NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
VOICES ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
NOAA HERITAGE AND THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID KENNEDY
FOR THE
NOAA 50th ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY
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TRANSCRIPT BY
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Molly Graham: This begins an oral history interview with Mr. David Kennedy for the NOAA 50th Oral History Project. This interview is taking place on Thursday, September 30, 2021. It's a remote interview with Mr. Kennedy in Madison, Virginia. The interviewer is Molly Graham, and I'm in Scarborough, Maine. Because this is a remote interview, I'll send you the release separately, but I just want to confirm I have your permission to record.

David Kennedy: You do. You should know that there's a little bit of a lag when you say something and then apparently when I say it back, so we need to make sure we give just a second or two between talking.

MG: Yes, I'm noticing that myself. Well, if you could start at the beginning and say where and when you were born.

DK: I was born in Oskaloosa, Iowa, and that would have been June 24, 1947.

MG: I was curious about how your family settled in this area and if you could trace your family history starting on your mother's side for me.

DK: Mother's side, I can't trace it very far back, but it's Scotch-Irish, I think. But my grandparents were farmers, small-time farmers in rural Iowa. My father's parents were just working-class folks, who worked in, I think, just basic industry in and about Iowa.

MG: Do you know what generation came to Iowa?

DK: No, I don't know. I've never really traced that. As far back as I know, the folks were there, so, no, I haven't gotten very far back.

MG: What about your father's side?

DK: So, I was mentioning my father's side, working-class folks, born and raised in the small town of Oskaloosa.

MG: When you say working-class, in what industry did they work?

DK: Well, the last that I can recall, and this is probably fuzzy, but there was a major hydrant valve industry in my small town. The water valves that you see all over the country, actually, are manufactured there, and I believe my grandfather worked there. My father was in the newspaper business his whole life, starting as a paperboy. I've still got the bag that he used to deliver his papers and worked his whole career in the local newspaper, [and] ended up, I think, as foreman of the composing room of the little newspaper.

MG: Did he have a particular beat? Politics? Education?

DK: No, no. He was actually producing the newspaper. When I say foreman of the composing room, back in that day, they actually made the type for the stories to print on the newspaper, so he wasn't in the reporting end of it; he was actually producing the newspaper each day.

MG: Did he ever share any stories about his work or news stories that stood out?

DK: Not really. It was fascinating how much I used to visit there. This is where the type was upside down and backward and made from molten lead and put on a roller to actually then print the newsprint – my, how times have changed since those days. I can remember my father coming home with burns from the molten lead splashing around as they were actually creating the type. He had to be able to read upside down and backward. Beyond that, no, I don't have any major stories to tell; I don't think.

MG: Was your father college-educated?

DK: No, he was not. My mother was a registered nurse and did her whole career in nursing of one kind or another. I think she ended her career in obstetrics; she was head of an obstetrics ward at the local hospital.

MG: Do you know how your parents met?

DK: No, not really. I vaguely remember that my mother, I think, maybe was a nanny or taking care of kids. My father and she were someplace around a local park, and I think met that way, but I don't remember for sure.

MG: How did they spend the World War II years? Was your father in the service?

DK: My father was 4-F. I can't remember. Maybe it was eyesight problems, but he was exempt and stayed and worked in a newspaper during World War Two. Many of my relatives served in one form or another. Both my mother and father had extended families. So lots of aunts and uncles – and many of the uncles did serve in World War II in one form or another.

MG: Did you have any relatives who worked in the coal mines in Oskaloosa?

DK: Not that I'm aware. Maybe way back in work histories, there could have been something, but I don't remember any discussion. I'm aware of the coal mines. I had a friend whose father actually owns several of the strip mines in and about Oskaloosa. Near where I lived, we actually had underground tunnels of one kind or another that I heard about that were related to coal. But I don't think I had any relatives that I'm aware of that were involved in that. How do you know about coal mines in Oskaloosa?

MG: I just was reading about the town in my research for your interview.

DK: Okay. Well, good for you. You probably know more about Oskaloosa than I do then.

MG: Well, I know it's a very small town. I was curious what it was like to grow up there and if you could describe the town a bit.

DK: Well, it was a town of maybe fifteen thousand people. Farming was really the big thing in and about the community. As I mentioned, there was a little industry, but basically, it was a farming community. We had a town square. If you were researching it, maybe you saw the bandstand in the middle of the square and the primary businesses all around the square and maybe a block or two off. But a very small town. At that point, [there were just] local businesses; we didn't have the big box stores. Do now but didn't then. So, a community where you knew an awful lot of the people, and you knew an awful lot of what was going on around you.

MG: Was that a good thing or a bad thing? If you'd get in trouble, would someone tell your mom?

DK: I can recall it being a bad thing. [laughter] There were a couple of incidents that I was involved with that got back to my parents because of the community. So, that was a bad thing. I guess I didn't greatly appreciate it. Looking back now, I don't greatly appreciate having grown up in a small-town community, but on the other hand, having not lived in big cities, I guess I would much prefer that very small-town life over big cities. I've not been overly impressed with the big cities that I've lived in.

MG: Can you tell me a little bit about the neighborhood where you grew up and where your home was?

DK: Just a typical small-town neighborhood. Lots of ranch-style homes, small, not big, no McMansion or anything even close, two- and three-bedroom homes, on the edge of town, not right near town. Lots of kids my age and above and below and lots of neighborhood playing going on with enough folks to make baseball teams to play against each other and get into all kinds of mischief. So, pretty typical small town, out on the edge of town community with lots of working-class folks. The neighborhood I was in certainly wasn't affluent by any stretch of the imagination.

MG: Do you have any siblings?

DK: Yeah, I have two sisters, both younger. I was the oldest. I have two sisters, one three or four years younger than me, and then another about twelve years younger than me.

MG: That's a big gap.

DK: That is a big gap. As a result, I ended up having to babysit my little sister. That was no fun.

MG: Any stories stand out from your babysitting experience?

DK: No, no. Just that I was twelve years old and always wanted to do stuff and [had] a little tiny sister to take care of. It wasn't terrible. She and I got along pretty well – no big stories.

MG: Can you tell me about your education there in Oskaloosa, the schools you attended?

DK: So I just went through grade school, junior high, and high school. In grade school, they had regional schools, and I attended one close to my home, and then junior high was more central, and then the high school, which was out on the edge of town. Traditional education, nothing special. I was involved in all the sports. I played basketball, football, track, kind of stuff. So, pretty traditional.

MG: Any classes that you particularly liked or teachers that stood out to you?

DK: So, I'm a jock, okay? Big football player and all of that. But one of the groups that I got involved with was the thespians. I actually really enjoyed being in theater production, just not out front. I did sets and stuff like that but was interested in and involved in theater.

MG: Well, tell me more about your involvement. Do certain productions stand out to you?

