BREWSTER: From the government accounting office or somebody.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, there's got to be something. [00:40:02]But -- and then another aspect, and if you want to talk about that later, we can, but there's the Outdoor Recreation Information Center. It's kind of like the APLIC up in Alaska.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

SEAN O'MEARA: O-R-I-C. And it's based at the REI flagship store.

KAREN BREWSTER: In downtown Seattle?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. Some time ago, it was -- it had different locations, and when I started working, it was in the Jackson Federal Building. It's a partnership between US Forest Service and the Park Service. And -- and then at one point, Washington State Parks was in on it, too.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what does that information center do?

SEAN O'MEARA: It -- it's mostly about the seasonal recreational opportunities: hiking, skiing, bicycling, what have you.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: In the various federal land management agencies in the state. [00:41:09]And uh, at the uh, at the ORIC right now, there is a -- I would say the lead -- the lead person there is a fellow named David Minaglia. He's one of the first people I'd met when I started working at North Cascades.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: He's got a BS in forestry.

KAREN BREWSTER: And is he a Park Service employee?

SEAN O'MEARA: He's -- yeah, he's a Klondike employee.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. That's an interesting -- well actually, no. I guess in Alaska, the APLIC's there, um, there are Park Service employees who operate it.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Because I can see the people in their uniforms. Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: But they -- oftentimes, they would have a polo shirt on or something.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And the one in Fairbanks, the people, they wear Park Service uniforms. Or at least one person that I can picture in my mind does.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

[00:42:02]KAREN BREWSTER: Uh, so. Well, it must be good to have it at REI. I think that would make sense.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, it used to be, like I say, at the Jackson Federal Building, and at that time the Forest Service was the managing partner. And a deal was done around the time the flagship store was being built to have the ORIC in there, and they were offered -- Well, here's one thing. The park would have to pay rent to the GSA, the federal --

KAREN BREWSTER: In the federal building?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's weird.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, no comment. But REI offered free rent, free use of business machines, all that. And uh, it was change, but, you know, there would be those who would say, "Hey, wait a minute. This is kind of neat, having it in the federal building 'cause you got all these workers

downtown." But then, too, you've got your outdoor recreationalists going to REI, and so it -- it worked out really fairly well.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: It -- it really has. And uh.

[00:43:17]KAREN BREWSTER: And I think if you're trying to attract or be a resource for people who aren't local Seattle residents, if you're a visitor --

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- you know, REI is easier to get to. It's right off of I-5.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, any --

KAREN BREWSTER: There's parking. It's way easier than the federal building.

SEAN O'MEARA: Getting into the federal building, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Where you have to go through security nowadays, I'm sure.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Although maybe the ORIC could be outside of that, who knows. But I can see that you would be maybe tapping a wider audience at REI.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. It's worked out. [00:43:55]And so, when we're in the federal building, I mean, we had brochures from every park in the system. And it -- it was very well run, and it was before you could get this information easily on a computer.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And at the end of a busy day, you'd have this pile of maps around your feet, you know. Forest Service maps, topographic maps, and you'd have to answer letters and phone calls, and it was really pretty hectic. But there were two older ladies volunteering there then. One was Mary Anderson. She and her husband, Lloyd, had started REI. And there was another older lady. Her name was Mary also. I've forgotten her last name, but these gals in their younger days, they had done all these hikes in the Cascades and Olympics.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hmm, what a great resource.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, they were. They'd seen it, and they could make a good suggestion to somebody. But once again, you know, the public, not always thinking -- uh, one couple came in in their tennis shoes. I mean, they had more than that on, but they wanted to just walk up to the top of Mount Olympus over on the Olympic Peninsula, so they had to -- it had to be explained to them that no, you needed special equipment to do that.

[00:45:20]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and there's something to say about those women you're talking about and having that personal contact with people who knew from personal experience -
-

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- all this knowledge of trails versus sitting in your home looking at the Internet and trying to figure it out.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. Yep.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that sounds like that's been lost, that those kind of volunteers aren't at ORIC anymore.

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, well, it's been a few years now, but the Park Service fellow there, Dave Minaglia --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: When I would be acting superintendent, he'd say, "Aw hey, Sean. I really want to take some time off." And he has ridden his bicycle across the country, and he was a thru-hiker on the Pacific Crest Trail. And Dave knows what he's talking about because on the weekends, he does this stuff.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And he walks -- he walks the talk. And uh, he's the right man for the job.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: He loves his job.

[00:46:19]KAREN BREWSTER: That's great. Now did you, um, quote "man" those desks at any time, yourself personally?

SEAN O'MEARA: What -- yeah. When I was first hired on, I spent most of my time in the first year over at the ORIC, and uh, you know, in a way it -- wherever you're working, it's all about the people. And at first, the Forest Service gal was a little bit frenetic, and it was kind of uncomfortable. But she moved on, and they got another Forest Service gal in there, Joann Conrad, who was just terrific. She was very busy, but you felt like you were part of her family.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And there was kind of a contrast between that and working at the Klondike at the time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And even though you'd be kind of pooped out at the end of the day working in the federal building, it was perhaps a little more pleasant experience.

KAREN BREWSTER: At the federal building?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, with Joann Conrad.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: So.

[00:47:30]KAREN BREWSTER: So if you were at ORIC that first year, you weren't learning Klondike history and everything. You had to learn all about trails and permits and all these other --

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, you had to learn that, too, but still, you know, if they -- if somebody was going to be on vacation or whatever, you might need -- you might be called down to the Klondike. It'd be -- as I remember, it was, you know, two days at the park or three days at the ORIC or it was some funny thing. It was back and forth, it really was. But finally, it got smoothed out. Not everybody was a good match. Initially, all the Klondike rangers had to put in their time at the ORIC. And not everybody was a hiker, much less a backpacker.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: But I had been.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And being a scout leader and all that, so --

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and not everybody on Klondike staff at the time may have been so comfortable in a public, uh, situation like that. And again, not everybody's good at interacting with the public.

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, no. I mean, it's fair to say that, you know, these -- these folks here, they were all really pretty good with the public, I -- I do have to say, and uh.

[00:48:57]KAREN BREWSTER: Now we're looking at this picture that has former -- your former -- some of your former Klondike employees. Can we at least -- were these people who were there on staff when you started?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: Can we at least say --

SEAN O'MEARA: Let me see.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- who the staff was when you started?

SEAN O'MEARA: When I started, let me see.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, we have mentioned that Willie Russell was the superintendent.

SEAN O'MEARA: He was the superintendent, and Sue Kiefer was the admin officer. And all these other folks, they came on later. Because there was a ranger named Mike Murphy who -- who left. And uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, and you said Marianne Mills was --

SEAN O'MEARA: The chief ranger.

KAREN BREWSTER: Chief ranger when you started.

SEAN O'MEARA: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: And she was -- she was there. She's not in this picture.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. But she was there.

SEAN O'MEARA: Um.

[00:49:56]KAREN BREWSTER: So that was it? It was Willie, Sue, and Marianne when you first started?

SEAN O'MEARA: And Mike.

KAREN BREWSTER: And Mike.

SEAN O'MEARA: And -- and then there was me and the same day, a fellow from Cal Santa Cruz was hired named Ted Hager. And Ted had been a three-year seasonal at Crater Lake, and uh -- well anyway, Ted stayed at the Klondike for about a year, and then he -- he went back to California. Rent was just too much in Seattle, and uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: So.

[00:50:31]KAREN BREWSTER: And then you mentioned Willie, who did sort of some of the history things at some point. And Betsy Duncan-Clark was an interpretive ranger?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, she was -- she became the chief ranger. She came to us from Klondike Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: After eleven years up there. And she was with us for about three years and then moved on to Great Basin.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Um-hm.

[00:50:55]KAREN BREWSTER: And then these other people?

SEAN O'MEARA: This is Todd Haskell, and he -- he came on, oh, I would say about '94 to 2001. And Marc Blackburn had come on as a seasonal and then got converted to a permanent position.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what years was Marc, approximately?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, let me see. Marc -- Marc was there from, oh, about '90 -- around '94 to 2002.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[00:51:41]SEAN O'MEARA: And then we also have Kevin Marty and oh gosh, I'm trying to think when would this picture have been taken. It was certainly before the Nisqually earthquake.

KAREN BREWSTER: Which was 2001.

SEAN O'MEARA: One.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And what did Kevin do?

SEAN O'MEARA: He was an interpretive ranger.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, Kevin and Lisa Midlam, who was also a seasonal, they were both seasonals, they had developed some sort of a resource about the buildings in the neighborhood. Yeah, Kevin had -- mm, what did he do? He had a master's in geology, but he did his dissertation on something on the Tongass National Forest.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: Now he's a geology instructor.

[00:52:42]KAREN BREWSTER: And then the guy at the top there?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, this -- Todd? He --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, that's Todd Haskell? Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. And then this is Chris Smith. And Chris had previously been a seasonal ranger at John Day Fossil Beds. He came to -- got a posi -- a permanent position with us, and then he moved up to the APLIC.

KAREN BREWSTER: In Anchorage?

SEAN O'MEARA: In Anchorage. Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: So he was also interp?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yep.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yep.

SEAN O'MEARA: All of us.

KAREN BREWSTER: A lot of interp.

[00:53:15]SEAN O'MEARA: Well then, you know, everybody had to be the heavy if somebody was misbehaving and gently guide them to the door, and uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: Is that what the superintendent tends to do? That's their job?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, no. No. I mean, somebody's drunk in the auditorium.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, I see. Somebody in the public. Oh, oh, oh, yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: Somebody's raging around, and uh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, you did mention interesting stories of interacting with the public in different situations.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well.

KAREN BREWSTER: You have some of your -- your good stories?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, you know, there's -- there was one story concerning an individual who had eaten too much corn, and the restrooms were rendered unusable.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh my.

SEAN O'MEARA: And one of my employees called up to the office and said, "I had to secure both of the restrooms." And so, I zipped on downstairs. I said, "You know, you can't do this." He said -- he also in the same breath, said, "You've got to call the janitorial company." I said, "They don't come during the day. If something happens during the day, we have to take care of it."

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, so another employee, Ruth Kerr, who's since passed away, she and I took care of the mess. And --

KAREN BREWSTER: That's not one thing you think about that an interp ranger has to deal with.

SEAN O'MEARA: No, I mean, that would be more on the lines of being an apprentice plumber. And uh, oh, gosh --

[00:54:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and as you said, escorting certain people out of the building.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah. You know, so, you know, if somebody was drunk and maybe a little belligerent, you know, I'd say, "Let's go on up to the front door. There's something I'd like to show you up there." And I said, "You know, I'm really concerned for your safety, the way you're staggering around here. Uh, I'd hate to see you fall and hit your head on something. So you're welcome to come back, but for now, I'm going to have to ask you to leave." "Hey, wait a minute." I said, "Look, there's the easy way or the hard way. I can get the Federal Protective Service down here right now or the Seattle Police Department. Either way, you're gone. And uh, so it's your choice." And uh, I never had a problem. [00:55:44]Kevin, who had been the pitcher for Central Washington University's baseball team, somebody picked a fight with him and landed a punch on him one time out in the neighborhood. And he was in his uniform, but um --

KAREN BREWSTER: So then did the police have to be called in that situation?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, I think he probably figured it out himself, or, you know, he solved the problem, but uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, hopefully he didn't hit the person back.

SEAN O'MEARA: No, I don't think he did. Uh, no, he didn't. He was able to get away from him. [00:56:24]But when you've got a neighborhood full of, you know, homeless, socially challenged people, you know, that can lead to some colorful confrontations.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And illicit acts would be taking place in the alley next -- right next to the park here.

KAREN BREWSTER: In the old building?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: You could look out the window and say, "Golly! Look at that." You know. One time the superintendent had gone out the front door, and he looked down the alley and he said, "Hey! You can't be doing that here. You're right next to a national park." And you hear the argument going on. "I want my five dollars back." "I'm not giving you five dollars back." And so, they start arguing about that. And after a while, the admin officer had the lower part of the windows frosted so you couldn't look out the windows anymore, but subsequently, the uh, the Alliance for Pioneer Square has had an alley improvement project, and now the dumpsters are gone. There are businesses in the alley. It's -- it's a changed place.

[00:57:38]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Well, the neighborhood's still does have its share of --

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- um, homeless and socially challenged people.

SEAN O'MEARA: The missions and so on.

KAREN BREWSTER: You know, I was down there yesterday, and yeah, you know, it's still there.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so, yeah. So how at the park did you guys deal with that? I mean, was there a lot of that kind of traffic into the visitor center?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah. As I called it, the park's potties program, you know. These guys would be coming in multiple times. During the winter, they'd look up at the list of movies, and they'd say, "Let me see, I haven't seen uh, 'Days of Adventure, Dreams of Gold.'" It was the longest-running movie, so they could go in the theater and "zee" out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Get warm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Get warm. Drink vodka. And so -- and so you had that. [00:58:31]And one time, oh, a guy had come in, and he -- he expressed a lot of interest in the alarm system and so on, and I saw him fooling around with the -- the donation box one time. This was about the third time I'd seen him in the park, and I'd told the people working that day, I said, "If I'm up by the front and I start waving to you, I want you to call the FPS. And you can tell 'em --" You know, I'd grab this cell phone and uh, I said, "Tell 'em I'm -- I'm following this guy." And so they had my number, and I'm following the guy north on First Avenue to the Starbucks, and all of a sudden (police car siren noise), you know, about three cars converged, and they shook this guy down. And he had this lock-picking tools. And they ran the Wants and Warrants for him, and he was wanted for theft in Bellevue or someplace, but --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: So that was -- that was kind of exciting.

[00:59:39]KAREN BREWSTER: So did -- as the people who manned the front desk, were you guys trained in how to deal with these sort of people?

SEAN O'MEARA: Not so much.

KAREN BREWSTER: You didn't have law enforcement training, did you?

SEAN O'MEARA: No. It just took a little moxie, that's all.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, you know, I had been to the ranger skills course at Grand Canyon or at the Albright Training Center, excuse me. And uh, so there was a day spent, at least a day spent, on law enforcement training. And oh, somebody said, "Gee, Sean, you should -- you should have gone into law enforcement." But why bother? The pay was the same, and you had to put yourself through a seasonal law enforcement academy.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: Before you would -- could be hired as a seasonal law enforcement ranger.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: And then once you were hired into a permanent position, they just turn around and send you to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, Georgia, and uh --

[01:00:39]KAREN BREWSTER: And so, yeah. At the visitor center, you guys don't carry weapons? You're not law enforcement?

SEAN O'MEARA: Just a staple gun.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that could do some damage.

SEAN O'MEARA: A nail gun, maybe, but --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: No, it -- no, there wasn't -- well, and there was another colorful incident with the staff. One of these people, not pictured here, was hired on, and he came to work with his little duffle bag, and his lunch was in there. And he said, "Boys, if any of you need it, I've got a little .32 automatic in the -- in my lunchbox." And uh -- well, what are you gonna do, somebody doesn't like your program, shoot 'em?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: You know, you can't do that.

KAREN BREWSTER: No.

SEAN O'MEARA: So. Well, Willie heard about that there -- one of the employees had a pistol. And Willie was a Port of Seattle police officer, too.

KAREN BREWSTER: And you said he'd been in the military.

SEAN O'MEARA: And been in the military. He'd been a paratrooper. He had his own gun. I don't think -- he didn't bring the pistol to work with him, but Willie would often answer a

faulted alarm at night, and then he would get called out. And he'd go into the building 'cause he'd bring his pistol from home.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: But sometimes, you know, we were just instructed to wait for the Seattle Police to show up there, and they would be the first ones in. And it was usually that the janitor hadn't closed the door correctly.

[01:02:08]KAREN BREWSTER: But so when Willie found out about this employee with --

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, he went and talked with the Federal Protective Service. "I've got an employee down there that's got his own personal handgun." You know, that was recounted by an FPS officer to me who said, Willie was pretty excited at the time, and uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: So did that person not bring it in the next day?

SEAN O'MEARA: Probably had a talking-to or something like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: But we thought it was -- it was just another humorous happening at the park.

[01:02:39]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, your other dealings with the public, you know, like when you were giving your tours or the -- you know, the school groups, you say, you get to know people. What kinds of interactions did you have with people?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, you know, and then being there on your breaks or your lunch, and you'd know who the people at the Elliott Bay bookstore (The Elliott Bay Book Company) were, for example, and people who ran various businesses. You'd be on a first-name basis. And, you know, then as -- when I was acting superintendent, I would go to these monthly meetings of the Alliance for Pioneer Square board. I was a -- you know, a kind of a, oh, what do you call it? An at-large member. A non-voting member.

KAREN BREWSTER: Non -- yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, so we got to know people that way, too. And those people were much more involved. Like the -- a guy who ran the Lutheran Compass Center, for example, was -- one time he was there. He was a board member. And Charlie Royer, former mayor of Seattle, lived in the neighborhood, and uh, and other folks, too. Wilson O'Donnell from the UW Museum Studies Program lives in the neighborhood. [01:03:58]And uh -- oh, another thing we would do is in the summer, in June there would be the Seattle Fire Festival to commemorate the fire of 1889, and so we'd be involved in putting on a -- an exhibit for that and setting up a booth and a table. The fire department museum out in Ballard, The Last Resort Fire Company, would bring their vintage fire engines out. And other things like that. So we were involved with the community that way.

[01:04:36]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. So do you feel like that neighborhood, the community, supported there being a park there? 'Cause we know like --

SEAN O'MEARA: Absolutely.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- in other places, parks get established and people aren't so excited by it.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, I know. I know. It's uh, no. Yeah, the park is a part of the -- the neighborhood, that's for sure. [01:04:54]And another program that was developed was the Trail to Treasure, and that was done in partnership with the Alliance for Pioneer Square. And I've got drafts of the program in my basement.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what was that program?

SEAN O'MEARA: It was a series of wayside exhibits that would tell you, you know, at this place, there was a Native community established, and, you know, this happened here and that happened there. So a person can get a self-guided walking tour brochure from the park, or they can go on a guided walking tour on particular days of the week with one of the staff.

[01:05:39]And I think at one point, there had been volunteers taken on by the Alliance for Pioneer Square, and uh, you know, I think both the park and the Alliance, they counted the volunteer hours.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well now, you know, they -- that underground walking tour is a big thing.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, it always has been. And we were -- we were friends with them. And uh, as a matter of fact, the former manager of the underground tour for many years has owned a restaurant in downtown Bellingham called Bayou on Bay. When it was relatively new, my wife and I went in there, and here's Steve Crosier, the manager, and I still had his -- his underground tour business card. And uh, just a terrific person. And he helped a couple of ladies get going with a walking tour, a historic walking tour of Bellingham.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:06:43]SEAN O'MEARA: The underground is not something that is unique to Seattle, but Bill Speidel really played it up. There's -- there's an underground in Havre, Montana, for God's sake.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, which is much better than the Seattle underground. I mean, they're -- the have refurbished these various businesses. A dentist. A doctor. A bookie. A car mechanic. And a brothel.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow. All underground?

SEAN O'MEARA: All underground around this one block.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

SEAN O'MEARA: It was -- it's -- it's incredible. But the underground tour, they'll take two dozen people out. And, you know, a lot of them, here's the husband at the tail end of the line, you know. Oh God, the wife wanted me to do this, you know. And there she's all ears, but he's along for the ride. Well, you're not going to hear anything being at the tail end of two dozen people in Pioneer Square.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And -- and actually, at the park itself, there's a door in the basement that takes you into that space under the sidewalk. And so for certain selected people who were, you know, they're on business or whatever, I'd show them the underground, you know.

[01:08:03]KAREN BREWSTER: But so your walking tours, how many people would you have on one of your tours?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, maybe a dozen or so. They may have a top limit now. I don't know if it's twenty. But I got called out one time. I was acting superintendent. This tour guide, not from the area, had arranged with the park. She called up -- or I don't know if she did call up, but she, uh -- these people had paid to be on her tour, and so we were going to be part of the entertainment. She had over twenty people, and she wanted them to have this guided tour. She saw that there was this free walking tour. And I happened to come downstairs, and I said, "What's going on here?" He said, "Oh -- " One of the seasonals said, "Oh, we were going take these people on a walking tour." I said, "That's too many people." Well, I shouldn't have done it right in front of the people, but so when the permanent superintendent came back, you know, I -- she said, "You know, Sean, I have to talk to you about this complaint that I had." I said, "Well, I hope she never comes back anyway." But, you know --

[01:09:18]KAREN BREWSTER: Because as you say, if it gets too big, the people in the back don't hear, and we've all been on walking tours where that happens and -- or the guide doesn't wait 'til everybody gets there. They start talking when people are still congregating.

SEAN O'MEARA: Right. That can happen, too. And so I think the park has published a top limit for the walking tours. And space on the sidewalks is a concern, too.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. [01:09:49]So, yeah, is the Park Service walking tour considered a conflict with the underground tour? You're not competing with private business?

SEAN O'MEARA: No, I mean, they advertise so much more. That's a very big deal --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: -- for Seattle tourism. Oh, the underground tour. And they've got this big bookstore and everything. It's -- it's quite an operation.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, ours is very small compared to theirs. [01:10:20]But I had done a deal with Smith Tower, this old skyscraper, built in 1914. Up on the top floor, right below the pyramid at the top --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: There's the Chinese room. And you can walk around, get a 360-degree view. You know, at the end of our walking tours there for a period of time, we could take our guests in there, take 'em up the elevator, these old, uh, oh, what's the name of the company who makes elevators?

KAREN BREWSTER: Otis?

SEAN O'MEARA: Otis. These ancient elevators that worked flawlessly. We have an Otis elevator in the Cadillac Hotel that, "Well, gotta call the repair man again." And so with elevator operators in this -- in the -- in the tower there, they'd take you up. And you could walk around and say, "Now, over here's where, you know, the first pioneers came ashore, whatever. And that's where this used to be, and this is how the place was filled in." [01:11:25]But that map in the visitor center didn't used to have that piece of plexiglass over the top, and kids would futz with those little buildings and break 'em off.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: And one of the superintendent said, "Oh no. It's meant to be touched." I said, "The hell with that. They're breaking it, you know." And so she moved on. And I picked up the phone and called this plexiglass company, and they do other display cases and so on, and they came and built that -- that cover for it. And then you see -- you can push these different buttons to see where businesses were.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And little people will get there and play it like a keyboard, you know. They'll just be beating on it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: Or jumping on the scale that gives you your --

KAREN BREWSTER: Your weight in gold.

SEAN O'MEARA: Weight in gold. And you'd hear the junior high guy get all his buddies. He says, "Now when I count to three, you're gonna -- " And I'd fly out from behind the -- "Hey,

wait a minute!" And another superintendent said, "Now, Sean, you don't want to ruin somebody's visitor experience." Hey, if they're gonna bust it, I will. I mean --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: There's gotta be a balance.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Protecting the exhibits is part of your job.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, it is. And so it would take a long time to get that thing back to normal again. That scale was built for weighing llamas, by the way.

[01:12:52]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, yeah, so what -- is there a difference between interpretation and exhibits and education? How does that all relate?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, well, yeah. A person can go through the exhibits, and we tell them, "Well, you know, you want to do this chronologically. You start here and brrrr (sound effect) go down -- down to the basement, see a movie, whatever." With -- with the education, sometimes the kids will be taken into the classroom, and they'll have some sort of a project that they're gonna -- they can work on, or some exercises that they can be led through.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, let me see. At the old museum --

KAREN BREWSTER: Which was on First?

SEAN O'MEARA: On Main Street.

KAREN BREWSTER: Main Street. Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: You know, they would see a film, they'd get a demonstration, and they would get a talk --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: -- about the exhibits and what it all meant. And uh, you know, you could say like, "Well, what are your folks doing today?" "Well, my mom's at work and my dad's at home. He's gambling, or whatever." You know, you get some funny answers. And uh, I'd say, "Well, back in 1897, a lot of people were out of work. And what would you do if, you know, this -- all this money floated into Seattle one day. What would you do? Would you stay home, or would you try to go get some gold yourself?" And so, you know, you lead 'em through that thought process. And "Well, here's what you're gonna need if you're gonna do that, and uh, because it's very different up there." And uh, and so on. Where most visitors aren't going to get that. You know, they walk in, they want to see things, and uh, they're looking at it on their own. And depending on what time of year it is, I mean, they can -- they can ask to see a movie or in the summer time usually there's a schedule of events and the movies are only shown at certain times.

[01:15:10]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. But does the interp rangers, do they give tours of the exhibit to the public?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: Or they just give the walking tours?

SEAN O'MEARA: Walking tours. And they can give you any depth, pretty much, of information you want on the gold rush history, or maybe Seattle's history.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: It depends on the volunteer or the staff person, how interested they've been.

[01:15:38]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and I was going to ask, you know, you had, you know, three or four interp rangers, did you guys each sort of take a different angle to the subject and build on that, or how did you guys split up things?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, as I said, that during the year there would be a ranger program, and so everybody chose a topic that was unique to them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And, uh.

KAREN BREWSTER: So what were some of your favorite topics?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, I talked about law enforcement on each side of the border. And that was really kind of fascinating because on the US side, it was pretty sketchy. Well, eventually they sent the army up there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I didn't know that 'til I was in the exhibit yesterday.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

[01:16:24]KAREN BREWSTER: I didn't know the Buffalo Soldiers had been up there.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah. And uh, so they had that, but on the Canadian side, it was very well organized. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police and then the Canadian Army, too. The Yukon Field Force came up there. And, you know, they were at all the border checkpoints, at all the passes, and on the river. Before the Mounties were there, people drowned taking their boats down the river. And you had to pass a boating operation test before you went into the rapids by the Mounties. And if you didn't pass, you had to hire one of the Mounties to take your boat through.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. An experienced pilot.

SEAN O'MEARA: Right. And women and children usually went around the rapids on the Macaulay tramway, this Flintstones-type railroad that was built by a guy from Victoria.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, they didn't walk around?

SEAN O'MEARA: No, they had these -- they peeled these logs that were all the pretty similar dimension.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Or diameter. Those were laid end-to-end on ties, and then they had these rail carts, and -- with these concave wheels that fit right over the log.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And they would be pulled by donkeys or mules. And you can see pictures of this. And people putting boats or canoes on these things, and all their goods and so on. And then when the White Pass and Yukon (Railroad) got established, they bought out Macaulay. And there are just small remnants of the Macaulay tramway. I think there's a transportation museum in Whitehorse that you could learn about that. Or you could do it online.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:18:30]SEAN O'MEARA: And uh -- and then someone else had developed a tramway by the Chilkoot Pass.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, by the Scales.

SEAN O'MEARA: The Scales.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: The Golden Stairs.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And White Pass bought them out, too. But you can still see where the pylons had been and the cable.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: You know, if you're having a hard time going up the hill, you can hang onto this 100-year-old cable. [01:18:59]I got to hike that. And that made the gold rush come alive for me. Before that, it was a visitor center in Seattle, but to go into the visitor center in Skagway and to hike the trail, it really made everything come alive. And to meet the descendent of Skookum Jim. He was -- he's a Canadian park warden, and uh, when I got to hike it, I -- well, I traded my NPS ball cap for a Canadian. I've got that. And at this one campsite on the Chilkoot Trail, the Canadians had dug this rectangular pit and had two fifty-gallon barrels in it. And there were, you

know, wooden rails over the top with the outhouse on it. And so they'd slide it over one barrel, and when that got full, they'd slide it over the empty. And when I was talking to this guy, I could hear the wop-wop-wop of a helicopter coming to hook up to this full bucket of crap and haul it away. I felt a little put out. You know, I had to hike that trail, and here this barrel of crap got a helicopter ride.

[01:20:19]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, you wouldn't wanted to have carried that barrel with you, that's for sure.

SEAN O'MEARA: No. Absolutely not. But that was just -- I had never seen it. I thought, "Wow. That's amazing that they hire a chopper to haul that stuff away."

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Well, it's neat to hear that go -- that -- so you got the opportunity to go to Skagway. Did the park send you there, or that was your personal choice?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah. Yeah. You know, she said, uh, "Guess what?! You get to go hike the Chilkoot Trail." And both of them got to go, too (points to picture).

KAREN BREWSTER: The other interpreters.

SEAN O'MEARA: He -- Todd was not even a hiker.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so he went up to Skagway, and he just stayed there, and he'd do day hikes. And old Willie just got madder than hell at him. Oh.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's ok.

[01:21:07]SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, and then Chris Smith, he -- he went and hiked it. I took one of my Boy Scouts who had just graduated from college. I was the volunteer coordinator, so I helped him pay for his expenses going up there, so he and I hiked it. And uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: What year would that have been?

SEAN O'MEARA: Hm, just a minute. (Sounds of walking across the room) It would've been in the late 1990's.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: Anyway.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's your certificate that you hiked it?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, and your Parks Canada hat? That's great. [01:21:45]Uh, so whose idea was it for you guys to go do this visit to Skagway?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, I think it was probably Willie's -- Willie's idea that we should get some familiarity with the park up there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And to hike the trail, and uh -- Around that time, I'd gotten to go to the two-week training in Anchorage, and Betsy Duncan-Clark was my little team leader. The group was broken down into small groups, and so that's where I met her. And then when I went to Skagway later on, I kind of shadowed Betsy, and she went on board a cruise ship and was handing out brochures as people were getting off the cruise ship to go see Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And then they do walking tours, as well.

SEAN O'MEARA: They do. Uh, it's -- it's interesting because of all those ships that go up there, that park has the highest visitation of any park in Alaska. Well, there -- and there's a reason for that. You know, they're out there --

KAREN BREWSTER: Clicking.

SEAN O'MEARA: I'm sure that somebody has gone to the doctor with a sore thumb, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, for the clicker thing.

SEAN O'MEARA: The clicker. And uh -- but anyway, it was all pretty worthwhile.

[01:23:07]And then for the creation of the International Historic Park, uh, superintendent had someplace else he wanted to be, and so I got to represent the park for that. And -- and Todd went up there with me. We rented a car and drove up to Whitehorse, and uh, and then got to -- I got to take the train up to Bennett, and it was -- it was all pretty interesting.

[01:23:37]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I haven't taken that train, but as an interpreter, what's your assessment of their program?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, the train?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, don't they give a program on the train?

SEAN O'MEARA: I -- to be honest with you, I don't remember too much of that. They might've had a PA system, but it was --

KAREN BREWSTER: They don't give a regular interpretive program?

SEAN O'MEARA: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or they didn't when you did it?

SEAN O'MEARA: You know, things change. [01:24:03]What was impressive, though, was for this event, the chief rangers from the big parks in Alaska had come for this.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: An incident response team. And those people had thought of just about everything. And so on the train ride, there were these boxed lunches. There were a bunch of regular visitors who went on the train ride to go up to Bennett to see this thing. And they were -- one guy was just kinda scrambling to get to a roast beef sandwich or something, and he -- and he broke his leg.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, no.

SEAN O'MEARA: I mean, it's not funny that he broke his leg, but the train pulled into Bennett, and they yarded him off the car, the train car, with a Stokes stretcher. And somebody got on the phone and a de Havilland Twin Otter plane flew in on floats and came as close as it could to the shoreline, and the rangers carried this guy out, put him into the plane, and away it went.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And I thought, "Wow. That's pretty amazing."

KAREN BREWSTER: Good search and rescue.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, it was.

[01:25:19]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, they're used to that from the trail. If they have to rescue people from the Chilkoot Trail, that's a pretty involved operation, I would assume.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah. Well, they've got a -- there's good cooperation between the two park services.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, so I got to meet a lot of Parks Canada people, and --

[01:25:39]KAREN BREWSTER: So what was the big event for the International Historic Park? What kind of an event did they have?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, they had representatives from Skagway and the various Parks Canada sites along the way, from their side of the Chilkoot Trail on up. And so there we were, but the Canadian emcee, he failed to mention the Seattle Unit, you know, and I wasn't going to embarrass the guy and jump up, you know, but --

[01:26:10]KAREN BREWSTER: Is that a common occurrence, you think, that the Seattle Unit gets left out of the Klondike story?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, I think a lot of people -- people have asked, "Well, if the gold was found up there, what are you doing here?" You know, that kind of thing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so, that's where you start explaining to them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I mean it is interesting to think when Klondike park was established, it was -- the Seattle Unit was established at the same time?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And why somebody thought to do that -- do both of them. Do you know?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, Congressman Joel Pritchard of Washington remembered his Washington history, and when it was bandied about in Congress about creating this park, he said, "If you're gonna have a park about the gold rush, you're going to have something in Seattle."