DK: I don't remember the play at all. That was a long time ago, remember? But like I said – well, first of all, I really liked the teacher. The teacher and I got along really, really well. She was a young woman that related well to kids. Again, I was behind the scenes. I helped develop sets and pull curtains open and shut, and all that kind of stuff. But I don't remember any of the plays at all. I just was thinking, and it hadn't really registered, but after I graduated, I worked in Yellowstone National Park for a couple of years, and we had a group that did productions for the tourists. I actually did get on the stage at that point, and it was a Shakespeare play. I can't remember exactly which one. But somehow, some of my interest stuck, and I actually did participate in a production one year in Yellowstone.

MG: How was it received?

DK: Very well. Of course, tourists are kind of bored in the evening. After the sun goes down, they can't look at Old Faithful, so they want something to do. So, coming around and watching a bunch of kids put on a Shakespeare play, yes, it was very well-received, and a lot of camaraderie with a group, the kids. It was all college kids there that were doing the production – a lot of camaraderie there. It was very fun.

MG: In my research for this interview, when I was reading about Oskaloosa, I saw a picture of Cold War-inspired playground equipment in a local park. So, I was curious what your awareness of the Cold War was at the time and how much that impacted your psyche as a young person?

DK: I don't remember. The only thing I do remember is duck and cover under your desk. I do remember that. But beyond that, boy, I'm not familiar with the reference that you're giving there. So, all news to me. You do remind me that my grandfather worked on WPA [Works Progress Administration]. That was prior to World War Two, wasn't it? The Public Works stuff that went on.

MG: Yes, the 1930s.

DK: It was the '30s, yes. He was involved in that, I believe. But I don't remember the Cold War really at all. I remember [Nikita] Khrushchev and [John F.] Kennedy and [Richard] Nixon and that whole thing, and Khrushchev pounding the shoes on the table and all that sort of thing. But a reference to more than that, no, I don't have it.

MG: Do you know in what capacity your grandfather served with the WPA? Was he working in forestry?

DK: He wasn't in forestry. It was local work in the community. I can recall our cemetery had some cement structures that were not just cement blocks, but nicely designed wet cement and waves and curls and things like that, that I was told he was involved in working on. It was local work in the community. He wasn't out somewhere in forestry or anything like that.

MG: Were your parents politically minded at all?

DK: I don't remember growing up in high school that much of their influence or discussion about politics. Once I had left home and came back, it was very clear that they were Republicans and didn't want all Democratic spending, autonomous government, all that kind of stuff. But that was long after I was gone. Growing up, I maybe was more active. I think there's a picture somewhere of me with a Kennedy campaign button pinned on my shirt. So if there was thought of politics, nobody really influenced me all that much other than just what I was thinking myself.

MG: You must have been a junior or senior in high school when John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

DK: Yes, I was. I can't remember junior or senior. But I remember distinctly being in a classroom at the high school, having the announcement made, and then school being dismissed. A bunch of us friends climbing into a car and going out in the country and just sitting around just shaking my head, saying, "Oh, my God, what happened here?"

MG: What was your awareness of the Vietnam War as you were graduating?

DK: I went to college first to a little place called Northeast Missouri State, just a little state college in Missouri for one year, and then ended up at the University of Northern Colorado, in Greeley, Colorado. So, Vietnam was going on. As I got ready to graduate, ironically, the head of the draft board lived next door to me in my little town. I didn't want to go to the war. I was against it and was trying to weigh my options, so I went to my next-door neighbor and talked about going to graduate school and getting a deferment to go to graduate school. I did get accepted to graduate school at Arizona State. So, I let her know that, and a few months later, I got my draft notice that my friends and neighbors had selected me to become part of the military. At that point, I thought about draft-dodging, but I didn't. My family was real strong, stalwart military supporters. I just decided I didn't want to do that. So, I looked around and tried to get the best option I could. I did not want to be an Army grunt on the ground. So, I went to the Navy and Air Force and other places, and I took all their tests. The Air Force said I did very well on the tests and wanted and said that I could go to the Air Force and wanted me to be a pilot. So, I enlisted in the Air Force instead of going to the Army.

MG: I want to back up just a little bit. Somewhere in my notes, I have that your parents really insisted that you find work that made you financially secure. I was curious about what kinds of conversations they were having with you. What did they want you to do when you graduated from high school?

DK: That's funny. So, my parents, my mother in particular, always had told me that I was so smart and capable, but that I didn't apply myself, that I was an underachiever. As I got ready to graduate from high school, the sentiment was, "Because you didn't apply yourself academically, we're not sure you ought to go to college. Maybe you should go to a trade school." I didn't do that. I went to this Missouri college. But then the pitch was, "Well, if you're going to go to school, you need to get into something that will be very stable and financially beneficial for you. We sure hope that you will understand that you want to get into business administration." I wasn't very good at taking their advice, but I did in this case. So, I enrolled as a business major, and then I joined a fraternity and spent most of my time fooling around with the fraternity and not going to school and had extremely poor grades and didn't really care for business administration. At any rate, then I transferred to the University of Northern Colorado, signed up again for all of the business administration courses, and in the first semester or two, took an elective course in anthropology and loved it and was just really captured by the concepts and the cultures and what have you. So, my next semester, I signed up for all my business administration courses, came home, thought about it, and said, "This is crazy. I hate this." I went back and dropped all my business and redid my major to anthropology. My grades went up to 3.54 from there on out. I ended up with a degree in anthropology, which my parents said, "What the hell are you going to do with that?"

MG: What was your answer?

DK: I said, "I didn't know." I was sitting around between classes with professors, talking concepts and – "What about this?" and "Maybe we should think that?" I felt like I probably would end up as a college professor. As I mentioned, I had been accepted to graduate school. That's where I was headed before the draft got me, and I ended up going to the Air Force.

MG: Can you say what about anthropology intrigued you?

DK: I think I'm just fascinated by different cultures and how they work and the people associated with them, and the diametrically opposed approach to life that goes on in so many different parts of the world. I felt like I had my eyes opened up about religion and the role that it played in different cultures, US involvement in other cultures, and the damage that they conducted, all supposedly for the good of the nation and every place else. There's just a variety of things that really fascinated me about it. To this day, I'm involved. In fact, I'm very close now, working with indigenous cultures to be involved in Arctic research. That's one of the real interests that I have and am pursuing. That part has stuck with me all along, even though I've really wandered way off of becoming a college professor in anthropology.

MG: There's a lot of overlap with anthropology and oral history. Did you ever have a chance to do interviews such as this?

DK: No, not really. In fact, I'm surprised at the depth that you're going here, and I wonder what that will get you. But this is interesting. I'm enjoying it.

MG: Well, you are an eyewitness to a time and place that I wasn't around for. So all of this is very interesting to me.

DK: Okay, good.

MG: It seemed like the 1960s was really the heyday for cultural anthropology. Margaret Mead was very popular then. Were you expecting that there were lots of options in this field?