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so it's thanks to him, really, that -- that that visitor center is there. He's gone, subsequently.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: But -- So he'd be -- well, he was a World War II vet, so that kind of explains that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:27:27]SEAN O'MEARA: But uh, at one point they talked about naming the theatre after him, the Pritchard Auditorium.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: At least at the old -- the old park. Because he -- he -- he would come in and talk with Superintendent Russell, and uh, anyway.

KAREN BREWSTER: So how did --

SEAN O'MEARA: So that's how that happened.

[01:27:50]KAREN BREWSTER: How did the two units, um, interact with each other?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, sometimes more and sometimes less.

KAREN BREWSTER: Can you talk about different time periods of when it was one way and when it was the other?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, I think that, you know, with Clay Alderson, we had -- we had pretty good communication with him, because he -- he and his wife would be down to Seattle every once in a while, and he would talk with Willie. And so park staff got to go up to -- up to Skagway, and uh, mm, and then I know that -- I am, to be honest with you, I'm not sure. Oh,

yeah. Ok, after Willie then, it was Debbie Conway. She and her husband, they got -- they got to go up to Skagway, I think on a cruise ship.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: They got a cruise. And uh, so she had been there. I also went to a meeting in Victoria with Debbie and Parks Canada people, and so there was that. I don't believe Karen Dorn ever got to go up there.

[01:29:14]KAREN BREWSTER: What about, did -- was there cooperation, collaboration on particular projects?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: I mean, I'm thinking, what would you have collaborated on?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, you know, I -- I'd been introduced to and talked many times with Karl Gurcke.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And there was -- there was items of mutual interest, like whatever happened to the steamship Portland. And he knew some people who -- from State of Alaska who found the wreck in a place called Katalla, Alaska. Here it is.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

SEAN O'MEARA: I mean, the -- you know, the machinery and the hull below the waterline. And it was a bit up the river, and that was subsequent to that earthquake in --

KAREN BREWSTER: It rose up?

SEAN O'MEARA: It rose up. And uh, people had taken it -- I think the steering wheel is in the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle, the MOHAI. And, you know, there'd be people who are picking over a wreck.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: But I mean, here was -- I think the engine and the boiler and so on were still there. And uh, so there was a bit of back and forth for that. [01:30:33]And for, oh, other topics of mutual interest, you know, we would talk about that or communicate. Um, and it -- it -- there -- I think there were other people who were on the staff. Well, certainly Betsy had the -- the strong connection with --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: -- with the people up there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And as you may know, I mean, just from Karl himself, I mean, there are several people on that staff who've been up there for decades.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:31:12]SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, a fellow who had been the chief ranger, I've forgotten his name now. I think he's not the chief ranger anymore. He may have another role, but if I had my admin history, I could -- oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, tell me what you're gonna say about him, and then I might be able to tell you who.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, I mean, he's from, uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: Was that Reed McCluskey? Is that who you're talking about?

SEAN O'MEARA: Not Reed. It was somebody else. I had met Reed.

KAREN BREWSTER: Bruce Reed?

SEAN O'MEARA: Tim. Tim.

KAREN BREWSTER: Tim. Oh, Tim Steidel.

SEAN O'MEARA: Tim Steidel.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, he just retired in October.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, he did. He'd -- I know he'd gone to Virginia Tech, for example.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right. Right, right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And a lot of -- lot of Hokies in the Park Service.

[01:31:57]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so if you were cooperating on topics of mutual interest, was there exchange of photos, collections, exhibits? Did you send things back and forth?

SEAN O'MEARA: I think -- I think I remember that there had been some of that, there really had. At the time of the Gold Rush Centennial, the Washington State History Museum had an exhibit. And that's down in Tacoma. And when the exhibit was done, they called us up and they said, "Hey, we've got a couple things here you might be interested in. We've got a -- a replica Yukon River skiff, and a stuffed horse. Would you like either one of those?" I said, "I'll take the boat. And uh, but you can keep the horse." And so Marc Blackburn and I drove down to Tacoma to look at the boat and said, "Sure. Send it on up." Well, you know, sad -- so the Mount Rainier carpenters built a cradle for this boat. It was incredible. And uh, but when the earthquake happened, the Cadillac got ruined. It was a collaboration between the Park Service and Historic

Seattle that it got repaired. And if the Park Service would be the anchor tenant. Well, there was not going to be a place for the boat in the new museum, so I ended up giving it to the White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad. And I believe it's in the depot up in Bennett.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: Which is kind of where those boats were built.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: So it got to a good home.

SEAN O'MEARA: It did, and uh -- [01:33:48]And there's even more of a personal story. The guy who built it, Mike Vlahovich, is a boat builder from Tacoma, and his sister had worked at the Boy Scout camp with me. And uh, I mean, he's been written up in *WoodenBoat* magazine, and so he and another guy built this boat. And the boat was a neat touchstone. You could explain how they were built out of green lumber, and the planks were always shrinking, and periodically, you'd have to take the boat out of the water and re-caulk the seams, or else you and your stuff was going to sink in the river.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, and here was this terrific boat. [01:34:35]And the Filson company even -- it came with a mast and a spar.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: But no sail. And I got in touch with the Filson people, and they made a -- a sail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Like an old-style canvas sail?

SEAN O'MEARA: Just a big, square canvas sail. Free, gratis. And they provided the Filson clothing that's in the museum.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And Nordstroms provided that exhibit down in the basement with the shoes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Shoes. [01:35:06]Yeah, I hadn't realized that Filson and Nordstrom got their start by outfitting. Well, I guess Nordstrom made money in the gold rush, and then he came back and started --

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah. The Nordstrom story, you know, he -- he had been farming in --

KAREN BREWSTER: Minnesota?

SEAN O'MEARA: No, no, no, no. Well, he had been in the Midwest. He'd been form -- farming in Arlington, Washington.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: But he'd come over from Sweden. He was an immigrant. He wrote a book called "The Immigrant." But so, he'd been farming. And it wasn't doing too well, so he read about the discovery of gold, and he and a couple of friends went up there. Well, kinda too late. And they were working for somebody on a claim, and then the guy who owned the claim adjacent said, "You know, I found all the gold I want, and I'm leaving. If you guys want to buy it, you can." And they did. And then the Mounties said, "You know, we're taking you to court because this hadn't been properly surveyed." And they beat that first court hearing, and then the Mounties came back and said again, "Well, we found more evidence that you hadn't -- "

KAREN BREWSTER: Jumped the claim?

SEAN O'MEARA: The claim had not been surveyed properly. "But we'll -- we'll drop the charges if you will sell the claim to Dr. So-and-so, Royal Canadian Northwest Mounted Police." And so, they sold the claim. They got a real good price for it, and with that money, John Nordstrom and another stamper built a shoe store.

KAREN BREWSTER: Down here in Seattle?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. Nordstrom and his partner's name was Wallin, couple -- he and another Swede.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, so that's how he got his start-up money. And the doctor subsequently took out a fair amount of gold from the claim.

[01:37:09]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, it wasn't Nordstrom. One of them did go up and do some, uh, gardening, farming up there to supply fresh produce to the miners.

SEAN O'MEARA: There was somebody who had a farm on one of the islands in the river. And another incredible story was, there was a man on the faculty of Pacific Lutheran College, now University, Reverend Harstad, Bjug Harstad, B-J-U-G. And uh, he went up to stake a claim, not for himself, he was a clergyman, but for the university.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And then he left it in the care of a student. I don't know what happened there, but --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I hadn't realized that people went up and -- I mean, I knew that people went up and did, you know, supplies and stores and roadhouses, but I didn't realize that somebody had gone up, you know, to grow vegetables.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: To supply to the miners. That was smart.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yep. I remember that. [01:38:11]And then one of the more amazing stories is, oh gosh, Belinda Mulrooney. She's one of the people they talk about in the --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: -- exhibits.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And a -- you know, book was written about her, but she went up and threw her last fifty cents in the Yukon River, bought up these skiffs that were just lining the bank of the river that people didn't go boating on Saturday there. She had men tear them apart, built cabins, sold the cabins, rent the cabins, made some money. And then said she was going to build a hotel. And some man said, "Ah, you'll never make -- you'll never make it." And she said, "I'll bet you." And they did bet. And she won. And so, her workers and she shared a big -- the bet money. And uh, yeah, she was incredible. She made -- made and lost a fortune. Made another one on the -- the uh, the Alaska Gold Rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm.

SEAN O'MEARA: She's buried in Seattle, but just a God-given sense for business.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And that she was a woman is --

SEAN O'MEARA: Very amazing.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- at that time period.

SEAN O'MEARA: Very amazing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. [01:39:29]So telling these stories in the exhibits or through your programs, how do you do the research? I mean, how have you found out all this stuff?

SEAN O'MEARA: Reading.

KAREN BREWSTER: You just read?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, it -- I mean to me, it was fascinating history. I mean -- and, you know, I mean, not to -- not to say that it was all beer and Skittles down there, but what a sweet job,

reading about history. You know, in books or on the Internet or talking with people like Karl, and other folks and uh -- I can even do "The Cremation of Sam McGee."

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: I was in Skagway one time, and they had a bunch of kids come up from Juneau on the ferry, and Buckwheat Donahue got 'em in the auditorium, and he taught them the first stanza of the poem, you know, with boos and ahs and all this other stuff. I came home and thought, "Geez, I've learned the first stanza. I may as well learn the rest." And I did.

[01:40:34]KAREN BREWSTER: And did you use that in your programs?

SEAN O'MEARA: Not me, so much, no. But my friend Jan Hughes --

KAREN BREWSTER: In that photo?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. She -- she was the admin tech. She has a friend who's a teacher in Snohomish County, and Jan would get dressed up in a plaid shirt and bring a pickaxe with her, and she would do one of the Robert Service poems. And she'd talk about -- it was an off-site program that she would do.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

[01:41:03]SEAN O'MEARA: Well, and that's another thing. We would do off-site programs for education. I -- I can remember going to some schools to do that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And, uh.

[01:41:18]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, a lot of material you had to have in your head.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: I can tell you have a good memory.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, pretty good memory. It's uh, it -- it really helps. I mean, you know, on a personal note, I ran into people I went to high school with there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Really.

SEAN O'MEARA: You know, and I thought, you know, "Oh God, all the people went to that high school, you know, they're doctors and lawyers and so on." And one day this school group lined up outside, and we thought, "Aw, man." They weren't on the schedule. But everybody gets treated nicely when they come in. And so, the kids are coming in. We're showing them into the movie theatre at the old place. And here's this dad at the end of the line, and he's bald on top. He's got a beard. I looked at him. I said, "Harry Morgan, Lakewood High." And said, "Ah! You recognized me." We'd been in the Boy Scouts together. He was an engineer. He lived in Maple

Valley. And so, we had lunch several times. Now they live in Mexico. [01:42:25]But another time at the ORIC, a woman came in, in army dress-green uniform, and she said, "I need US Attorney's Office." "So just a second." Well, there's my nameplate on the countertop, and she said, "I know you." And I thought, "Well, I don't know you, soldier." I was a sailor. I said, "Well, and where are you from?" And she said, "Well, I was born in Kansas, but we -- I grew up in Ohio." I said, "Where in Ohio?" And she said, "Oh, Cleveland." And then I looked at her name. I said, "Oh Jesus!" She sat next to me in the band. And she'd been on this trip to Europe with me, too. And we see Joyce and her husband every once in a while.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's neat.

SEAN O'MEARA: Back in Virginia. And uh, I mean that was simply amazing. And that was -- there was a couple more people, too. The chief of contracting from the Denver Service Center. I recognized her.

[01:43:22]KAREN BREWSTER: Now when the exhibits are being designed, the interpretive staff, do you help with that exhibit design?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, definitely. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Can you talk about that process?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, what they did was, they created focus groups. And there were about three different kinds of focus groups. There was the general public, there were educators, and then there was the park staff. And all of them were asked, what do you like or not like about the present exhibits? What would you like to see in any new exhibits? And so, all that material was written down and digested, and then, uh, an exhibit company, a design company, was contracted with, and they were in Seattle. And they came up with the plans for the exhibits, and after that happened, then you had to find an exhibit fabricator. And Debbie Conway had worked with this company in Buffalo on two previous assignments, one at Cuyahoga National Park, and another one at the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Park Visitor Center. And uh, there they were again. And so they got the bid, even though there -- I think that there's a -- there's a well-known exhibit fabricator in Seattle at Ballard, but I think they might have been -- they already had a full plate.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so this company in Buffalo got it. And then one day, these -- about three semis full of new stuff came in, and uh, they went to work installing.

[01:45:09]KAREN BREWSTER: Now this is for the exhibits when you moved into the Cadillac?

SEAN O'MEARA: The ones you're seeing -- yeah. The ones you're seeing now.

KAREN BREWSTER: The ones in the old building were already there when you got there?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, when I -- when I arrived, yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, there were a lot of, oh, let me see. Let me take a close look at this. (Shuffles papers) No. But there were these big murals on the wall, and one was of a train at the depot. I gave that to King Street Station. I think it's back in the baggage room now.

KAREN BREWSTER: So it was a mural that could be taken off?

SEAN O'MEARA: Right. It was a thin film of the photograph.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And, I mean, this thing was about the size of the wall from the end of that cabinet to the door.

KAREN BREWSTER: It's like, ten by twenty or something?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, it was big.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[01:46:08]SEAN O'MEARA: And there was another one of the steamship Portland coming in. I contacted the Puget Sound Maritime Historic Society, and they were demo -- doing the demolition of the visitor center, and the next day after we had taken down this thing of the -- the Portland and had to break it up and so it'd go in the garbage, somebody called me.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: I said, "You're a day late."

KAREN BREWSTER: So they -- they -- they demolished the old building?

SEAN O'MEARA: No, the building is still there, but an architectural firm moved into the space, and --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. So, but the other materials from those exhibits?

SEAN O'MEARA: A lot of it did come. It came to the new -- the new facility.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Some of it's in curatorial storage. [01:46:57]Uh, then there was the gold panning demonstration, which has had more or less popularity depending on who's operating the gold pan.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: You know, some people just -- they weren't into it. Whatever. I've got this back in the back.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, that's the old sign?

SEAN O'MEARA: The arrowhead on the visitor desk. Jim Carly took part of the visitor desk to put into his carpentry shop. But Debbie Conway said, "It's all gotta go." Well, this thing was held on with, uh -- I can show it to you. It's that thick.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I know those old plaques that they --

SEAN O'MEARA: It was just held on by this sticky, two-side tape.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: And (sound effect), I got it off. And there was a sandwich board that went out front that had a smaller arrowhead on it. And I -- Todd had unscrewed that from the old sandwich board, which was back in storage somewhere.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: It would never be used again, but -- so I have those. I was tempted to -- well.

KAREN BREWSTER: Put it on your front door?

SEAN O'MEARA: When you came in.

[01:48:10]KAREN BREWSTER: Um. What was I just gonna ask about? So are the exhibits ever updated once they're installed? Not -- not moving from one building to the next, but once they're in place?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, yes. No and yes. There are the static exhibits that you could see as you walked around and then went downstairs.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Whereas in another room -- and you saw where the bookstore is?

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: There's that big room there outside the auditorium. That's called the Kerr Room, after, oh God, Ruth Kerr. And she passed away.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Anyway, uh, and there would be -- that was the rotating exhibit room. And there've been a number of things that've been in there with the help from the museum studies program people. And for some of the early things, we would have to have exhibits fabricated

somewhere, but now I believe the museum studies kids, or students, are -- they're doing it. Which is great. And uh --

[01:49:21]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, can you talk a little bit about that program and your involvement?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, well, I think that what had happened was, I had a volunteer, uh -- tch, tch, tch (sound effect). Oh gosh, Ann Gillespie, and she took a certificate class from that program. And I think as a part of that, she brought Wilson O'Donnell down to the park. He lives in the neighborhood down there. And also, one of our seasonal employees, a fellow named Keith Routley, who's not pictured here. He is -- he's now at Fort Stanwix. He's the curator. He uh -- he'd been a seasonal with us, and then he enrolled in that program. It was fairly new. Along with another fellow named Ken Viste, V-I-S-T-E. [01:50:29]And they were the first two guys, I think, that were in the program. And so, Keith got his master's. Well, the both of them got their master's, and they both went to work at -- at the park. And uh, let me see, I forget the exact timeline. When we -- when we moved, the curatorial storage, it's kind of a segue into the curatorial function.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: But I'll try to stay on the track of the program, but it -- it was -- it was very good. And uh, you know, I was kinda tempted, oh, that'd be a neat thing to do, because just about all those people got jobs. And uh, one gal, who works at the Museum of History & Industry, or maybe it's not that. No, it's the maritime museum at the south end of Lake Whatcom.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Not Lake Whatcom, I'm sorry. Lake Union.