DK: Yes, indeed. Of course, Margaret Mead was one of the gurus, and in a good deal of the work that I did in getting a degree, Margaret Mead played some role or another. Yes.

MG: What else stands out about your time at the University of Northern Colorado?

DK: What stands out about it? Well, it was the heyday of hippies. It was just all sorts of activity and protests, just a whole lifestyle that I guess I remember more than anything. I really was drawn to that. In fact, while I was at Colorado, I made a couple of trips out to San Francisco to hang out in the Haight-Ashbury district and try and be a part of that whole thing. That was the life that I lived while I was there and nothing terribly outstanding that I can think of – a lot of parties, a lot to hanging out with the right folks, a lot of protests, and what have you. So, quite a change then when I graduate and end up down in San Antonio, Texas, up against a wall with my head shaved, becoming an Air Force person. [laughter] Big change.

MG: Was there ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] on your campus? Was it a requirement for male students?

DK: No, it wasn't. I'm sure it was on the campus. I was not involved with it in any way. I was, once I graduated and enlisted in the Air Force, selected to go to Officer Candidate School, and that school was in San Antonio, Texas.

MG: Remind me what year you graduated from college.

DK: I think it was '69. I'm pretty sure it was 1969. Yes.

MG: Those were some heavy-duty years, particularly on college campuses. I was curious what those social movements looked like where you were.

DK: So, Greeley, a small town near Boulder, Colorado – Greeley was a more conservative town. It was kind of a rancher-farmer town, huge stockyards surrounding it so that the smell of cattle was around most of the time. There, maybe more muted in terms of being right in the middle of the heyday of hippies and protests. But thirty, forty miles away was Boulder, Colorado, the University of Colorado, and it was like Haight-Ashbury Midwest or kind of West. It really was into the scene, big, big time. I spent a good deal of time in Boulder, on what they called the Hill,

which is in the middle of the campus and where there's restaurants, bars, and what have you. There's a famous or infamous, depending on who you were, a place called The Sink, where everybody hung out that was anybody that wanted to be a really cool hippie. So I spent a lot of time in the Sink.

MG: How would you spend your summers in college?

DK: The first couple of summers, I worked in Yellowstone National Park. I was everything from a dishwasher to a bellman to a reservations clerk. After that, I worked in construction. I worked in Colorado on a dam project, building a major dam and reservoir, and I was just a kid on the side of a mountain with a jackhammer, cutting out rock. [laughter] So, that's what I did.

MG: How did that position materialize? What brought you there in the first place?

DK: I had a good friend who – and this dam and reservoir were on the other side of the mountain. So, you've got the plains and then the Rockies and then the rest of Colorado on the other side. I had a good friend who was well-connected in Grand Junction and Glenwood Springs, Colorado, which is where this construction project was headquartered, and he got me the job.

MG: I know you were heading towards graduate school, and you would end up in the military. But did you have a particular focus of your research or something you planned to study?

DK: No. Although at that point, at Northwest Arizona State, Northwest tribes and Indians were probably my interest at that point. But no, it's more of a general education degree.

MG: Would you have a chance to go back to school to take any classes later in your life or career?

DK: It's interesting because when I went to the Air Force, a couple of things – one, I felt like maybe I could have the Air Force allow me to do some more education around anthropology. There was a very small organization within the Air Force that was anthropologically oriented, but it was more around the construction of seating, how to fit people into aircraft, and that kind of thing. It wasn't really looking at cultural issues. The other thing is that, as I mentioned before, when I enlisted and did all the testing, I was told that I tested very well for an aptitude for pilot. So, when I went to officer training school, you were in a dorm room, and they had the names of the people in your dorm room and what they were going to be. For me, they had me going to pilot training. At some point, after I had been in officer's training school for a while, I went to whoever my supervisor was and said, "You know, I really don't want to be a pilot. I'd like to do something in the Air Force that relates to my education. I'd like to talk to you about that." The response was – this is Vietnam War, right? – the response was, "We need pilots. We don't need anthropologists. If you don't want to be a pilot, we're going to send you home and put you back into the draft." So, that's when I said, "You know what? I think I'll be a pilot."

MG: Tell me more about the training.

DK: The basic training is lots of physical activity, but it's also understanding military rules and regulations and how it works. There was a good deal of propaganda about the Vietnam War and how incredibly lucky we as candidates were to be getting into the Air Force and serving in Vietnam. They would actually have fighter pilots come and narrate films from fighters fighting other aircraft, Russian MiGs, and what have you, with all the – "You got a bogey at five o'clock. Dive, dive, dive." We would all sit in an auditorium and listen to those kinds of videos to prime us to be prepared to go off to war.

MG: Ultimately, did you ever go to Vietnam?

DK: I never did. The closest I ever got was towards the end of the war; we were sending a bunch of aircraft and supplies to Vietnam with the idea that you got it from here, which was just all ridiculous. I ferried some aircraft partway to Vietnam. But then other pilots picked them up and actually flew them into Vietnam. So, no, never got there.

MG: Can you say where you went instead?

DK: Well, I went to Midway, which is where we dropped off the aircraft, and then somebody else picked him up from there. It was an interesting experience.

MG: Tell me more about that.

DK: Well, Midway is obviously a major blip in the history of World War II and the Battle of Midway and small islands with airfields and lots of military facilities and gooney birds [Laysan albatross]. You fly onto these barren islands with a few palm trees and lots of these crazy birds. It's a beautiful, beautiful setting, but you're out in the middle of nowhere, and you have a sense and feel of the history of the place. I don't know whether you ever watch old World War II documentaries, but some of the documentaries of the battles that went on around Midway are pretty fascinating. Of course, they destroyed most everything there. Then, you had the ship battles and the aircraft carriers, and what have you around it. So, an interesting experience.

MG: Yes, I've interviewed a number of World War II veterans, some of whom served in that area. Instead, you were sent to Alaska.

DK: Yes. That experience was interesting and a story that I do tell quite often because, as I've mentioned, all through the officer training and then pilot training, there was no question that you were being – there was an attempt to brainwash, to really, really feel like, if you were going to make anything of yourself, you had to end up in Vietnam. So, at the end of pilot training, I was not at the top of the class; I was probably in the middle of the class. The way it worked is a whole block of aircraft would be presented to the graduates. Depending on where your rank was, in graduating, you had your choice of aircraft. The majority of the very high-placed candidates in my class picked fighter jets that would go to Vietnam. So, we do this selection in a big room with all of the graduating classes and their families. Then, it's like a lottery kind of thing, where you got somebody that stands up there and says "F-4, Tan Son Nhut, Vietnam. Joe Blow selects this F-4." The whole crowd goes [imitates cheering]. It goes on like that, it gets down to me, and I see that there is the possibility of flying a C-130 in Alaska with an extended tour. By this

time, the Vietnam War has been going on for a while, and I'm thinking an extended tour means it's considered an overseas duty, and it's a three or four-year tour. I'm thinking, "Okay, the Vietnam War has been going on for a long time. Three or four years in Alaska? As opposed to having to set myself up to have to go to Vietnam, I'll select a C-130 to Alaska," and I did. I'll never forget this. This, again, is families and everybody. So, "David Kennedy, C-130 to Alaska," and there is this, "Aww, you poor guy." [laughter] While many of my comrades were getting killed in Vietnam, I was salmon fishing and enjoying the gorgeous Alaska scenery and mission. It was a really, really interesting mission. We get a lot of flying into remote parts of Alaska. We had the only aircraft in all the Air Force that had skis, and we flew back and forth to Greenland and then flew out onto the ice cap, which is part of my interest in the Arctic. So, I had a fantastic mission. Interestingly enough, as the years went by, and some of my classmates would come back from Vietnam, or wherever and happen to stop through and see me, they would say, "How did you get this assignment? Wow, what a genius." The only real reason I got the assignment is I didn't do very well with being brainwashed.

MG: I'm surprised it wasn't a more coveted duty.

DK: Well, it wasn't at that point. Again, the whole culture was, if you're going to be a hot shit pilot, you need to prove yourself by going to Vietnam.

MG: You said it was an interesting mission. What was the mission? What was the nature of your duty there?

DK: It was a variety of things. At that point, there were a number of Distant Early Warning [DEW] sites located in very remote parts of Alaska, but generally, up on the mountainside with radar domes and then some sort of facility at the bottom. We did all the resupply to all of these sites out in very, very remote Alaska on interesting airfields, many of them with precipitous angles on the side of the mountain, where you had to land going uphill. Once you had gotten so close to the airfield, there's no way you could actually go around; you had to land or crash. We worked with the Army and did a lot of paratrooper dropping and cargo drops and stuff like that. Then we had this mission to Greenland, where there were three radar sites on the ice cap in Greenland, and on our skis, we would fly out and resupply all their fuel and supplies, take people on and off, and what have you. There are probably other things, but those are the majority of the kinds of things we did.

MG: Were there ever any accidents or hairy situations?

DK: Yes. I was involved in – so, when we would go to Greenland, we would take two aircraft, both with skis, and one was the backup for the other. On one of the missions, I was the backup aircraft or the one that wasn't going out onto the ice cap. The other aircraft, in trying to land, stalled out and crashed onto the icecap. I was the aircraft then that had to go out and rescue the crew, and there were a couple of people killed. That was probably the closest I got to a real accident. I never had one myself.

MG: What was the rescue and recovery of that plane like? It must have been very harrowing.

DK: Well, it's interesting. Yes. So, now this aircraft has crashed out on the ice and snow at an elevation of around nine thousand feet. But it's not destroyed. In fact, a couple of people did witness the crash, and there was a huge fireball. But because the fireball was with the aircraft, landing on the snow, all of the fire was absorbed into the snow and ice. So, it didn't burn the airplane. It damaged some of the fuselage and a couple of the engines. But they actually went out with maintenance people and were able to fix the airplane and ended up eventually flying it out of there. Pretty incredible what they had to do in those kinds of conditions to actually repair the plane, but they did and flew it away.

MG: Did that change anything for you, you know? Did it give you a sense of fear or vulnerability?

DK: No, not really. The main takeaway really was there was a set of procedures that you used when you were flying on the ice. Your depth perception is very, very limited. The ice and horizons are all blended. When you were landing out there, you had a procedure where you couldn't dip your wings when you needed to make a turn; you had to keep the wings level because you never quite knew how far you were off the ice and snow. If you tipped the wing too far – so, all of your course corrections, once you're trying to fly down this marked-out snow airfield, were done with your rudder. I don't know how familiar you are with a plane, but basically, a rudder is a big flap that's vertical on the tail of the aircraft. If you push your rudder, you can yaw the plane and get it to move over. What happened is the pilot got on the final approach, was quite a ways off the centerline, and so was pushing really, really hard on his rudder to make the correction to get over to center himself on the runway. He had what had never happened before and what's called a rudder fin stall. Basically, he turned the aircraft so far sideways that the wings weren't generating the kind of lift they were if they were directly into the airstream. So they're turned so far sideways, they quit generating lift, and the plane just dropped out of the sky. All of that is the background to say that in the end, they blamed the pilot for this, even though it had never happened before, and his guidance was that you had to use your rudders and not your wings. From that, I learned that if you did have a problem, you probably were on your own, and you weren't going to get a lot of support because somehow they were going to make you be the one to be to blame, not the aircraft or procedures. By the way, I have a hard stop at 10:30. Do you have a watch or a clock?

MG: Yes. I'll keep an eye on the time. You were in the service for five and a half years. Was that two tours of duty?

DK: What happened is once I got into pilot training, at some point about mid pilot training year – it was a year, a year and a month or two for pilot training – the Air Force announced that they'd done a cost-benefit analysis of the expense required to train you to be a pilot, and you had a four-year assignment plus the year that you were in pilot training. So, you had an obligation of four years plus your pilot training. But the Air Force announced that the cost-benefit analysis said that they weren't getting enough out of you with the four years plus your [pilot training]. So they just arbitrarily said, "Surprise. You now have an extra year commitment to us. We're not going to let you go at four-plus. It's now five-plus. There wasn't anything you could do about that, apparently, and so I had an extra year. But at the end of the Vietnam War, they started a whole series of early outs, they were called, where they would release people from their

commitment because the war was winding down. Even though pilots were last on the list, eventually, they went around to offering pilots an early-out, and I took one as soon as I could get it. But I had already served at that point for five and a half years.

MG: What year was it that you got out of the service?

DK: I don't know. Let's see. Five and a half? I think it was 1976, the middle or late 1976, somewhere in there.

MG: I read that the Air Force was working to support the National Science Foundation during this time. Was that while you were in the Air Force? I'm curious about the connection to the work you were about to do and how that happened.