KAREN BREWSTER: Lake Union.

SEAN O'MEARA: She had done her internship at the Wisconsin Maritime Museum, which is in Manitowoc, where I was born.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And I thought, "Wow, that's -- that's pretty cool, and now she's got a job." But so, it was attractive because they got jobs doing something they liked, and so on and so forth. [01:52:06]But the curatorial function had been as a collateral duty, and let me see, so somebody -- one or the other of the rangers would have it. And so, I remember at first, the storage was in the basement of the Union Trust Annex. So here it is, down below the street level.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And there was -- there was a flood out in the alley, and water was coming through the wall, and so we had to go rent a bunch of pumps and things like that, dehydrators. And Todd Haskell was the curator at that time, and so we moved the uh, the collection up into one of the offices because we also got a -- got some -- and that was on the mezzanine level because the park had rented out the second floor of the Union Trust Annex for the offices and everybody.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: So, he moved it up there.

[01:53:17]KAREN BREWSTER: And what year would this have been?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, that --

KAREN BREWSTER: Approximately when the flood?

SEAN O'MEARA: That would have been back in the -- in the late '90's.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, I think it was still while Betsy Duncan-Clark was the chief. And so, he moved it up there, and uh, he -- he was the one that had to do all the various reports, work with the ANCS plus program and all that.

KAREN BREWSTER: What's ANCS Plus?

SEAN O'MEARA: Automated National Curatorial -- (whispered) A-N-C-S.

KAREN BREWSTER: Service?

SEAN O'MEARA: Something like that. It's run out of Charlottesville, Virginia.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[01:54:03]SEAN O'MEARA: Anyway, um, so Todd was doing that, and then he left in 2001, and then Marc Blackburn took over. And Marc left about a year later. And then I had it for a little while. I went down to a -- well, I'm not going to tell stories on myself, but --

KAREN BREWSTER: That's the idea.

SEAN O'MEARA: I mean that -- it was not a user-friendly program, I'll tell you that, and uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: It was a computer program for cataloging?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, cataloging. Automated National Catalog System, I think. And uh, so um, I would start to get help from -- I knew people who worked at all the other parks. When she left, I got somebody --

KAREN BREWSTER: Sue.

SEAN O'MEARA: When Sue left, I got someone on a detail, uh, I think from Mount Rainier, and so she was able to give us four days a week, and when that detail was up, then I got somebody from another park for three days a week. And then finally, two days a week. [01:55:19]Um, so a priority of Debbie Conway when she was hired as superintendent was to hire an admin person, and she hired Jan Hughes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And um, but similarly, Debbie also hired Tim Carly. And because Tim had come from Acadia and worked for Brooke (Childrey), he was on a term position back there. He needed to find a permanent job, so he got one in Klondike. And so then, he was the one responsible for moving it over to the Cadillac Hotel, where once again, it was in the basement, up against a wall in the alley. And then it got moved into what was a smaller conference room. And that's -- around then, Brooke got involved, too. And uh, but now it's gonna be moved up to the third floor where the park offices are.

[01:56:19]KAREN BREWSTER: Has it ever been in a climate-controlled space?

SEAN O'MEARA: As much as they can. Well, no, I should've mentioned that Keith Routley was the one who was the -- responsible for moving the stuff.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Not Marc, he was gone. Tim hadn't arrived yet, and Keith was --

KAREN BREWSTER: Was Keith officially hired as a curator?

SEAN O'MEARA: No, he was a park guide, but um -- it's -- this is not an embarrassing thing, but he -- he was having problems with his hearing, and he got a cochlear implant.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And Debbie Conway, when she moved to Fort Stanwix, had a curator who was about to retire and wanted to complete a backlog. Catalog -- backlog catalog work. And so she asked if we could send Keith out on a detail, and we did. And then the curator out there retired, and one day Keith got a phone call, how'd you like a 7-9-11 job?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: He's been a GS-5.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Only comes around --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. But when he was hired here at Klondike, he just learned curator --

SEAN O'MEARA: It was a cura -- uh, collateral duty.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And Brooke was coming up, and uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. She said she -- Brooke Childrey, who I interviewed the other day, she came in after Keith.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: I think.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[01:57:48]SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, so various people have had their hands in that. And while Keith was there, they accessioned a steamer trunk full of Klondike stuff, and so that was -- to catalog, that was -- that was a major project.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And to make the room safe, as safe as they could, anyway.

[01:58:13]KAREN BREWSTER: Is it a fairly small or large collection of stuff?

SEAN O'MEARA: Mm, I would say it's at least in the -- at least it's the size of this room.

KAREN BREWSTER: Which is what, thirty by twenty or something. I'm terrible at numbers.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. Me, too. But most of the collection is paper stuff.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so, things had been sent out on loan before that happened. Had to go to a conservator, and there are a couple of them in the area. And I remember that Todd was involved with that, and, you know, I think -- I don't know if there's -- I don't know if there's only one program, University of Delaware, that does --

KAREN BREWSTER: Does conservation?

SEAN O'MEARA: Does -- Yeah, paper conservation.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I don't know.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so it's a very specialized thing.

[01:59:06]KAREN BREWSTER: There are objects on exhibit. Is most of your object collection, then, what's on exhibit?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, there are some things, but a lot of stuff, like the newspapers, they're replicas.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: At one point, uh, for an education program, we borrowed from the National Archives or the University of Washington, this big volume of Seattle P-I newspapers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: They had been digitized, and somebody said, "Aw, well, I guess we can throw these out now." And somebody said, "I don't think so. They're going out to the archives." So happily, it didn't get destroyed. But so, I knew somebody from Bellingham from my SCUBA days who had gone to Rochester and was a professional photographer. He had a studio a block away. And I said, "Say, do you suppose you could photocopy this issue of the paper, and -- " Well, he did. Long story short, he did. It got printed. It got laminated. And so here's -- but we actually had our hands on this newspaper.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: GOLD! GOLD! GOLD! [02:00:20]And it was funny to see these articles that -- some things have changed, and other things have not changed, the kind of things you see in the newspaper. And -- about politics and pharmaceuticals and so on.

KAREN BREWSTER: It's all the same, huh?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, the more things change, the more they stay the same, you know.

[02:00:44]KAREN BREWSTER: But you had started to talk about the museum studies --

SEAN O'MEARA: Program.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- program, and how those students got involved in doing exhibits at the park.

SEAN O'MEARA: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Was there a particular person that you made contact with, or how -- you -- you were saying some of your volunteers --

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, well.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- and Keith and Ken took the program.

SEAN O'MEARA: Wilson O'Donnell, he was the faculty member that I would be in touch with.

KAREN BREWSTER: OK.

SEAN O'MEARA: And there was another student who did her dissertation on a high school-level program. And uh, Tim was the -- a representative to her committee. And the UW sent one person over to hear this girl's presentation. And we both looked at each other after it was all over and they'd gone, and said, "How come we don't have master's degrees?" But --

[02:01:45]KAREN BREWSTER: So, but was there somebody at the park whose idea it was, like we should use these students, that it can help the park?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, sure, because we had this space, and we wanted to populate it with meaningful exhibits. Oh, for Black History Month one year, we -- we had uh, cooperated with -- there's a Black History Museum in Seattle. And, you know, we cooperated with them and got the loan of various items, and we had a -- like a booth for a restaurant set up in the visitor -- in that room. And we also had the daughter of one of the prominent jazz musicians, she was a vocalist, come down, and she had a little concert. And uh, the uh, the guy who's the -- I'll call him the CEO of Discover Your Northwest, Jim Adams, plays the piano. And well, anyway, she did music, and, I mean, it was a full auditorium. It was great. It was a terrific program. That was one. [02:03:09]And then another one even before that was the -- an exhibit, a temporary exhibit, of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exhibition. And uh, HistoryLink gave me copies of their files of the things they had on their website, and we had them printed out and mounted on these temporary display panels that could be set up in a number of configurations. And so that was pretty good, too. Um, that was -- Oh, well, it happened once we were in the Cadillac Hotel, so I've forgotten the exact date of the exhibit -- exposition. It was probably 2007 or thereabouts.

[02:04:02]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Something. But so, was it your idea to start using these students?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, yeah. Because, you know -- and all the superintendents, they bought into that, too.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: I mean, and when somebody was new there, they -- they really had to rely on me for a lot of the turnover because there would be a gap between superintendents, and I was usually the acting. And when Willie left, uh, there were (whispered) one, two (at normal volume) three actings, and then there was going to be another period of a few months before Debbie Conway came on board. I said to the last one, who's now at the White House. I mean, don't get me wrong, it's the President's Park, as they call it. And uh, but I said, "You know, rather than get somebody in here, pay for an apartment for them, I know what's going on here. Why don't you suggest that I do this until she gets here?" So that happened. And then whenever someone would leave, I would get it, and so that worked out.

[02:05:23]KAREN BREWSTER: How did you feel about being acting superintendent?

SEAN O'MEARA: It was pretty nice. I had a pretty long leash. And uh, and Rory Westberg was the associate regional director, and I got along just wonderfully with him. I'd -- we had hired his daughter as a seasonal, and she was with us a couple -- at least a couple seasons. Miriam Westberg. And she was a good performer. And I don't know. I -- And then by the time I retired, you know, I think I -- I had started planning it about a year out, you know.

[02:06:07]KAREN BREWSTER: You retired in 2011?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. The end of December. And uh, so I hit age sixty-six that April, and let's see, I remember the announcement came out, and I procrastinated a lot over the time -- over time, and I had not applied for another job since I applied for the one I had. And it went from being done on a typewriter to being done electronically, and there's this little box that said, "You have a maximum of 300 characters."

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And it was basically all you could do. And I tried over and over to put all my training and experience in there, and it kept throwing it out. And Tim stayed late to help me with this application, and I didn't have a resume all typed up and ready to go. I couldn't just attach --

KAREN BREWSTER: Now, what were you applying for?

SEAN O'MEARA: Superintendent.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, I see.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so, I said, "Aw, the hell with it." And I hit the "send" button. Basically, said I worked here for nineteen years. And Rory called me up a couple weeks later. He said, "You know, I'd like to come down and talk to you about your application. I really appreciate what you've done these various times, but you know -- " So anyway, that was that, and I was gone. And I've been happy I've been gone. It was good, but it's done.

[02:07:41]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, yeah. It seems like it was a job you enjoyed and were very passionate about.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: You know all this history.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. And uh, you know, they've dropped some things and added some things, and there've been -- there's been change. But I'm not sure how much some things have been emphasized since I left, like being well-informed on the history for everybody. And uh, anyway.

[02:08:17]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I mean, are there things that you implemented that were particularly important to you, that you see aren't there?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, they don't go to the cruise ships anymore. And as a matter of fact, Holland America was the only one -- the only cruise line that would pay us. Discover Your Northwest would send them an invoice at the end, and it amounted to, I don't know if it was \$100 per performance, and we were treated like family on Holland America. Not so much on the other lines. But the other lines, like Princess and Carnival, they're all under the Carnival umbrella, and the others never paid us. And uh, it was fun, but -- but it's done, and I don't know. But the thing that really is kinda too bad, and it was not -- not the fault of the park, really, um, and neither was the cruise ship thing. I mean that was a decision that they had made, Amtrak had made, was that -- the loss of the Empire Builder program.

[02:09:28]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. So why did the cruise ship program end?

SEAN O'MEARA: That I don't know. It happened after I left, and, you know, I -- I have stayed in touch with most of my friends, you know. We have birthdays within a month of each other, and uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, yeah. Was it a cruise ship decision, or was it a park decision?

SEAN O'MEARA: I think it was a park decision. But I can't -- I can't -- I can't say for sure on the cruise ship thing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, it wasn't really costing them very much, and then whoever came onto the ship, they got -- they got to have a free lunch there, too.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: It wasn't really free, but --

[02:10:11]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I was thinking when you were acting superintendent, that's quite different than working with the public every day in a visitor center context.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah. It's -- it's different, but -- and I wasn't working with the Amtrak people and the cruise ship people, and other partners. And uh, if I could pause -- I want to use the --

(Pause)

KAREN BREWSTER: Question. [02:10:36]So we were just talking off about how you commuted for all those years from Bellingham into Seattle.

SEAN O'MEARA: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: By car and train and bus.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yep.

KAREN BREWSTER: That -- a couple hours each way?

SEAN O'MEARA: Pretty much. It takes -- well, on a good day, you could drive to Seattle, like on a Sunday, in an hour and a half and be down there. But during the week, it was a different story. And over time, the freeway got more congested. And so, being on the bus was really terrific because I could read or talk with my seatmate, whoever, and uh, you know, I had a -- a -- a bus buddy, who we had similar tastes in books, and we'd trade books back and forth and so on. It was -- I got to know a lot of those people. And uh, thank goodness for the bus. I did drive myself all the way down to Seattle the first four months, and then I learned about the bus.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: And then you said you could take the train from Everett?

SEAN O'MEARA: Everett, yeah, the Sounder. It's a heavy rail commuter system. From Everett, it goes into Seattle, and then that system also goes down to Tacoma. And it's going to go further, too, I think.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And, uh --

[02:12:15]KAREN BREWSTER: But as you say, you missed things here at home, and -- So why did you keep doing it? Why did you keep making that trip?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, I guess because I didn't really want to move the family to another place. As we discussed earlier, often times in the Park Service, you -- if you want to get a promotion, you have to move. And I wasn't willing to take a chance on getting stuck with someone sketchy, you know. It's kind of like, in that instance, the glass is half empty, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: I had, you know, in my time, in my going to conferences and trainings, I'd met some pretty nice people who were superintendents, but uh, I don't know. I just didn't want to take the kids out of school. I knew that we wouldn't be able to, for example, get as nice a neighborhood in Seattle as we have here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so that was really the reason I didn't want to take them out of school. And then the day came, they were done with school around the turn of the century. And uh, you know, it wasn't too much longer.

KAREN BREWSTER: But yeah, you -- the job must've been important enough to do that instead of trying to find a job here in Bellingham.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. I -- I just really do not believe there would have been anything in Bellingham. [02:13:49]Talking about education, I think that's changed. You -- you listen to people who are in the business, and they tell you their stories, and you say, "Oooh. Thanks anyway."

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And I had been in classrooms with my kids, and uh -- Well, as my former boss said, "I found something better." And it worked. Um, that's about it with that.

[02:14:21]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Um, what was I gonna ask you about? Oh, um. Well, you were sort of talking about different superintendents. And, as you say, you worked there for nineteen years. You went through different administrations.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And different -- different -- things were done in different ways.

SEAN O'MEARA: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Can you talk about some things you experienced that worked, things you experienced that didn't work, frustrations you had being in that system?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, with the first superintendent I had, it was pretty much we operated on the status quo, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: These are the exhibits we have, and -- I mean, if there was a chief ranger who came along who had a different idea, then we'd have somebody between us and the superintendent, and they'd say, "Ok. Everybody has to design a slide program that they're going to give or a walking tour." Something like that. Um, in a way, that made it a little more interesting, um, to do those things. [02:15:37]But uh, the -- when we moved to the new -- the new location, the Cadillac Hotel, that was -- that was the cause for a whole lot of more creative work.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: I mean, we had to. We -- we certainly were involved in the new exhibit planning and any programs that went with that. And subsequently, before I left we had a new

film made. Um, and uh, various things like that. The -- the Amtrak program, well, that came in at the tail end of the first superintendent's tenure. And so that -- that continued on.

[02:16:27]KAREN BREWSTER: So did you feel like, with -- you say the more creative work, did you feel like you had more of a role in --

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- what was happening at the park?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yes. Yeah, I did. Yeah. And uh, so I was able to, you know, steer things a little bit. [02:16:46]And um, but the superintendents would usually get their marching orders from the associate regional director, and, you know, I think with the first one there was maybe some heels being dug in, and I'm not gonna change and if you don't like it, then go ahead and complain. And you're not going to win on that because of who I am. And uh, but the subsequent superintendents, they realized that they needed to do a good job. It was usually the first, um, appointment as a superintendent for those -- those people who followed.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And -- and so they're trying to leave a legacy of some sort that would enable them to make a jump in the superintendent field.