DK: Yes. Well, that's interesting that you would pick up on that because, in fact, that's what really launched me into a career and NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration], and what has kept me interested in the Arctic because while I was in Greenland, I did support the National Science Foundation [NSF] on a number of missions. They were doing ice cores to try and determine climatology and a variety of other contamination and pollution issues. I became pretty close with a couple of the primary scientists that were working for NSF that were out of the University of Washington. I began to talk with them about, "Hey, I'm going to get out of the Air Force. I'm wondering if there's anything I could do with you guys." Eventually, that led to them referring me to a gentleman who was, I think, the research director at the Environmental Research Laboratory [ERL] for NOAA in Boulder, Colorado, a guy by the name of Joe Fletcher. If you haven't researched him, he might be somebody interesting for you to take a look at. He, too, was an Air Force pilot, but he was a real creative, interested-in-science guy and always thinking outside the box. He left the Air Force, but he generated a research program on an ice island in the Arctic called T-3, or Fletcher's Ice Island. He was one of the developers instrumental in developing that research program. Basically, it was an ice island that floated around, and they had a whole research camp on it. They had all sorts of measurements. But what happened is that the NSF guys from the University of Washington referred me to Joe Fletcher, who contacted me and said, "Hey, I understand you're just getting out of the Air Force, and you might be interested in something." I said, "Yes." He said, "I'd like you to be a Hurricane Hunter pilot for NOAA." I didn't want to do that. I became a pilot, but I was never that enamored with being a pilot. I wanted to do something else. I said, "No, I don't want to do that. Do you got anything else in mind?" That led to him referring me to a NOAA-run program at the University of Alaska, called the Outer Continental Shelf Environmental Assessment Program. Even though I had decided – I had a VW [Volkswagen] bus – I was going to go to Mexico and be a hippie, he convinced me that I ought to instead go to the University of Alaska and take a job with the Outer Continental Shelf Program. So, I did an abbreviated trip to Mexico, and then I came back and took this job working for the University of Alaska but working on a NOAA program. That's what got me introduced to NOAA.

MG: It's very interesting that you had this hippie mentality and interest in the lifestyle with this Air Force experience. I'm trying to picture what you looked like back then.

DK: [laughter] Well, as soon as I got out, I grew a beard and had my hair long. As you can see, I have a little problem growing hair long anymore, but I have kept a beard ever since I got out of the Air Force. That was my one token hippie experience, I guess.

MG: What was Mexico like at that time? What was that trip like?

DK: I was in Puerto Vallarta for the most part. I did a couple of trips out to little villages and hung out there. This is back when a bunch of hippies were out living rural, very out of mainstream life. So, I visited some of those things, but it basically was more vacation than anything else. It wasn't really a life experience. It was lying on the beach and hanging out in Mexico.

MG: Is there anything we're missing up to this point, up to when you join the Geophysical Institute?

DK: Probably. [laughter] But I can't think what it would be at the moment.

MG: I was curious just what your impressions of Joe Fletcher were. He was someone that you would interact with a couple of times in your career. What was he like?

DK: Well, he was a mentor to me. We were kind of brothers in the bond. We both had flown. It turns out that one of the missions that I had on a regular basis was actually to fly over T-3, this ice island, to resupply it, so it was all airdrops. We had a lot of common ground. He was a very accomplished guy and well-respected in the scientific community and at NOAA. I certainly looked up to him, and we talked often. I can't remember specific things. I can't remember asking him for advice, but he was very interested in my career and what I was doing, and we kept close for quite some time. In your research, did you run across Joe Fletcher?

MG: Yes, I definitely did.

DK: You did?

MG: Yes, I was curious about him. You mentioned him in an interview.

DK: You were pretty thorough in all of this. That's right.

MG: I do my homework. Was the Hurricane Hunters program fairly new at NOAA, or had it been in existence for a while? I thought it came out of World War Two, actually.

DK: It had been in existence for a while. How long? I don't remember, but it wasn't brand new at all. By the way, I have since, as I moved up in the ranks and became somebody who could say, "Hey, I'd like to try this," I wanted to try to fly into a hurricane. So, I went down to Miami and got on a NOAA aircraft and flew into one of the big hurricanes."

MG: Did you do that with Dr. McFadden?

DK: No, I did it with – who did I do it with? Jack Hayes, who was the director of the Weather Service at that point.

MG: What was that experience like?

DK: It was a little bit of a letdown. You're flying along, and you go through the [eye] wall, and you shimmy and shake and bump. But really, I wouldn't equate it to anything worse than some of the severe turbulence I have experienced in flying on airlines. Then, you get the eye, and that's very impressive to be able to be in the eye and see the eye all around you and the calm and the ocean below. What I didn't like is that these guys were very thorough. We had gotten into Miami at one or two in the morning and had to get on this airplane at about six in the morning after that. So, three or four hours of sleep. They went out and reentered the hurricane five different times and so got kind of tired of going in and out and in and out of the hurricane. But it was a great experience, and I'm glad I did it.

MG: What was the position that you had at the University of Alaska? What were your duties?

DK: So, I was a research facilities coordinator. That basically meant they had – I forget how many – thirty, forty, fifty at least, research units. A research unit was a scientific topic. That could be observing bowhead whales in an aircraft. It could be setting up a camp to monitor ice floes. It could be doing biological studies in a remote lagoon. In most of those cases, they needed to have camps or logistics or aircraft. In some cases, we designed and built vehicles that would go over the tundra and not damage them. My job was to coordinate, facilitate all the needs of the logistics and planning for all the research units that would go out into the field.

MG: Were those research units under the Outer Continental Shelf Assessment Program, or was that one of the areas of research?

DK: It was under the Outer Continental Shelf. There were two or three different parts of the Outer Continental Shelf, and one was in Southeast Alaska. Then, this one was for the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas. So within Beaufort and Chukchi Seas, that arena was managed by the University of Alaska for NOAA. That's where all of the research units that addressed those two oceans were housed.

MG: I was reading about the Geophysical Institute, and it had a really interesting foundation, which reminded me of your path. It had a military background and an interest in natural science. Can you tell me a little bit about history if you know it?

DK: I don't know much of the history. I just kind of wandered in and got accepted as part of the team. We had a wonderful guy by the name of Dr. Gunter Weller, a German guy who managed the program and was one of their very early, early folks looking at climate change in the Arctic. Great respect for him. But in terms of history, we had volcano experts and satellite experts and all those kinds of things. But I really don't know much about the history.

MG: I had read that it was formed – go ahead.

DK: Are you going to lead the spilled oil reach team?
MG: I had a couple more questions about the geophysical Institute, but if you'd like to move ahead, we can do that.

DK: Go ahead. I'm not sure I'm going to answer them but go ahead.

MG: Did you get to know Sidney Chapman, who the building is named for now?

DK: No, not at all.

MG: How long were you at the Geophysical Institute?

DK: It wasn't all that long. I should have looked up my timeline. What happened is – maybe two years at the most. What happened is I did get involved in this spilled oil research team. I became kind of a major player with them. Then I got offered to take on the leadership of that program, which was located in Boulder, Colorado. I was not at the Geophysical [Institute] all that long before I accepted the job to go back to Boulder to head up this team there. Two years, maybe. I don't know – something like that.

MG: Tell me more about the team in Boulder. I forget the group there.

DK: Yes, it was the Environmental Research Labs.

MG: Well, tell me a little bit more about that and how you got involved in the oil spills.

DK: The way I got involved in the oil spills is there was a research unit in my Outer Continental Shelf program that was designed – at that point, most of the oil spill research was done in laboratories. In other words, we'd take different kinds of oil and test them in a lab or use a wave tank or whatever. The concept here was, we need to get some real-time data and information on oil once it's spilled into the real world. As a result, this research unit was formed. The idea behind it was, let's have a cadre of folks located around the country who we train to take basic measurements in an actual spill. So, when there is one, we will take team members, and we'll have them have flyaway kits, if you will, (Halliburton?) cases with instrumentation, current probes, and all sorts of other things, and they will go – whoever is nearest will go to an oil spill and take these measurements. That will really enhance our ability to understand what happens with oil in the ocean. So they asked for volunteers to be trained to be part of that research unit. I was in the middle of it. So, I volunteered. I got the training. Early on, we had a couple of oil spills that I was one of the closest people to, and I ended up going. In short order, I was one of the few people within the research unit who actually had been to a spill, had experienced what it was like, had taken measurements, and could talk about, "Okay, here's what we need to do next to expand this." Out of that came an acknowledgment by NOAA that they wanted to have this team be more formalized and organized. They asked me to become the new director, in large part, because of the experience that I'd already had in going to oil spills and performing some of what the research unit was trying to do. So. I moved to Boulder and took over as head of the program.

MG: What was the name of the program?

DK: The Spilled Oil Research Team, SORT.

MG: You mentioned you had real-world experience. Was that in 1977 with the transatlantic pipeline spill?

DK: I can't remember, but '77, '78, in that range would be about right.

MG: Were you tasked with forming the team for SORT?

DK: Yes. We had a core group that organized and continued to develop the protocols, the instrumentation, chain of custody – there was just a whole variety of things that needed to be hammered out. We had two or three PhDs. We had oceanographers. We had a variety of folks that were part of the core team. Then we had recruits located around the country that were trained like I was initially. We began to get a real structure, where we had what we called scientific support coordinators, SSCs, located in different parts of the country that could quickly go to the Coast Guard, who was our primary customer/client, set up shop, and then bring in the expertise from our core group to begin to develop the research and actually execute.

MG: Was SORT the precursor to the Office of Response and Restoration [OR&R]?

DK: Yes, it was. What happened is over the course of the first several oil spills that we went to, we would show up, be pretty well-organized, have a real plan, have data that we were generating that the Coast Guard was interested in. The Coast Guard began to turn to us when we would show up and say, "Hey, we'd like you to help support us and be part of our team," and "Hey, we have all these other researchers that are screaming at us to do this, and that, and another thing. We can't evaluate whether what they want to do is legit and whether we ought to try to support it or not. So we would also like you to do an evaluation of other researchers that are coming up." As a result of that kind of dialogue back and forth with the Coast Guard, we sat down – "we," this core team, primarily know folks, but not all; there were some contractors – and developed a program, where we could have the scientific support coordinators regionally, where we would have a set group of experiments and data that we would generate, and where we would set up protocols to interact with the Coast Guard formally and other agencies. So, me, along with a couple of other NOAA folks at ERL, basically built the program. Then we had to sell it to NOAA. We had to sell it to other agencies and sell it to the Coast Guard. But eventually, it was formalized, got its budget, and became the Office of Response and Restoration.

MG: How long did you stay in Boulder?

DK: Let me think about that for a minute. Another two or three years, I guess. Another couple of years, maybe. I'm pretty fuzzy on this. What happened is when I was in the Air Force, I flew back and forth between Anchorage, Alaska, and an Air Force Base in Tacoma, Washington a lot. As I flew in and out of there, I ended up being vectored over a group of islands called the San Juan Islands. Is that in your research? The San Juan Islands are a string of islands off the Washington coast, the northwest tip of Washington, and Vancouver Island – gorgeous little

islands, about five or six served by ferry or aircraft only, no roads. I had been flying back and forth over them, looking down at these beautiful islands. Eventually, I was so taken with them that in one of my stops in the state of Washington, I got a real estate agent, and I went to the San Juan Islands, and I bought twenty acres of land one day. So, I had this property on the San Juan Islands, a raw piece of land, nothing on it. Now, I'm in Boulder, Colorado, and I still have that hippie taint to me. I decide that I want to go to the San Juan Islands and homestead or build a cabin, have some livestock, some goats, and make some cheese. So, I got an agreement to allow me to go and set up as a contractor in an office in the San Juan Islands and still work on oil spill stuff, but to be on the San Juan Islands and live out my dream of building a little homestead. I only stayed a couple of years in Boulder before I coerced everybody to let me go out to the San Juan Islands.

MG: Isn't that where the Office of Response and Restoration would be based eventually? In Seattle?

DK: Correct. What happened is Scoop Jackson, the senator from Washington, funded a huge complex for NOAA on Lake Washington and where the spilled oil research team, OR&R, was located in what then was the NOAA headquarters and ERL. NOAA was told that they needed to find a way to fill the beautiful facility that Senator Jackson had built on the lake with NOAA programs. So, this program was tagged to be moved to Seattle.

MG: Can you talk a little bit about the oil spills you attended in the 1970s and '80s? I'm wondering if there's any that stand out before Exxon Valdez?

DK: Oh, sure. Yes, there were a lot. That was the one-off of – excuse my age and memory, but there was the big oil spill off the coast of Massachusetts. That was really the beginning of our very, very significant involvement spills. What was the name of that? Have you got that in your research?

MG: No, I'm sorry.

DK: At any rate, there was a major spill off of Massachusetts that we got deeply involved with for months. That was the first landmark event that we attended and were deeply involved and really worked very, very carefully and closely with the Coast Guard and got a tremendous amount of reputation and applause for what we did there. There was, off of France, the *Amoco Cadiz*. We went there at the invitation of one of the French science organizations and spent a lot of time working on the *Amoco Cadiz*. There was the big blowout in Norway, near Stavanger, where [Paul] "Red' Adair and Boots & Coots – that whole era, the John Wayne movie of these oil fighters [*Hellfighters*], but they were real. So, at that point, we were still trying to learn more and more about oil spills. We had this really supportive director of ERL, who, when we would say, "Look, there's a spill in France. We think we can learn a lot if we go," he'd say, "Hell, yes. Go." So, we did some of the major first spills in other countries. I've been to dozens and dozens of spills throughout the US over the years. I became a scientific support coordinator for different regions of the country throughout my development. I was not the director of the Office of Response and Restoration for quite some time; others did that. I was a regional science support coordinator. I did that for the southeast. I did it for Alaska. I can't remember if I did it for other

places. But throughout that, we began to routinely go to spills. I don't know. We probably did fifteen, twenty spills at least a year or more.

MG: What are the special considerations you need to make when working on international oil spills?

DK: Permission from whoever the governing bodies were to be there, a connection with the folks that would have logistics to allow us to get on helicopters and airplanes, especially if the spill was out in the ocean, our State Department, obviously, and in many cases, the embassy where we were going. I referenced the blowout in Norway. I was put on a plane without a passport to go over there. The embassy met me and issued me a passport when I arrived in Copenhagen or wherever it was that I went. We had close relationships with all those people.