[02:17:49]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, there's a difference between doing that to promote your own advancing career.

SEAN O'MEARA: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: And doing things to -- that would help the park and help the park staff.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Was there a difference?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, well, I think with the -- the first permanent superintendent after the first one.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: She was -- she was handed this project that was pretty substantial. I mean, ok, you're gonna have to work with Historic Seattle, and you're gonna work with the exhibit planners and fabricators and get it all shifted over to this new location. And that's a lot of work.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: It really was. And so, that -- that was -- that was pretty good. [02:18:46]And Deb Conway created some new opportunities, like as I said, the cruise ship program. I mean, I was the one who wrote it, but she said, "Ok. I want you to write this program, and next Friday,

we're going over to Holland America and you're gonna tell 'em about it." And uh, you know, she was supportive. One time on Fridays, sometimes Holland America would charter the ship to a group, and I remember uh, the Prairie Home Companion.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: That program had chartered the ship. And uh, I was really kinda anxious. I said, Well God, what if Garrison Keillor comes to my show and he doesn't like it, and he's gonna say in his soft, frog-type voice, 'Well, I did this program with the National Park Service. It was really kind of sucked, you know, but -- " And she said, "Well, what are you worried about?" I said, "Well, hell, the guy's a professional storyteller." She said, "You're a professional storyteller."

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: "Break a leg," you know. And so, it was the most appreciative audience I'd ever had.

[02:19:57]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and you said before, you know, being act -- when you were acting superintendent, that's a lot of administrative work, I would assume.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. But, you know, sometimes people would call for these reports in the afternoon as a -- and here's the famous opening line, "Sorry for the short turn-around." I'd look that over. That's what the delete key is for.

[02:20:29]KAREN BREWSTER: So you were a trouble-maker as an acting superintendent?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, I never --

KAREN BREWSTER: No, I'm just teasing you.

SEAN O'MEARA: No, but -- I never -- I don't think I really did too much that was really nefarious, but uh, and I never certainly was called -- called on about it. I mean, except for that one goofball who was a private tour guide.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And she ratted me out to the superintendent, you know.

[02:20:54]KAREN BREWSTER: But you had said something earlier about year-end money. So when a park has year-end money, what happens with that? How's that allocated?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, well, there are always projects. There's a shopping list of projects, and there is a, uh, there's a program called PMIS, Project Management Information System.

KAREN BREWSTER: It's a computer system, right?

SEAN O'MEARA: And, you know, if you want to do a project, you have to define it in PMIS. And uh, and that's where the money comes from, you know. And then a committee -- there are various committees, network-wide and regional committees who will prioritize, and they'll pass judgment on the worthiness of somebody's project, and that's how that all happens.

[02:21:44]And uh, and then there was a thing called the Government Performance and Results Act, GPRA, and uh, I remember when that came out, and the guy over at Olympic, I mean, I think he retired because of it. You know, he -- it was gonna nearly drive him to suicide, you know. But you know, it was a thing. And --

KAREN BREWSTER: Was it the regulations you had to do or -- ?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah. You had to -- every park would be assigned certain GPRA goals. Visitor safety, staff safety. I've forgotten all of them, happily. And -- but once I had to go to a GPRA workshop down in San Francisco, and Rory Westberg and Doug Hout were the ones who put that on. And they did -- really did a fine job, for something that was just drier than burned ashes. You know, it was -- it was terrible. And, I mean, it's not like I got completely fired up about it. But, I mean, you know, they explained it, and uh, in a -- in a positive way, and uh, you know, the couple of the best people I've worked with who were outside the park and above the park, and um, mm, so there was that. And I was the GPRA person, you know.

[02:23:21]KAREN BREWSTER: So when you had to allocate that end-of-year money, did you do it through the PMIS, or you did something different?

SEAN O'MEARA: No, there were these incentive things, you know. Or not incentives so much as awards. You know, and if it was within a certain amount, you could -- you could give the money to the employees who were doing a good job. And I remember once, you know, I was going to, I don't know, give 'em all five hundred bucks or something like that. The HR people said, "Excuse me, but I don't think you can do that." I know I argued with 'em, and I said, "No, they deserve it. They did this, that, and the other thing." And, "Oh, all right." And I don't want to be on the record for saying, yeah, everybody got five hundred or a thousand bucks, but I mean -- I mean working in Seattle, I mean, it's expensive.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And people are hav -- I wasn't the only one with a long commute. Or in college, like --

KAREN BREWSTER: Some of these --

SEAN O'MEARA: Sean's Angels were there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Is that this group of young women who were your interp staff? Sean's Angels, that's good.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well -- and uh, anyway.

[02:24:47]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, it sounds like you supported your staff, and you wanted to use this money internally and not have it go into this whole PMIS.

SEAN O'MEARA: Pencil sharpeners or anything like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: So -- so -- so we -- we did that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: I mean, there were other things that were made possible, you know, like, office supplies and other things. Maybe exhibit repairs.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Things would break. You know, like, letting kids touch things. Oh, everything's gotta be touchy-feely, you know. All that, what's the word? Interactive.

KAREN BREWSTER: Interactive. [02:25:25]But now it's interactive computers. You -- I mean, that's the exhibit now. You go in, and that's -- the interactive sections are, there's a screen and you do things. You follow these certain personalities through the exhibit if you want, and you can interact that way.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, Lord.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um.

SEAN O'MEARA: I don't think I'm going to see that one. I mean, it's just --

[02:25:50]KAREN BREWSTER: You raised your eyebrows with interactive, so I -- you're not a fan?

SEAN O'MEARA: No, I -- you know, I -- I guess I'm a Luddite, you know. As I -- as I said to the exhibit planners, one of my favorite museums in the country is The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, Virginia. All these incredible boats and huge, uh, models of steamships and stories about adventures and things. It's a terrific, terrific place. Ever since I've been a little kid, I've loved that museum. And I never saw any computers in there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, you know, but I know what -- I know what you mean, and you see people walking down the street, and I'm surprised more of 'em haven't been flattened by cars.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: You know, as they're looking at their hand, you know. And I remember the new superintendents would come in, and they'd all be given a palm -- a Blackberry.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm, right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And I made the remark, I said, "You know, if they gave me one of those, I'd put dead batteries in it." You know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, but you -- for the exhibits and kids and you say, you know, you do need some interactive for the kids.

SEAN O'MEARA: No, I know.

KAREN BREWSTER: No, not -- so what would you have done when you were there, interactive for kids? Not the programs you did with the school groups, but what kind of -- were there interactive exhibits?

[02:27:20]SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, well, there's the Junior Ranger program. And that was another thing. And uh, the Junior Ranger program, and uh, you know, every park has one nowadays.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And there have been kids who've, I think, pretty much been to all the parks. That's a considerable expense.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: You figure Samoa and places like that. But so that's a way for a kid to work through a worksheet, you know, and find answers amongst the exhibits, and attend this and that and the other thing, and then, pa-ting. You get the little badge.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so there's that. That's what there is for kids in the -- and some kids are very aware of that. And some of these kids, they'd come in with a vest that's covered with plastic, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Those little badges, right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Ok. Oh, yeah. And uh -- Uh, you know, that's -- that's fine. [02:28:24]And then, oh, did you go downstairs?

KAREN BREWSTER: I did.

SEAN O'MEARA: And you saw -- down the steps, you see all those rocks?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: Those are pedigreed rocks. They're from Mexico. And those rocks are supposed to represent a beach in Alaska.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, well.

SEAN O'MEARA: And that's where they got 'em, you know? And then, somebody comes in to do a curatorial survey. Are you doing things according to how they're supposed to be done? Are you keeping the place clean? And they look at them -- those rocks, and they said, "Ah, these rocks are gonna have to be hand-washed."

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh my goodness.

SEAN O'MEARA: And I'd been in touch with a Boy Scout troop, and by golly, those Boy Scouts came down, and they washed half of those rocks.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

SEAN O'MEARA: They did. And -- and they were going on -- to hike the Chilkoot Trail. Actually, I hired one of those Boy Scouts as a seasonal, and uh, you know, and then I think the -- whoever was in charge of the curation, uh, "Ok, the rest of them we'll just run the vacuum cleaner over and call it good, you know." But there were critters that could live in there. Bugs, mostly.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And -- but due to other barriers, I don't think a bug was gonna last in the curatorial storage room, you know. Anyway. But --

[02:29:55]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so when you got there, there were already collections in the ownership of the park?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yes. Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you don't know how those collections were acquired?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, they were -- they were, you know, some things people would go up, and they'd be hiking the Chilkoot Trail, and they'd see something laying there, and they'd grab it. And they'd come in and say, "Hey, Willie. I found this for you up there in Alaska."

KAREN BREWSTER: But they wouldn't give it to the park in Skagway, they'd bring it down here?

SEAN O'MEARA: Sometimes they would, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And that happened. And other times, people would -- would donate things. And, you know, a letter would have to be generated, and acces -- you know, the item would be accessioned.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so on and so forth, and uh, um, but usually, you know, the rangers -- unless you were the one who was supposed to be working with that stuff, you weren't even gonna see it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: It's all in a tray somewhere, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Old maps, letters, uh, and things.

[02:31:10]KAREN BREWSTER: So did you have a favorite part of the job? Since you did all these different things: your interp and your collateral duties with the curation and acting superintendent.

SEAN O'MEARA: I don't know, I just liked working with the people. You know, I uh, my coworkers were pretty great folks. I was very fortunate that way that the vast majority of them were -- were good people. And uh, I was able to help them out with their careers sometimes, and uh, and then you'd, you know, the volunteers that I met and that I had are -- they were just a terrific bunch. And I'd, you know, I've stayed in touch with some of them. You know, shortly after you came in, this couple walked by and was talking to Mary, and uh, Gallon O'Connor lives about six blocks away. Phi Beta Kappa from Stanford.

KAREN BREWSTER: He was one of your volunteers?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. And he's a computer guy, does the I/T for Whatcom County now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And but he'd been one of my volunteers, and now coincidentally, he lives in Bellingham. And we probably see them more than anybody else here.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's funny.

[02:32:33]SEAN O'MEARA: And it's -- it's -- it's just a lot of fun. Another one of them, when she got the job -- a job with Bureau of Reclamation down in Stockton, California, on top of that she decided to go to law school. And then she sent me a summons to appear at her graduation.

KAREN BREWSTER: Nice.

SEAN O'MEARA: We drove down for that.

KAREN BREWSTER: That was nice.

SEAN O'MEARA: And, yeah. Terrific people. And, um.

[02:33:04]KAREN BREWSTER: But in any workplace, there are times when not everybody gets along or issues develop.

SEAN O'MEARA: No. You are right.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so how were those handled? You know, you don't necessarily want to tell me the details of some of them, but --

SEAN O'MEARA: No, there would be -- I don't think we ever had any problems with harassment. I mean, some people were leaned on, and uh, for them, there could be -- there was some sort of an equal opportunity person who doubled as a kind of an ombudsman.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And certainly, the associate regional director, the people in that position, would hear about somebody who was leaning on people and causing them grief. Uh, you know, that's terrible.

[02:34:09]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And those people were pushed out of their positions?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, basically.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or they chose to leave because they were -- they felt uncomfortable.

SEAN O'MEARA: Because life was getting uncomfortable for them. And, you know, I think that one thing is, you have to look for the best people have in them, and make the most out of that. I mean, this man had a -- a teaching credential. But because of this one's level of education, he was made the education coordinator. And uh, that's a -- that's a long story.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And, uh --

[02:34:53]KAREN BREWSTER: So that's personal favoritism kind of issues that may have happened?

SEAN O'MEARA: It -- it --

KAREN BREWSTER: And again, it may be it's all in any bureaucracy, any institution, these things happen.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, and in fairness, it's how much either one of them wanted to buy into this -- the plum of being the Ed Coordinator. There might have been more motivation with that one than with this one.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: It's -- it's a trick, you know. But --

[02:35:28]KAREN BREWSTER: And I was wondering, too, how much the management style of a superintendent trickles down to the staff, and how that affects how people work together or don't work together in the hierarchies?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, I -- I usually wasn't really too happy when, oh gosh, it's performance appraisal interview time. I didn't look forward to it, although I never ended up really faring too badly. I never got put on a performance improvement plan.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: But when Karen Beppler-Dorn got the job, it was -- it was like a walk in the park. You know, I said, "Oh, God." She said, "What are you worried about, you know?" And it was just nothing. It was very pleasant. And I was really pretty sad when she took a position down in Pinnacles.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: She subsequently has gone back to Ohio, and uh, it was 'cause a couple of people down there were really grieving her. There was somebody who was writing letters to the Secretary of Interior about her. Bad letters.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, you know --

KAREN BREWSTER: You had a good experience with her?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, I had a very good experience with her. And uh, you know, so --

[02:37:02]KAREN BREWSTER: But you weathered the good and the bad?

SEAN O'MEARA: I did.

KAREN BREWSTER: Which not everybody is able to do.

SEAN O'MEARA: No, I mean you --

KAREN BREWSTER: So how did you get through the bad?

SEAN O'MEARA: I don't know. I just -- I forget what my -- the various performance markers were, you know. I guess I -- I guess I met them in a satisfactory way, and um, I -- I know that perhaps with each of them, each of those people who was in trouble, I mean, I could -- it was a personality difference or something that the individual was doing that really irritated the superintendent involved.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: For the most part, all those instances occurred down there with the first one.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And um, yeah, that's -- that's the way that worked.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, that's where the trouble was.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so.

[02:38:16]KAREN BREWSTER: And so you -- did you learn from that things that worked and didn't work that you did when you were acting superintendent?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, I -- I just tried to make everybody feel valuable. And, you know, give 'em praise and, you know, point out things that they should or shouldn't do. Ah, the young ladies there, you know. They really -- they really did a good job, but they didn't like wearing uniforms. So on their half a day where they weren't on the desk, they'd change into their street clothes. And I looked at that as, mm, so somebody wants to dye their hair green, you know. Hair always grows back. You know, it's small potatoes. It's not like they got some sort of a lewd tattoo on their forehead or something like that. And so that was small potatoes, and uh.

KAREN BREWSTER: So as long as they wore their uniform at the desk --

SEAN O'MEARA: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- you were ok with it?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah. And uh, yeah. You don't want to really become a fascist unless you have to.

[02:39:34]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and, you know, the Park Service, like many other federal agencies, sometimes has a reputation of being quite the bureaucracy, and you have to do things a certain way, and there's no flexibility.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you feel that way?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, well, there were some things that you had to do, year-end reports and so on. And uh, you know, that was -- some folks had found easier ways to do that by using a computer, inputting your visitor statistics on a daily basis into a program, but that was not really somehow possible with a -- and then hitting a button at the end of the year and whoop! There's the report.

KAREN BREWSTER: It's all processed, yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: But it -- it didn't -- it wasn't possible at our park, and so it was just something you lived with, you know. It wasn't the most pleasant thing, but -- [02:40:31] You know, I did get some money from different sources for different projects for the education thing. I successfully wrote a grant to 4Culture for the education program curriculum that a couple of teachers on Mercer Island did. I looked at the website today for the park, and it's gone. But there's another -- another -- there are some other curriculum things there that they can do. So it's just that, you know, things will change over the years, and, you know, just as time passes, you just have to realize, well, someone came up with a better idea, maybe.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And, uh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or methods change or technology changes.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

[02:41:25] KAREN BREWSTER: And, yeah, that must be hard, though, to accept something you worked very hard on and were passionate about in the '90's, maybe, or the 2000's, and not -- it not being used anymore.

SEAN O'MEARA: Right. And the same thing with the Klondike Gold Rush database that was on the HistoryLink website. I mean, a bunch of students from UW, not necessarily the museum studies program, but there was a guy named Dr. Dave Biggs. He wasn't a doctor then, but he was a graduate student. He's at Cal Riverside now. And uh, he had led this program, and there was -- he had a GIS guy, and here's a map of Pioneer Square in the very beginning, and then during the gold rush, and today. And so, there was the GIS component. You could look up names of all these stampedeers and see, was this one of your ancestors? And that exists in different formats other places. Up in Alaska, and uh --

[02:42:34] KAREN BREWSTER: But it was all together as this Klondike Gold Rush database?

SEAN O'MEARA: Right. And there was a kiosk in the -- in the old museum.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: A computer in an old wardrobe, and we'd open the doors up.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And there it is, and uh, but then HistoryLink took that on, and they put the whole thing on their computers, so from anywhere, you could go to the HistoryLink, and I -- I hadn't looked at that website for decades, or maybe, but this morning I looked at it. I said, "Where did it go?" And it's gone.

[02:43:08] KAREN BREWSTER: So what is HistoryLink, for people who don't know?

SEAN O'MEARA: It's -- it's a website about Pacific Northwest history, and it got started, oh, 1997, I think.

KAREN BREWSTER: And is it a Park Service thing, or it's a regional -- ?

SEAN O'MEARA: No, no. It's -- it's a regional thing. It's out of Seattle.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: The guy who started it, he and another fellow had been the editors of an underground paper, the Helix. And -- but he developed this incredible website. And he's gone. Sally, his wife, continues on with it, I believe. And they were -- they were a big help, like I said, with the Alaska-Yukon Exposition that was in Seattle, the centennial. And they had a bunch of these little AYP pins made up that were replicas of the ones that people had. One day a fellow came into the park, and he said, "You know, I was going through my grandfather's stuff or whatever, and I thought you guys might like to have this." It was one of these AYP pins.

KAREN BREWSTER: It was one of the originals?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. And so I (sound effect) gave it to the curator. Well, when I went down to HistoryLink, uh, the people who -- well, I forget. Mrs. McCartney or whatever. I've forgotten her name.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: Someone had found a box of these pins from a hundred years before, and uh -- ninety years before. And uh, would've been a hundred years. And she said, "There you go." And so, I've -- I've got it in the little hundred-year-old tissue paper that it came in, along with one of the new replicas with a clutch back on it. But little tiny things like that, it's -- you know, I met some fascinating people who were involved with the history or their ancestors had been.

[02:45:11]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. So that HistoryLink, is there anything related to Klondike on it? If this database is not there anymore --

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, I think it --

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you guys provide other content?

SEAN O'MEARA: There -- there -- there are other articles that were written subsequently by other people. There's a well-known Seattle photo historian named Paul Dorpat, D-O-R-P-A-T. He has a guy named -- his last name is -- oh, his name is Greg Lang, and he wrote an article about the Klondike Gold Rush, and it's on HistoryLink.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And you know, so --

KAREN BREWSTER: But nothing from the park?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, off-hand, I don't -- I don't think so. And uh, you know, you've gotta have somebody with the interest to do that.

KAREN BREWSTER: And the time.

SEAN O'MEARA: And the time. And uh.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that hasn't happened?

[02:46:12]SEAN O'MEARA: Some of the folks they have down there, they wouldn't have had relatives in the Klondike.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: If you can read between the lines. There weren't people from those places going on the gold rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And that doesn't mean they don't have an interest in history, but I'm just saying that, uh, not everything has been in alignment for that to happen such that HistoryLink received an article written by a park employee.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. But even when you were there, there wasn't -- the Park Service besides this database thing, which really wasn't the Park Service.

SEAN O'MEARA: It was -- it was --

KAREN BREWSTER: Sort of a collaborative thing.

SEAN O'MEARA: It was a collaborative thing.

KAREN BREWSTER: That the Park Service hasn't continued to provide content to HistoryLink?

SEAN O'MEARA: I don't think so.

KAREN BREWSTER: And it sounds like that disappoints you.

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, kinda sort of. [02:47:08]You know, it's -- you know, like I say, in the enabling legislation, you know, that was why the place was created. And the Wing Luke and the Asian or Japanese expulsion thing from Bainbridge Island.

KAREN BREWSTER: The internment memorial on Bainbridge, right?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, I mean, hey, that's nice. But uh, what's that got to do with the gold rush?

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Nothing.

KAREN BREWSTER: And has that happened since you left?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: And it was kind of funny because the Japanese internment thing, that had been being talked about. And there is a park over in Idaho where one of those --

KAREN BREWSTER: Minnetonka (Minidoka).

SEAN O'MEARA: Minnetonka (Minidoka). And the superintendent there, uh -- and he was a friend of Willie's, and he said, "Yeah. That's gonna be mine. That's gonna be part of my park, you know." And uh, so there was this arm-wrestling thing going on. Who's going to be in charge? Well, you know, "Ok, how about this? You can say that it's part of your park, but we'll provide the courtesy supervision." Or whatever. And so it's a Klondike employee who, I think, goes over there in the summer time, and uh, you know, that was one of those back and forth funny things.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh -- [02:48:34]But the Wing Luke --

KAREN BREWSTER: What is the Wing Luke?

SEAN O'MEARA: Asian heritage museum. It's --

KAREN BREWSTER: In Seattle?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, it's in the international district, and it's about the experience of people from Asia coming to the United States, and what kind of a life they -- they had. What they left, and what they got here. And certainly, they've played a big part in the building of the railroads and establishing communities, uh, in one place or another. And uh, often times not treated very well. And that certainly happened in the Chinese expulsion of 1885 down in Seattle, or anywhere.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Here in Bellingham, they expelled everybody of East Indian ancestry.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: Now there's a monument by the library, you know, some sort of reconciliation thing. And it -- you know, those people form a big part of the population.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And they played a role, certainly, at the time of the Klondike Gold Rush, too. And uh.

[02:49:45]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Well, I think if you think of the Seattle Unit, part of that story is the history of Seattle and what was happening here in Seattle. The Wing Luke and the Asian-Amer -- the Asian experience building up Seattle in that time period.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: That to me sounds like there might be some linkages.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, there cert -- there could be. There certainly could be. Uh, but to be honest with you, I don't know what has been done with that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: You know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Versus like the internment from Bainbridge to Idaho, I don't quite see how that has to do with --

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- the history of Seattle itself and how the city has grown up with the money that came from the Klondike and all that.

SEAN O'MEARA: Right. [02:50:34]Well, and there were other things that, um, caused Seattle to maintain the bloom, you know? The Boeing Company.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Shipbuilding. They had shipbuilding certainly during the gold rush, and uh, the computer thing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, but I know one thing, you know, when a teacher was calling to make a reservation, you know, they might ask, "Well, what else is there to do?" And I would say, "Well, there's the Wing Luke Asian Heritage Museum."

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: "And that's just a few blocks away. And -- and if you want, there's the underground tour." And for a lot of those kids, it was just a day out of school.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. [02:51:23]But sort of like you're saying is that the park has a role to tell a particular part of the story, and then those other institutions tell their own part of the story. The park doesn't have to tell everybody's story?

SEAN O'MEARA: No. Not at all.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: And anyway, so -- so it's -- it's a thing that's evolved, you know. I think that the people at the support office, they wanted to make the Klondike more than it was. Seattle's national parks hub, or something. And certainly the ORIC --

KAREN BREWSTER: Does that.

SEAN O'MEARA: Feeds into that, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Here's this information. And you know, they can say, "Well, oh, we're partners with Wing Luke." That -- that's now called a National Park affiliate site.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: I mean, they don't hang the arrowhead on their door or anything like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: No.

SEAN O'MEARA: But uh -- and I don't think there's any money changing hands.

KAREN BREWSTER: But, you're official partners or something?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. It's like the International Historical Park. It's just a warm, fuzzy.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: There's no money going back and forth. And uh, you know, it's just a (sound effect).

[02:52:49]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I was thinking of the Klondike story and how it relates to Seattle. Has there -- has everything been told that there is to tell about that, or there's still pieces of that story to root out?

SEAN O'MEARA: I think -- I think that the more people do research or do real -- real focused research, you can -- you can learn more. I think a lot of it in the -- in the line of personal stories. Personal stories. I was saying how the article -- there was an article on HistoryLink written, you know, sometime in this century, 2012 or something, by Paul Dorpat's associate. And part of it was based on a letter that was received, a descendent of this, one of the successful stampedeers. And so stuff like that comes to light. Or somebody's cleaning out an attic. And what are they

gonna do with this stuff? You know, would you be interested in it? And then, oh yeah, look at this. And uh, so it's a matter of making the information in the collection usable to the staff who are telling the stories.

KAREN BREWSTER: And to researchers?

SEAN O'MEARA: And to researchers. Even those non-NPS people.

[02:54:22]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that's what I was thinking. It's available to the public doing research? Or -- or historians?

SEAN O'MEARA: They -- they have to, you know -- they have to ask permission. They can't just show up.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, yeah. No, I mean, any archive.

SEAN O'MEARA: And then they're -- somebody's going to be assigned to be down there with them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, that's standard for any archive museum collection.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: You don't just open the doors and let people walk in.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, no. I mean, you've got -- people have different motivations for doing things. [02:54:52]And uh, oh, we had a partnership with the Northwest Seaport for a while. The tugboat Arthur Foss. That had actually towed a ship full of people up to Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: It had functioned during the gold rush. It had a different name back then. So we would station somebody on the tugboat on the weekend, and they'd hand out little blurbs about the role of the Arthur Foss, uh, during the gold rush. And -- and that's how that happened. And that's kinda partway how I came by one of my volunteers, a retired Coast Guard officer whose son volunteered in the engine room had recently graduated from the Merchant Marine Academy.

[02:55:44]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, it is interesting that you can still find little tidbits in whether it's the Klondike history or any history that leads into a new path.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Like the current rotating exhibit, which I'm assuming was done by students, is about the mail and letters.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh.

KAREN BREWSTER: And how people wrote let -- samples of letters and -- and talking about how the letters would have traveled, you know, dog team and things like that.

SEAN O'MEARA: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: You know, and again, like, you wouldn't necessarily think about that as a story to tell, but it was an important part of life for the stampedeers.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, when you think of how people communicate, that's um -- it is. And I - I remember seeing that in part of the collection that came from Bainbridge Island to us in a steamer trunk, uh, letters or more -- maybe more than one was written on the back of a poster or a flyer because paper was hard to find.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And they mention that in the exhibit, how paper was hard to find.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And they had somebody written on a piece of wood or a used envelope they reused for letter-writing.

SEAN O'MEARA: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: It was a very creative way to go into a different aspect of what seems to be an overly already-told story.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, it's -- it's really something with written communications. I've got a couple of friends, and that's the way they prefer to communicate.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: They uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: It's the lost art of letter writing.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yes, it is.

KAREN BREWSTER: It is. [02:57:23]Well, speaking of little tidbit topics, are there some pieces of the story that you wish you could've been able to tell when you were still there that you -- haven't been told, or you didn't get to do programs on?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, I don't know about that. You know, if I hadn't, then someone else would. You know, someone did a program about Klondike medicine and how people were prepared. Right there in the Pioneer Square area, there was a pharmacy that sold, uh, not only medicines but first aid kits and a manual, like a first aid manual. The G.O. Guy Pharmacy. And that's since been absorbed by Rite Aid or some darn thing. And then there was -- starts with a B.

KAREN BREWSTER: Bartell.

SEAN O'MEARA: Bartell's. And Bartell actually went on the gold rush, and that family's been very generous, too. And the wife of the current Bartell said, "If there's ever anything you would like to know, just feel free to call us."

KAREN BREWSTER: Nice. [02:58:39]Yeah, so you didn't have a particular pet topic that --

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, I kinda got involved with so much other stuff. I was, you know, whirling around and -- but I just thought it was kind of interesting. Like I said, I had done a program about the -- the law enforcement.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Both sides of the border, and how that was handled, and uh, hm, and the transportation and the boat building. It -- it's -- it was all interesting stuff to me. [02:59:24]And how the transportation in Seattle changed, you know, from the street cars and the interurban electric rail cars or mm, maybe they were self-powered.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Gas or something like that. But uh, it's kind of a -- that's a thing of the past, but now, you know, you've got the light rail coming in, and the street cars.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: They keep improving on that. So uh.

[02:59:58]KAREN BREWSTER: So did you have to do a new program, a new public program, every year?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, I think that was the intent.

KAREN BREWSTER: That you had to -- that each ranger had to create a new program for the next summer season?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, and uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: That's a lot of programs for you. That would've been nineteen programs.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, yeah. But it depends what your role was, you know. And in times of low staffing, you know, that took a back seat.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: And, you know, as I kind of shifted to a more supervisory type thing. And then it was a matter of quality control and mm, what do you call it? Auditing.

[03:00:44]KAREN BREWSTER: So you reviewed -- when you became more supervisory, your staff would create the programs, and you would review them before they made them public? Is that what you mean?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, yeah. At the -- the point came when they weren't -- they weren't really doing programs in the auditorium. But they were do -- instead, they were doing a walking tour, or they'd do a program on -- on a cruise ship.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: So for that, I'd do that. And then I'd go down to the ship with 'em a couple of times, and I'd make notes on -- on, well, their delivery and how they were making a connection, and also historical accuracy. And I'd point out -- I'd tell 'em what they did right. And, I mean, you know, like, you know, she'd say, "Well. You know, I think you did a good job with this, that, and the other thing, but here's what you need to -- " And so, she was good at that. Anyway.

[03:01:46]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, so when you started, you did those slide show presentations in an auditorium at the old place?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yep. Oh --

KAREN BREWSTER: But now they don't do that? They just put in a canned movie?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, they've got about three movies you could -- three or four, maybe. And one would be about hiking the Chilkoot Trail, and I think they might have gotten one. I don't know if they have one from Skagway where --

KAREN BREWSTER: There is a movie that they developed in Skagway. I can't remember what it's called.

SEAN O'MEARA: And I think we used the same people.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, and then there's a remake of "Seattle Gateway to the Gold Fields." That's about fifteen minutes. And then "Days of Adventure, Dreams of Gold." That has --

[03:02:33]KAREN BREWSTER: I think that's the one they use in Skagway. But I can't remember. But so that the interp rangers now aren't developing programs in the way you used to do it.

SEAN O'MEARA: I don't -- offhand, I don't think so.

KAREN BREWSTER: So what do they do?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, I don't know what they're up to now, to be honest with you. 'Cause I'm not there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, you know, Kelsey --

[03:03:03]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. She's still there, one of your angels?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. Yeah, she'd gone to Western, and then she went and got a master's degree, and we were able to (sound effect) ok, you've got a permanent spot.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's great.

SEAN O'MEARA: Now that was about the last thing I did. And uh, she has a program called In My Backyard that takes people from different backgrounds. To her credit, I mean, trying to make a connection with the under-represented population.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And get these folks interested, maybe, in the Park Service as a career, and also to have them in the visitor center. And so, that's pretty much what she does. But she -- she was just incredible with the kids. You know, they'd have these little volcanoes they'd make. (Lowers his voice) She could talk in a voice just like this, and they'd be paying rapt attention.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

SEAN O'MEARA: (Normal volume) Whereas other people would sayi (Louder voice) "If you don't listen to me, I'm going to throw this gold pan right at your head." Or something. You know, they'd lose it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: But she was very good with the kids.

[03:04:08]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, and yeah, I don't -- so in 2011 when you left, were the interp rangers still creating their own programs?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, if they had to go to a ship, they would.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: That was it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: They didn't -- they weren't doing anything in the auditorium.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: You know, unless somebody -- there was also another program called Northwest Notes, where they would try to have a monthly speaker.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And somebody would be in charge for making those arrangements.

[03:04:46]KAREN BREWSTER: So that was a speaker coming into the park to present on some relevant topic?

SEAN O'MEARA: Right. And so, some of those were pretty good. And I think that program where we had the jazz singer come in during that exhibit, that was a Northwest Notes thing. That was probably one of the best-attended. Another one was, I had the photo historian Paul Dorpat come in, and that was also very well attended.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, it would be.

SEAN O'MEARA: Others, not so much.

[03:05:17]KAREN BREWSTER: Because, you know, I'm trying to make the distinction also between interpretive rangers versus the education program. That there's education staff now, right?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or when you left, was there? Or it was still all that was overlapped with the interpretive rangers.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, somebody would be responsible for, you know, keeping that schedule --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: -- up to date and accurate. Like a hotel, avoid cross bookings.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And then developing the activities and things, that was done by one of the rangers?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or was there an education specialist?