MG: Remind me who was the director of ERL at the time that was so supportive of these efforts?

DK: I got the name of Bill Hess, H-E-S-S. He was quite a character, larger than life kind of character, and he went on – I think he ended up – what's that big circular thing for checking on nuclear issues? At any rate, he was a great guy. That was his name.

MG: Who was his successor? Who came after him?

DK: I don't remember. I was gone by the time he moved on.

MG: I was curious about how you were thinking about your career. It sounds like you were taking advantage of lots of opportunities. But were you working to shape it in different directions?

DK: I'm pretty sure I've talked about that in a couple of the interviews you may have seen. As I progressed and moved up the chain and became more successful, I would have people come around and say, "You've done such a great job with your career. Could you talk us through your planning? How did that work? Did you have a five-year plan? Did you have a ten-year plan or one year? How did all that work?" And I said, "I had a no-year plan." I would just try and do the best I could wherever I happened to be. Either because of some interesting opportunity, or someone saying, "Hey, you're pretty good. We'd like you now to do this," that's how my career went. It did not have any plan associated with it. For the most part, it was, "Hey, that sounds like fun. Let's go do that." I just bounced from place to place and was somewhat successful every place I bounced and kept getting other opportunities.

MG: Can you talk a little bit about the *Exxon Valdez* and what that was like for you?

DK: At that point, I was still in Boulder, Colorado, and we did have a pretty good organization in place. We had a scientific support coordinator for Alaska at that point. So, this thing hit, and we realized how big it would be. I had spent a lot of time in Alaska, obviously, before I had been involved in a lot of the debate [and] discussion about the pipeline and shipping oil in and out. I'd actually been at the dedication for *Valdez* when the Coast Guard guy was asked, "So

what about a spill?" And the guy said, "Ha! We're ninety-some-percent sure that we'll never have a spill." He wasn't a hundred percent sure. [laughter] Sure enough, that few percent that he wasn't quite sure of happened. We knew it was going to be a huge deal. We had been around enough by then to know that this thing would really take off. So we launched – I was there within a day of the time that the spill occurred, as were a number of other people. We reserved a suite of rooms in a hotel, got with the Coast Guard, and then this thing just escalated and multiplied over time. We were deeply and directly involved with the Coast Guard. We'd already very, very well established a reputation of working with them. As the thing escalated, the local scientific support coordinator was really overwhelmed. He was a PhD but didn't have a lot of political background; he was really more of a pure scientist. We ended up having the commandant of the Coast Guard more or less managing the spill and huge politics at play. The state of Alaska [was] crazy and involved. So I, along with the guy who at that point was the head of OR&R, started trading off being the scientific support coordinator representing NOAA. Like I said, it just built and built and built, and all sorts of issues daily came up. Some of the science that was being conducted was just seat of the pants. There was a whole discussion about dispersants and their use, and we were trying to do that about that. There were people that were proposing using microbes to biodegrade, and that led to a whole research arena that just started up from scratch. As the spill polluted and contaminated more and more beaches and the pressure on Exxon to clean up became greater and greater, they started – they had unlimited resources, and they started developing cleanup techniques that were in and of themselves so invasive that we started a whole line of research on, should we allow Exxon to be using these barges with these huge hot water high-pressure systems on them that were wiping out any life that might have been still there, even with oil, as sterilizing the beach. Not only that but basically driving the oil that was high on the beach down into the intertidal area, which was much more biologically diverse and rich. That led to a whole series of studies when we finally got permission to actually have side-by-side beaches where you didn't clean one section, but you cleaned it aggressively in the next, and then scientists would go in and look at both sections. In all of this, [there was] incredible political and press interest. I was on *Good Morning America*, *The Tonight Show*. I was on every kind of show you can imagine. I ended up becoming a special counsel to Ted Stevens and flying around with him on his Gulf Stream, looking at stuff. That's a relationship that lasted until he died. I still hang out with his wife a lot. It was one of those monumental undertakings, and it went on for a couple of years. We ended up taking admirals from the Coast Guard with us to spills all over the country, all over the world, to compare what had gone on and how sites had recovered. In fact, we went back to France, where I had been with the admiral that was managing the spill at that time, to look at the cleanup efforts and what had worked and what hadn't. It was just a pretty huge undertaking. We continued research to this day because of a number of very special issues on that spill. You can still find oil from *Exxon Valdez* on the beaches of Alaska today. How's our time doing?

MG: We're at ten o'clock.

DK: All right.

MG: I think I'll ask a few more questions about *Exxon Valdez*, and we can put a pin in it for today.

DK: Okay. I had no idea you were going to go into this kind of depth. How are you going to write all this up? What's this all going to turn into? What you sent me was just a few paragraphs. This could be a book.

MG: It might be.

DK: [laughter]

MG: I would recommend you check out the website and read some of the other interviews. You might especially be interested in Gary Shigenaka and Nir Barnea's interviews.

DK: I read both Gary and Nir's. As I recall, they were very, very short. I will say that in all the years that I knew Gary and Nir, never did either one of them ever mentioned [their] parents being in internment camps and the Holocaust. Neither one of them ever said a word to me about either of those things.

MG: Those were both very interesting interviews. I think they were each around two or three hours long.

DK: Okay.

MG: One of the things you said in a previous interview was that the cleanup can be as intrusive as the oil itself and that this discovery led to changes in how cleanup is done. Can you say more about that?

DK: Well, yes. So the experiments that I referred to, where very, very intrusive cleanup methods were used, that had really not been a topic, a specific topic, that had been addressed in spills before. As a result of that research – and there is an oil spill conference every couple of years. Now, there's one here in the US, and there's another one internationally. But in those conferences, we [share] in-depth reports of the research that was done and the findings. That led, over time, to an acceptance within the community of – gosh, we've got to be pretty careful when we start looking at our cleanup options to make sure that we're not doing as much or more harm than if we just let it go. In some cases, even though it's hard to chew and swallow, it's better to let the oil degrade and remove itself naturally instead of trying to be intrusive.

MG: Was this when in situ burning was introduced? Or was that one of the things that weren't quite so effective?

DK: I'm trying to think if that's when it was introduced. I don't recall that we did any in situ burning in Alaska. We tried to burn on the ocean. So, I guess that is in situ burning. Yes. So, there was an attempt. I'm sorry. There were two or three attempts to try and burn on the water. There are a number of factors that go into whether you could be successful at all. One has to do with how fresh the oil is. Two has to do with how contained you can have the oil. Oil, as I'm sure you've read, spreads very, very rapidly to a very thin film. Unless there's some way that you could contain that oil and keep a thickness that then gives you a source of the burn, you have a problem. Three are just other weather conditions, wind and what have you. Then, four is the

smoke and the contamination from the smoke. Most of those conditions were not met – and the other is an ignition source, a really good ignition source that can light the oil off. This is floating on the water, and you need a good, very significant hot-burning ignition source. Most of those conditions weren't met in the *Exxon Valdez*. But thanks for refreshing my memory. Yes, we did try it three times, as I recall, but it wasn't ever very successful. It's certainly never removed any significant quantity of oil.