SEAN O'MEARA: There would be, you know, Marc Blackburn and then Tim Carly were the ed people.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, but the other people would also have a hand in it, you know, like say, "Hey, we've got a school group coming in, so if you want to be at this station or whatever, that station." And that's what -- that's what you're up to.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. [03:06:31]But it sounds like in the earlier days, that was all handled within the interpretive ranger group, versus now there's maybe somebody who specifically has the education coordinator title behind their name?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, that -- that could be.

KAREN BREWSTER: With that change.

SEAN O'MEARA: I don't know how they've changed it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: I just don't. And uh.

[03:06:57]KAREN BREWSTER: But I guess I'm getting to the point that when you started and in your early days, everybody kinda did everything.

SEAN O'MEARA: Kind of.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. It was pretty small staff.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yep, it was. And uh, but there've been some people who've -- who had gotten their start at Klondike and moved on to superintendencies and so on. And moved up the ladder. Moved away.

[03:07:26]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And that's why your -- your being there for nineteen years is unique in some sense in the Park Service. Maybe at the staff level, it's more common than the superintendent level. But the fact that you stayed.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. It -- it was. It was just a kind of a fluke. I mean, I really -- I like it -- I like it up here. And uh, uh, I just -- I guess, like Dave Minaglia said to me a couple weeks ago. We went to REI to buy some shoes, and I hadn't seen him for a while, and he says, Yeah, I like my job, but I'm not here for the money."

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And I wasn't there for -- really, for the money. I mean, it's worked out over time, you know. You get the step increases, and then when I was acting superintendent, I had these term appointments, and uh, you know, four-month appointments, and that helped out my retirement, but you know, I wasn't -- I wasn't really in it for the money, uh.

KAREN BREWSTER: You did it 'cause you loved it.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, I did. And you know, I can't -- I can't imagine working for many other government agencies. Maybe the Coast Guard.

KAREN BREWSTER: So do you remember what years you were acting superintendent?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or what --

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, I could probably tell you, and it would be -- OK, if Willie passed away in July 2002, it would've been in 2003 for, you know --

KAREN BREWSTER: A few months or something? Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: A few months. And then about three -- three-plus years would pass, and then Debbie Conway moved on. And so, (sound effect) another three to four months.

KAREN BREWSTER: So 2006-ish?

SEAN O'MEARA: Something like that. And then uh, and if any of them got a detail for a shorter period, then I might --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Not necessarily moved up. I didn't get a pay increase, but --

KAREN BREWSTER: No.

SEAN O'MEARA: And then, uh, but I would have the authority or whatever.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[03:10:06]SEAN O'MEARA: But -- and then when Karen Dorn left, let me see, that would've been around the beginning of 2011 or so, I -- I had a -- you know, I was acting there, and then Rory Westberg called up, and he said, "I've got some good news and bad news." He said, "Bad news is your -- your -- your acting appointment is coming to an end. But the good news is, I'm going to advertise it as a GS-12, and I'm going to pick you." So I had that until Jacqueline Ashwell came on board.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you didn't work with Jacqueline?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, for a couple months.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: She was there when I retired.

KAREN BREWSTER: You retired. Ok. [03:11:04]Um, are there things that um, you would consider some of your greatest challenges of the job?

SEAN O'MEARA: Challenges. Um. Mm, oh, accepting different ways that the Park Service wanted things done. They -- they instituted a thing called interpretive competencies. These various little programs you would have to re -- make recordings of and send in to Harpers Ferry, and they would send it out to different people who had gone through a course, and now they were certifiers. And they could pass on whether you did a good job, according to the NPS guidelines, or not. And one of my friends was friends with the ed special -- an ed specialist from Nebraska. And she got a job at Joshua Tree National Park. And she submitted her paperwork and her video for the competency in education. And they said, the polite euphemism was "approaching competency." Was, you didn't get it. And I would've written back and said, "Well, you know what? Up yours because I got the job. How about yourself?"

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, you know, that's just -- [03:12:50]That's another thing. Another time, there was a fellow out here in this network who was one of the big movers. This is the way you do these programs, you know. You gotta do this touchy-feely stuff. Ok. And then one day, this group of women came into the park and they said, "Say, what are your tangibles in here?" And another one said, "Well, and better than that, what are the intangibles?" And they were making fun of how you were supposed to do it, because this guy worked at the park they came from. They were here. And they told me there was this old, retired guy who was a seasonal, and he'd come to that park for decades. And people just flocked to his shows. And he didn't go by those guidelines at all. So you know, I saw that as, ok, you take somebody who doesn't know how to tell a story, and uh, they've got to adhere to all this stuff. And oh, I guess that's kind of small potatoes. You know, I mean, you have to work within a system, and so you can't say, "Well, I don't like the whole damn thing." I mean, you may as well go out and find another job, then.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, it was what it was. And I was just really proud of it. And uh, oh, I don't know. [03:14:21]As far as things I was proud of, you know, my hand in the exhibit design, and being part of the Trails & Rails program, and the -- the cruise ship thing. That was -- that was all good. And -- and just retaining a terrific bunch of volunteers and -- and seasonal employees. [03:14:49]I mean, there were times in the early days when I'd see a particular car parked in front of the museum, and I'd be walking -- I'd gotten off the bus, and I'm walking across Occidental Park, and I'd think, "Oh, God. Keep your head down."

KAREN BREWSTER: Because it was a regional person or --

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: It was something in administration you didn't want to deal with?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. There were -- You know, some pot or another was starting to boil over, and, you know, there was unpleasantness in the wind, and so. [03:15:30]But, you know, that's the trick, though, with wherever you're working, you know. As we talked earlier, you know, you just have to be able to deal with those people. And uh, and not go nuts. I had a -- we have friends. He retired from the Air Force as a colonel, but way -- way back when, he was in Germany, and he was a lieutenant. And I asked him, "Well, how's it going?" He said, "Well, my boss, the major, is a bit of a jerk. But, you know, within three years, one or the other of us will be transferred."

KAREN BREWSTER: You have that in the military, yes. That's true.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so, the military, that's the way that works. And uh, well, when this place was viewed as a training park, it was almost the way it would work.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[03:16:21]SEAN O'MEARA: And I don't know, maybe they've changed that now since they increased the pay grade, which is a travesty, I think, but --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um, as we've said, that's common in the Park Service at the superintendent level. To advance in your career, you move around a lot. Now, what do you say about it, it's a travesty, that the pay grade?

SEAN O'MEARA: That the pay grade went up, and I don't know if the park got an increase to its base.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, I see.

SEAN O'MEARA: You know.

KAREN BREWSTER: So if they did not, then the superintendent could be taking more out of the pot?

SEAN O'MEARA: That's right. And the people down at the desk, they're getting less.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: I mean, that's a good possibility.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, we don't know the -- how that's working.

SEAN O'MEARA: Mm --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, maybe you do? You're suspect.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, when the button's turned off, I'll tell you how that --

KAREN BREWSTER: You suspect how that's working, ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: I know how that worked.

[03:17:15]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, well, you just told me what you're most proud of. Are there things that you wished you had done differently? Or things you wished you could have done that you didn't get the chance to?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, possibly -- well, once again, I was bal -- I was balancing the family versus the job. And uh, although -- and my wife worked for the State of Washington. She was a social worker.

KAREN BREWSTER: Here in Bellingham?

SEAN O'MEARA: Here in Bellingham. She had an opportunity to go to Olympia, and I said, "Erh, Olympia." I shouldn't have said that, but, you know -- That would've been a local move. She probably would've gotten more money and had more responsibility. But as for myself, I looked at the other parks in Washington, and well, I shouldn't say anything bad about any other communities, but they can't really hold a candle to Bellingham. They can't.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And they're pretty rural. But they, nonetheless, those parks do appeal to people, and I know people who've spent their whole careers -- it's kind of like Klondike Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: They've been there a long time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh.

[03:18:42]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and you found your place at Klondike Seattle. You were there for a long time, and that's what you connected with.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. And uh, it's kind of funny, back east in Richmond, Virginia, there was Richmond National Battlefield Park. And I saw one time, when my mom was still alive, there was a position in Petersburg, Virginia, where there was another battlefield, a cannonball park. And I -- I said, "Well, let's drive down to Petersburg and see what this looks like." I said, "I'll bet you in the visitor center, they've got some sort of a map, and it says, 'and over here there were five thousand dead Rebels and over here a thousand dead Yankees.'" And by golly, that's what they had. And uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: You know your interpretive stuff.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so I thought, who wants that? Well, my mom's dad was a Union soldier. I've got his papers and his picture and everything. It was all up and down the Mississippi. And uh, I certainly was well-informed about him. And uh, he was a German immigrant. And then I asked my dad. He was from West Virginia. What side were your people on, Dad? And he said, well, they had two flags. It depended on who was in town. Well, that was not true. I found out much later that his great-grandfather was a Confederate soldier, the guy that came from Ireland.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And was up and down the Shenandoah Valley, and I thought, "Geez. Maybe I could've worked at Monocacy Battlefield or something?"

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Because I was -- was related to somebody.

[03:20:23]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. But if you -- are there things that you, as you say, regret or wish you'd had a chance to do at Klondike Seattle?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, well maybe if I'd been younger or something, and, you know, could've been the superintendent and had more of a hand. But, you know, I liked what I did. And I -- I liked being able to be downstairs as well as upstairs. You know, it was kinda the best of both worlds. If I hadn't done what I had done, I may not've run into some of these people. And uh, you know, I liked it.

[03:21:03]KAREN BREWSTER: If you hadn't done this job, can you imagine what else you would've done as a career?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, well, I had been a SCUBA instructor. It got cold.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. That's one thing you sort of age out of a little bit sooner, maybe?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, and, you know, there are parks that have dive teams, and because I was a master instructor, I probably could have been in charge of the dive team at a particular park.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, I mean, I'd had a lot of experience with that. But, you know, (sound effect), that was over with, and um --

[03:21:38]KAREN BREWSTER: So you did -- before you started working for the park, you said you were a stay-at-home dad, and Boy Scouts, and stuff. You were also doing diving instructing or just -- ?

SEAN O'MEARA: Just before the kids came along, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, you know, so there was a -- kind of a perfect storm of that job being over, and our -- my dad passed away, and our first son was born three months later.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so, you know, that's when the gears shifted.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And I still kept teaching SCUBA for the police and for the college PE department and so on.

[03:22:26]KAREN BREWSTER: But how did you get into SCUBA, through the Navy?

SEAN O'MEARA: No. At that point, you know, I had no interest in it. I did see a Navy diver at work. I'll tell you that story later.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: But I -- a friend of mine, a classmate of mine up at Western, he and his wife had the SCUBA equipment. And I said, "Well, what's this stuff all about?" You know, we went to dinner there one time and he told me. And so my final quarter up at Western, I took a PE -- not -- it wasn't a PE. It was a dive class through the YMCA.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And we moved away, moved to Seattle. And when we came back so my wife could go to graduate school, I got into the diving a lot more then and helping with classes. And uh, became an instructor myself. And, you know, was -- it was a lot of fun. Met a lot of good people. It had -- it, too, has its ups and downs.

[03:23:28]KAREN BREWSTER: I was just looking at the notes about things we were going to talk about that -- And Karl had mentioned about the earthquake and the move to the Cadillac Hotel.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh.

KAREN BREWSTER: And we haven't really talked about the details of that.

SEAN O'MEARA: Ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: Then we said the earthquake was 2001, I think.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. So can you talk about that happened and how that affected the park?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, I will. It's -- on the day of the earthquake, and I can't recount the precise date.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, we'll have to --

SEAN O'MEARA: Fill that blank in. but, uh, I was working with my former supervisor from San Juan Island that day, and a school group came in. And we put 'em into the auditorium, and, you know, pushed the button and away they -- away that went. And all of a sudden, one of these big murals hanging from the ceiling started swaying back and forth, and other things started shaking. And uh, we realized what was happening. And like everyone else in the neighborhood, we opened the front doors, and got the -- opened the auditorium up and said, "Ok kids, follow us. Out -- we're going over across the street." You shouldn'ta left the building. [03:24:43]And it was kind of funny because a month or two before that, a guy came in, I said, "Well, you work in the neighborhood?" And he said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, what do you do?" And he said, "I'm a structural engineer." And I said, "Well, how do you think this place would fare in the event of an earthquake?" It had these massive Douglas fir beams, uh, that held everything up. And he said, "I think this place'd do pretty well." And by golly, it did. Just a little piece of sandstone trim fell off from about -- right above the first story, and I found it on the pavement. And if that thing had hit you in the head, you'd be goner. And uh -- [03:25:23]Well, anyway, the Cadillac Hotel, meanwhile, being built in 1889, it -- it -- it was one of the most-affected buildings in the Pioneer Square area. It looked like somebody had hit it with a couple of rockets. There were bricks all over. It ruined somebody's car parked out in front. It -- it was just a mess. And at the time, the building wasn't being fully utilized. There were probably people camping out upstairs, and the lower -- the street-level floor and the basement were used as a kind of a night club. Um, you know, and there were Captain Morgan Rum posters hanging up there and everything, and it was a -- but that was a -- that was an evening-time thing. And it was lucky that the earthquake occurred during the day when, I think the only person in there might have been the bookkeeper. And that place was just totally fritzed. [03:26:32]And the owner was a relatively new guy. I mean, it just trick -- changed hands. And he -- he was about to -- the wrecking ball was coming down the street. And somebody kitty-corner from the Cadillac Hotel, uh, I think the King County Historic Preservation officer or somebody, looked out and saw that and went out and said, "Hey. Hold it a second. Let me make a phone call." And they called Historic Seattle. And Historic Seattle then got in touch with Dr. Stephanie Toothman, who was the regional chief of cultural resources, later on the national chief of cultural resources. She's retired now. And she's back in Seattle. And they hatched this plan whereby Historic Seattle would buy the building from the owner, and if the National Parks would become the key tenant. [03:27:42]And prior to that, there'd been a couple of different ideas put forward for a more permanent home for the park. One was in a warehouse on one of the docks, and oh, it would have lots of parking space for school buses and things like that. Well, that didn't work out. And uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: Because the place on Main Street was not adequate? Was that why they were looking for someplace else?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, it was rented. Well, and still, this is rented, but now from Historic Seattle. And there was gonna be a move to purchase it during Jacqueline Ashwell's watch. She went down one floor to the uh, the chief of the Land -- Land Resources Division, and they had a -- they had a talk, and she did not want to purchase the building from Historic Seattle. Historic Seattle kinda sorta wanted to keep it for the rent money they'd get, and that would enable them to pay for other projects.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Preservation projects they had. And so that's what happened after I left.

[03:28:59]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. But when they moved from the -- you said they were thinking about moving from the original --

SEAN O'MEARA: Union Trust Annex.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- Union Trust building. Was that -- why did they want to move from there before even the Cadillac?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, I think one reason was the Union Trust Annex did not exist at the time of the gold rush, and it started out as a cracker and candy factory.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: And funny enough, the occupant of the second floor, sometime after I'd arrived there, was the uh -- uh, somebody frozen foods who marketed the Klondike bar.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And all we got one time was a small case of Klondike bars. But that was ok.

[03:29:49]KAREN BREWSTER: So the park was not satisfied with that building location? They wanted something more cul -- more historically appropriate?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yes. And uh, but, you know, the interior, like so many other buildings, you know, you've got a new tenant, and you model to suit them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so the interior kinda sorta looked pretty nice. I mean, it was supposed to mimic an upper deck of a river steamboat, the mezzanine level.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And it had a -- an auditorium with over 100 seats in it. And it was -- the auditorium could accommodate more people than the present one does.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so, the seats you see in the new auditorium were removed from the old place and the excess ones went to the junk pile.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And, uh, along with some of the displays -- or the mural of the steamer Portland. But ok. [03:30:54]So the day the earthquake happened, you know, was -- that was a big deal.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And the park was closed for a few days until an inspector could come by and say, yeah, it's safe. And the damage was really pretty minimal. One door frame was slightly out of kilter, and there might've been a crack, but those things were easily repaired.

KAREN BREWSTER: And the exhibits survived?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Things didn't fall off the exhibits?

SEAN O'MEARA: No. No. No. It -- it worked out really well, and uh --

[03:31:28]KAREN BREWSTER: So then the Cadillac building had to be restored.

SEAN O'MEARA: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: So how did that happen?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, well, Historic Seattle got a loan from KeyBank, which is headquartered in Cleveland, and uh, many years later -- well, anyway, the KeyBank people came to the Cadillac to see what their money had done. "So, is there anybody here who lives in Lakewood?" That's where I went to high school. And uh, so that all went forward. And you can see pictures on the internet of the damaged Cadillac.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, you -- you have it in the exhibit, too.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. And so, uh, you know, it was --

[03:32:20]KAREN BREWSTER: Did they use a historic architect to follow plans on restoring --

SEAN O'MEARA: They did.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- to the correct time period or however?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. They did. And, I mean, it's an incredible building. If you didn't go upstairs, then you wouldn't have seen, but on the second floor, there's a -- I don't know what the -- there's a walkway around this --

KAREN BREWSTER: Atrium?

SEAN O'MEARA: An atrium. And uh, you know, and then there are skylights in the ceiling. And uh, it's -- it's really a very pleasant place to work, I think. I thought. [03:33:03]And so, on the second floor, the tenants are the Land Resources Division and Discover Your Northwest. The cooperating association is there. And uh -- uh, you know, there'd been some back and forth, who's gonna be in here, the public, or the private, or whatever. And so happily, everybody's kind of involved with the Park Service. And Discover Your Northwest is the cooperating association for just about all the parks.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: There's a couple of exceptions. And uh -- and they're -- they're good people to work with. Most of that crew has been there for a very long time, too.

[03:33:55]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Um, so -- so, yeah, so the basement and the first floor are the public exhibit areas.

SEAN O'MEARA: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then the second floor is this --

SEAN O'MEARA: Is office space.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then the third floor?

SEAN O'MEARA: Office space and the -- the -- the --

KAREN BREWSTER: Collection storage?

SEAN O'MEARA: The collection storage is gonna move up to where the part of the regional library had been. At the -- the alley end of --

[03:34:25]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, you said there had been a regional library that is --

SEAN O'MEARA: Gone.

KAREN BREWSTER: Gone.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: But there's still a Klondike-related --

SEAN O'MEARA: Library.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- resource library?

SEAN O'MEARA: And it's probably kept in there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: I mean, they could -- theoretically, they could move that, and I wouldn't be surprised if -- unless they have a specific build-out for the collection, cover the windows or something like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, they could move the library into another large room.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: In fact, next to my office, there was an office space where about three or four people had desk space. And the uh, the current chief of interpretation is in my old office. Well, the people who were in this larger office, they all moved down to the -- the library to be out of the sight of the boss.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And um, anyway.

[03:35:32]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so how long did it take before the Park Service was able to move into the reconstructed Cadillac Hotel?

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, I think the -- I did some looking up, and I said the -- I saw the building was dedicated in 2006.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, but so there was a -- I mean, everything had to be pretty much completed. I mean, some people like uh, the Land Resources Division, they could move in. I mean, 'cause they didn't have exhibits to move.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Originally, in the old federal building, the Park Service support office had two and a half to three floors of people. And now there's one wing. The rest have been transferred or retired.

KAREN BREWSTER: Now, are they in the Cadillac building, too?

SEAN O'MEARA: The -- only the land resources people.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. OK. The rest of the regional and service people are still in the federal building?

SEAN O'MEARA: Right. And Discover Your Northwest, they had been at the old federal building, too.

KAREN BREWSTER: OK.

SEAN O'MEARA: So those two groups, they were moved over.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. The rest of regional was still -- now were they affected by the earthquake, the regional offices?

SEAN O'MEARA: Not so much.

KAREN BREWSTER: No.

SEAN O'MEARA: Not so much. And uh.

[03:36:50]KAREN BREWSTER: So it could've been -- if the building was dedicated in 2006, that's like five years or so?

SEAN O'MEARA: It took -- it took a while to do the deal of --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. The lease.

SEAN O'MEARA: Ok, will, you know. You know, will you buy this? Can you get a loan and get the contractors? Oh, it's -- I'm sure it's written down someplace who the architects were.

KAREN BREWSTER: So did Park Service historical architects consult, or were they involved in the process?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, I'm sure they were. There was a guy who, mm, oh, what in the heck -- the historic architect at the support office at the time, yeah, he -- he was involved. You know, those people do get involved.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And there was a guy who was the head curatorial guy. He worked for Stephanie Toothman. But he retired. And then, let me see if I can --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, in that admin --

(Sounds of microphone being moved or bumped)

SEAN O'MEARA: This isn't the admin history, but uh, oh, there've been so many projects, too, that -- [03:38:13] You know, there was the -- the George Carmack home. The guy who found the gold.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: He bought a house up near, uh, oh, one of the -- one of the hospitals. I don't know if it's Virginia Mason or Swedish or something. And this was owned by an old Ukrainian woman, and I mean, this is the house the guy lived in. Well, there were other interests who stood to gain by the sale of this place. The hospital wanted to buy it, make it part of the parking lot, and somebody went in there and vandalized it. Took all the architectural --

KAREN BREWSTER: Decorations?

SEAN O'MEARA: Decorations out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Aw.

SEAN O'MEARA: Fireplace, bannisters, all this stuff. Made it much less desirable. And uh, it was going to be a -- a preserved thing, but -- and so, some effort had gone into that, but that never happened. [03:39:22]And oh, I wish I had the -- kind of the admin history because the guy who was the historic architect, he had been involved with --

(Door opens)

UNIDENTIFIED MAN (Sean's son): Hello.

SEAN O'MEARA: Hi, Ted. He'd been involved with Klondike Skagway when it was created.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: He had gone up there --

KAREN BREWSTER: Was that Dave Snow?

SEAN O'MEARA: Nope. No.

KAREN BREWSTER: It's ok.

SEAN O'MEARA: I uh -- it happens to everybody.

KAREN BREWSTER: It does. It does. We can look that stuff up.

SEAN O'MEARA: The names fade out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yes.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so, he was involved to some extent.

KAREN BREWSTER: That was on the George Carmack house?

SEAN O'MEARA: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: Well, he -- he probably would have weighed in a little bit. There was another historian, a gal named Gretchen Luxenberg who was more involved with that. Uh, she -- she's the one who mostly did a lot of the National Historic Site things.

KAREN BREWSTER: The registration things. [03:40:27] So did that George Carmack house become a Park Service thing?

SEAN O'MEARA: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: No.

SEAN O'MEARA: It -- the, you know, after the vandalism, and we -- we -- there was an idea of who might've had this done, and uh -- 'cause I think that the concerned parties, they didn't want to go through the rigmarole of, oh gosh, now we can't do anything with it because it's on the register.

KAREN BREWSTER: Register, right.

SEAN O'MEARA: They just -- they just wanted their money. And that was that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh --

[03:41:04] KAREN BREWSTER: But so the move into the Cadillac Hotel, you think that's been a good thing for the park?

SEAN O'MEARA: Pretty much, yeah. The exhibits got vastly improved, and it was because of that move that they got improved.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And, you know, a lot of -- a lot of good things happened because of it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Such as?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, well. Well, coincidentally, there was a change in leadership, you know. Um, let me see, that -- oh, the change in leadership, that happened a few months after the earthquake. And, oh gosh --

[03:41:56] KAREN BREWSTER: So not everybody in the Park Service administration was supportive of moving to the Cadillac Hotel?

SEAN O'MEARA: I think most of them were, with this exception.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And, so once he --

KAREN BREWSTER: But despite that exception, it continued to move forward?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: That person was overruled?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yes. Yep. It was. And uh, and really, I mean, the idea that people who were going on the gold rush had stayed in that hotel, in that very building.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. That's pretty cool.

SEAN O'MEARA: It was -- the building has its own story aside from the gold rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, anyway.

[03:42:36]KAREN BREWSTER: So were there any downsides, negatives, that -- the result of now being in this different building?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: Compared to the old one?

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, I think not really. Parking's always been a thing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: You know, and now it's even more of a thing because there's a street car that goes down Jackson Street.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Right down the middle, so no more on-street parking.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right in front of the visitor center, right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Right. Yep. And uh, things have come and gone. [03:43:09]You know, it's nice to have the Park Service -- the fire department as a neighbor. Jan Hughes, one day after I'd retired, she -- she wasn't feeling good. She picked up the phone and called the gals in the adjacent office and said, "I'm not feeling so well." And they said, "Yeah, and you're not looking too well, either." And they called 911. They came right over. "You're having a stroke."

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

SEAN O'MEARA: Took her to the hospital. If she -- she lives on Whidbey Island. If she had gotten on the train and had that stroke, she'd be a -- a cabbage now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so -- And one time I had a -- a little episode, and they called the fire department, and um, it's -- it's just very convenient. And there was a couple of heatstroke incidents at the old place. But the fire department. [03:44:00]And later on, you know, after we had moved, all this -- these letters were still --

KAREN BREWSTER: That sign, yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: They were still up above the entrance.

KAREN BREWSTER: The old building?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. And so, I thought, gosh. So I went over there with a ladder and one of my -- one of my employees who worked -- had retired from Seattle Parks. He was able to unscrew some of these bolts, but the ladder wouldn't go around the awning.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so another one of my volunteers said, "Why don't you just walk down and talk to the fire department?" And they brought the hook and ladder truck, put the ladder up, and somewhere I've got a picture of a fireman coming down the ladder with the word "gold" in his hand. And, but if you look real close, you can still see the shadow of those words. And the words themselves are down in the basement.

[03:44:55]KAREN BREWSTER: I'm surprised they didn't take the whole sign down.

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, well, there's a similar sign that says Union Trust Building right here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, I see.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so, the words were -- each word is screwed to two horizontal pieces. I think they're cast aluminum, painted gold.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so those -- each word was screwed to the background there. But it was easy enough to remove them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, it was a -- it took a while to fix up the building, to put the structural supports in, and uh.

[03:45:39]KAREN BREWSTER: And get all those exhibits designed and in place?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yep. There was a short period of time there where we really didn't have much in the way of exhibits. We just had the movies and so on. But then the exhibits arrived, and that was that. And uh, but it all -- it all worked out. That was -- that was quite a project.

[03:46:03]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, and moving the collections, too. Quite a project.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah. Shifting everything over. It was --

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you remember how long that took?

(Cell phone rings in the background)

SEAN O'MEARA: Um --

KAREN BREWSTER: Somebody's phone.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, that was another thing.

KAREN BREWSTER: About how -- moving the stuff.

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, well, everybody had to uh --

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN (Sean's wife): I think your battery's dead or something.

SEAN O'MEARA: It probably is. It needs -- plug it in. But everybody had to pitch in and help. There was the matter of taking things out of the drawers and moving cases over, and uh -- what I'm trying to think, where was the -- where was the storage at that point?

KAREN BREWSTER: Up on the mezzanine?

SEAN O'MEARA: The mezzanine, yeah. It's -- yep. That's where it was. And that was really a pretty small office that it was located in. And so things grew, you know. Then they were able to acquire more.

[03:47:17]KAREN BREWSTER: And so, did -- it was Tim or Keith who oversaw that transfer of materials or the collections?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: And directed all of you guys to -- ?

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. It -- yeah. He -- he was. And uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: Which one was it? Was Tim?

SEAN O'MEARA: I think -- I think it was -- I think it was -- I'm trying to think. Was it Keith? Uh, it -- it may have been -- it may have been Tim. I'm -- 'cause I'm trying to think, where was -- where was Tim's office at that -- ? Now I know where he was at the old location, so he was on board at the old location.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: He was probably -- very well could've been Tim.

[03:48:07]KAREN BREWSTER: Because moving a collection, you have to do it very carefully and keep track of the objects and the materials from one place to the next, and --

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: So somebody, I was assuming, was sort of supervising all that.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, and I don't remember when Brooke started. I -- I remember her involvement was once we were already in the Cadillac Hotel.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh -- but once again, at that time it was at a different place than it is now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: It's in the basement.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: It was up against the wall where the alley is.

[03:48:47]KAREN BREWSTER: So but, you remember about how long it took to move the offices and the collections and everybody into the new building?

SEAN O'MEARA: It -- it definitely probably took a couple of weeks or more, you know. And there were professional movers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. And uh --

KAREN BREWSTER: So you weren't walking down the street with boxes?

SEAN O'MEARA: Uh, a little bit. A little bit. There was some of that. And I -- it was kind of neat, I -- just before Debbie Conway showed up, I had the only completely private office in -- in that building.

KAREN BREWSTER: The old building?

SEAN O'MEARA: That had floor-to-ceiling walls. The rest of the walls, when they built out the second floor, they only were three-quart -- they were like partitions.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

SEAN O'MEARA: Three-quarters high. So um, uh, you had to -- you had to be aware of who was on the other side of the wall.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[03:49:53]SEAN O'MEARA: One time an offensive remark was made about the admin person or the computer person.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And she was working on -- on a computer on the other side of the wall, and she said, "Yeah, I'm that inefficient I/T person you were talking about." But uh, so -- so I felt pretty lucky. And then, of course, I had my own office at the Cadillac.

[03:50:20]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Well, this has been great, Sean. You've talked for a long time. You must be exhausted.

SEAN O'MEARA: Oh, no. I could --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um.

SEAN O'MEARA: If you thought of anything else.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I was going to ask you if you've thought of anything else that, you know, or when I brought up this idea, there are certain things or memories you wanted to be sure we talked about.

SEAN O'MEARA: Mm, can't think of it. We've covered so much of it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I know, it's a -- nineteen years is a long time to cover in just a few hours.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah.

[03:51:00]KAREN BREWSTER: And I know there's sensitive topics that I could tell you were trying -- you know, how you talk about 'em. And so there's things we can and cannot talk about, for sure.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah, it's -- you know, I'm kind of reluctant to step on anybody's toes. Some of those people are, um, let me see, at least two or three of them in that -- in these photos are still working. And in that photo --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, you said those -- Dot's still working.

SEAN O'MEARA: She is, and she may be a seasonal.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: She works for Federal Trade Commission, and I think she might be over in Montana somewhere, not with the Park Service.

[03:51:56]KAREN BREWSTER: So you've launched quite a number of other people's careers, in a way.

SEAN O'MEARA: Yeah. Yeah. It's -- you know, when I -- when I was a student at Western, one of my favorite instructors had been a seasonal ranger at Acadia National Park, and in almost every class I took from him, in the slide programs he'd do, he'd say, "Oh, it was a great job, but you know, it's almost impossible to get on with them." And I thought, "Well, if that's what old Smith says, why bother to try?" And if I hadn't listened to him, I probably could've put in a lot more time. But uh, I -- I really don't have many regrets the way my life has gone. The kids have turned out fine, and we're still married, and got a lot of good memories. [03:52:54]But uh, what I would tell people, and I've been to a couple of job fairs, I said --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: You know, give it a -- give it a go, and I'd tell them what they could do to make that a little easier, to volunteer, you know. Because I think it still holds true. If people have an idea who you are, they're gonna choose you. And if you've performed well, they'll choose you over an unknown quantity.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[03:53:25]SEAN O'MEARA: But the hiring practices, I guess, have changed a bit. Used to be, uh -- well, I remember when this one called me up and said, "Are you hiring anybody this summer?" And I said, "Are you a student, by chance?" And she says, "Yep." And uh, "Where do you live?" And she told me it was nearby. And I said, "Well, bring in your resume and then your letter of enrollment."

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And uh, pa-ting. And uh, they -- they jacked up the pay grade. She was doing the admin function for Klondike and also for San Juan Island.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

SEAN O'MEARA: And so then she became a 9, but then she got this thing as an 11-12 at Federal Trade.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

SEAN O'MEARA: So.

[03:54:17]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, is there anything that you can think you would like your legacy to be? Or how you'd be remembered from your time at Klondike Seattle?

SEAN O'MEARA: Um, oh, I don't know. I guess I like to be thought of as a helpful person, and, you know, somebody who facilitated some careers for people. Gave 'em pretty good guidance.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: And kept some good programs going.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: Ah, but I certainly am not going to be able to say, yes, the move into this building was my doing. Maybe a major hand in some of the exhibits, but, you know, that's ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

SEAN O'MEARA: I was just doing my job.

[03:55:13]KAREN BREWSTER: That's right. That's right. Well, it sounds like you did it -- your job well, and you enjoyed it.

SEAN O'MEARA: I did.

KAREN BREWSTER: So. Well, unless you have anything else?

SEAN O'MEARA: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: We can call it a day.

SEAN O'MEARA: That's -- that's that.

KAREN BREWSTER: All right. Well, thank you, Sean.