MG: Can you say a little bit more about how the cleanup unfolded, how long you were out there, and how things were changing?

DK: Well, part of the problem initially was that the oil company, Alyeska Pipeline [Service] Company, had staged cleanup equipment, but that cleanup equipment, as I recall, was in maintenance or the barge that carried it was somehow incapacitated, and so they did not have immediate access to some of the containment equipment that they needed. That let the spill begin to get out of control and out of hand, and the tides were very high and fast. So, with the quantity of oil you had released, it moved out and began to contaminate huge areas very, very quickly, to the point that they were behind the eight ball from the very beginning in having enough equipment to clean up. Equipment was flown in from all over the world, certainly all over the United States, but all over the world on a regular basis. But the lack of that equipment while the oil spread, the inability of much of that equipment to really be very effective, and the new techniques that were developed all took time, and by that point, that oil had spread all the way down through Prince William Sound and eventually got to Kodiak Island, which is a thousand-and-some miles away. So, [we were] behind the power curve to begin with, and we never really caught up. Then [there were] many complications. One of the things – in many cases, beaches are nice sandy or sandy, pebbly beaches, and when oil washes up on them, it's kind of easy to take it from the surface – or easier. But in Prince William Sound, there were many, many of the beaches that, as a result of earthquakes from way back when, weren't sandy at all; they were cobble, and cobble are like a fist or bigger size rocks that have tremendous interstitial space, so that when the oil washed up on a cobble beach, sometimes it went many feet deep into that cobble beach. How do you clean that up? You either have to remove the whole beach cobbled by cobble, [or] you can try and flush it to the surface. But like I said, you still can go on to many of those beaches and fine pooled oil because of that type of beach. So, lots of complications.

MG: What was the effect on the communities in Alaska that were impacted?

DK: Huge effects; some of it real, some of it perceived, and some of it a little bit like communities where they don't believe in COVID – same analogy, really. To begin with, financially, it was a big boon to many, many folks. They were able to get involved in that spill. Fishermen who couldn't fish, their boats were contracted, and they were making as much or more money helping with the spill as not. But most of the commercial fishery – salmon, herring, crab, all of those kinds of fisheries – were shut down. So, a huge impact to the communities that were pretty much driven by that kind of economy. And tremendous emotional upheaval – a pristine environment now contaminated beyond anybody's wildest dreams and has our whole culture and future now compromised because of what's happened. So, everything from suicides to you name it – huge impacts to the communities. Then you go to the indigenous communities,

who are subsistence hunters and fishers. I was one of the people assigned to go out to some of these communities and try and talk to them about what was going on. I remember going to one community that was not affected. The spill had not come to them at all. They were in and about the area, but their immediate surroundings weren't affected in any way. I remember we pulled up in a front plane onto the community beach, and there was a crowd of people out, standing there watching us float in. We got close, but we couldn't get right to the beach. Jokingly – I'm standing out on a pontoon – I said, "Hey, why doesn't somebody come out and get me and carry me in?" Of course, I thought that was pretty funny. They didn't think it was funny at all and said to me, "This water is poisoned. We can't touch this water." That wasn't true. They could have hunted and fished in and about their area, but because of everything they heard and the stories about oil in the water and how toxic it is, that community just shut down and, ironically, led to all sorts of controversy because the oil companies started bringing them replacements for their hunting and fishing and were bringing such things as spam, which was not thought of very kindly. So a lot of controversy about the kinds of things that are brought in to replace the hunting, fishing, and gathering.

MG: Did this work take an emotional toll on you? It sounds very stressful. Also, Alaska was a place you called home.

DK: Well, sure. Yes. I think so. For one, tremendous pressure. You had a meeting in the morning with all the dignitaries and operational folks to set your day. Then you would go out and work ten, twelve hours. Then, in the evening, you came back, and you had to have another meeting at the end of the day with all these same people to talk about what had been accomplished that day. Then, you went out, and you were just meant by a wall of press that all wanted interviews. So, a sixteen-hour day easily most days, and that went on for months. So a combination of little sleep, lots of activity, lots of politics, lots of press, lots of everything else. Sure. Yes.

MG: How did you come to be booked on *The Tonight Show*? Was Johnny Carson the host then?

DK: No, and it wasn't *The Tonight Show*. What was that other late-night news show? I misspoke. There was another long-running late new show. I can't remember the name of it. But it wasn't *The Tonight Show*. Yes, I told a bunch of jokes to Johnny. We had a great time. No, it wasn't *The Tonight Show*. When I was asked to be on the show, I was pretty visible, and I was in the middle of the spill, and I was pretty well-spoken on the issues. So, I got a lot of attention. A lot of people wanted to do interviews. Somehow, the local affiliate said, "Hey, you ought to try and get Kennedy on the late-night show." I think it was called *The Late Night Show*, come to think of it.

MG: I was wondering if it was *Nightline*.

DK: It was *Nightline*. Yes. It was *Nightline.* I said, "Well, I'll get on there and talk about the facts. But what I don't want is to get into some sort of a squabble with state people, who were making a political case out of this whole thing, more than talking facts." In fact, it reminds me a little of COVID today. It was all an emotional – "Oh my god. Can you believe that this has happened to us?" They told me who else was going to be on, and it was the Attorney General of

the State of Alaska. I knew him to be one of the biggest promoters of – "Can you believe this has happened to us? Everybody needs to step up and help us?" I said, "Well, I'll get on, but I'm not going to have a debate with a guy." They said, "No, no. No problem at all." So, I'm in Valdez, Alaska, but I'm all hooked up. This guy is on, and I'm talking facts. They turn to him, and he's got a dead oiled bald eagle in his lap. [laughter] It turned out to be less than just the facts, ma'am.

MG: Well, is there anything else you want to say about *Exxon Valdez* before we take a break for today?

DK: No, I don't think so. I mean, you get the drift. It was a huge undertaking, a big deal, kind of a high watermark in my whole career, and really led to many other opportunities as a result of it.

MG: Good. Well, we'll have to explore those the next time we talk.

DK: Okay. Like I said, it's like it's going to be a book.

MG: [laughter] Well, it would be a very interesting one.

DK: Well, look at Zoom. It worked fine.

MG: A little awkward with the delay, but I think we managed.

DK: Okay. So, you'll send me a note and let me know when you want to try again.

MG: Yes. Thank you so much for your time.

DK: Not a problem. See you. Bye.

MG: Bye-bye.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Molly Graham 1/12/2022
Reviewed by David Kennedy 2/4/2022
Reviewed by Molly Graham 2/26/2025