Smithsonian Folklife Interview

Robert Burt
Forest, Silviculturist
Green Mountain National Forest
Rutland, Vermont

June, 2004

Interviewer: Kari Lusk

Kari Lusk (KL): Good morning. Today is June 24, 2004, and today with us we have…

Robert Burt (RB): I am Bob Burt. B-U-R-T.

KL: Bob, when and where were you born?

RB: I was born in Titusville, Pennsylvania, which is north of Pittsburgh and south of Erie, Pennsylvania. April 12, 1951.

KL: And where did you grow up?

RL: I grew up in Bradford, Pennsylvania.

KL: Was it a rural area?

RB: No, Bradford is about 25,000 population.

KL: Did you grow up right in town, or on the outskirts?

RB: I grew up in the outskirts.

KL: Was it a large family?

RB: No. I have one brother that's five years younger than myself. And he's currently in Indiana.

KL: And what is your current profession?

RB: I'm a forester by profession, and my specialty is silviculture.

KL: Did you ever guess as a young boy that you were going to grow up and be in silviculture?

RB: No. When I was a… Probably through about my tenth grade in high school, I always assumed I would be a schoolteacher. And when I was in Boy Scouts I took forestry merit badge,

and the local Forest Service foresters gave the merit badge; and I became interested in forestry at that point.

KL: Did you have any family members that worked for the Forest Service?

RB: No, but my brother did work summers on the Allegheny National Forest, where I started my career.

KL: Okay. And that was right in Bradford?

RB: That was right in Bradford, yes.

KL: Where have you lived throughout your life?

RB: Well, of course I grew up in Bradford. I went to school in Morgantown, West Virginia, which is West Virginia University, and I always assumed that I would be working in the northeastern United States. So then my first job was on the Superior National Forest in Minnesota. And I left Pennsylvania the end of September; when I got to northern Minnesota they were having a snowstorm. It was a little early, and I thought I was sent to Siberia. [KL laughs] And I later, I met my wife in Minnesota, and then-- She also works for the Forest Service as a soil scientist—we went to West Virginia. And then we came here in December of 1988.

KL: Okay. So, at what point did you start working for the Forest Service? Was it right after college?

RB: No, it's kind of interesting. I kept going into the Forest Service office and asking questions about career and so forth. So they offered me a summer job, and that was between my junior and senior year in high school. It was a program that… it was called Youth Opportunity Corps.

KL: Okay.

RB: And I made a dollar sixty an hour, which was the minimum wage at that time.

KL: Wow. So you did that, was it every summer after that?

RB: I worked five summers on the Allegheny…

KL: Okay.

RB: And I worked two summers under the Youth Opportunity Corps. And then later I got a GS 3. And I think it was like three something an hour, and I thought I was really rich at that point.

KL: What did they have you doing back then?

RB: Well the reservoir had just recently been completed, and they had recreation areas scattered across the reservoir, so we maintained those by… we collected the garbage, cleaned toilets,

picked up litter, and all the sort of things that I always thought I was the low end of the totem pole. And then later when I worked, I collected money at campgrounds, and the I actually ran a summer program one of those summers.

KL: What was it like back then? The climate, the people?

RB: Well it was really interesting back in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s. The Forest Service, at least in Pennsylvania, was not very well known, and there was like an identity crisis. We got confused with the state forestry, and people didn’t really know that the Forest Service existed. Of course, that has really changed now. You know, like thirty-five, forty years later.

KL: So what was it like initially to become part of the Forest Service? Were you proud to be a part of the agency?

RB: Yeah, it was kind of interesting in that, at that time growing up, I learned about the Forest Service through the “Lassie” program, and so it had this image that we’re out saving lost kids, and this romanticized feature of the Forest Service.

KL: Did you notice anything special about the Forest Service workers or the culture?

RB: I noticed that they talked a lot about Forest Service family, is that the people were very close together. Families picnicked quite often together; there was district parties and that sort of thing. And it was kind of interesting breaking into that culture.

KL: Do you think the Forest Service family has the same meaning today that it used to?

RB: No, I think things have changed somewhat. There’s not the closeness that there used to be.

KL: Why do you think that happened?

RB: I think there’s probably a diversity of people that come into the Forest Service. And people have different associations with the community. Where in the past, the Forest Service had… We actually were called in some locations the Forest Service clique. And we tended to stick together and not really associate with a lot of local people. And that was really encouraged at that time. People would move around quite frequently, so it was real easy for them to get friends with the Forest Service and like people that they would have this association.

KL: How do you feel about that personally? Do you miss the camaraderie with your…?

RB: I think it’s both good and bad. It used to be that it was hard to separate work and off time. In this community I have become much more engaged with outside activities and different groups.

KL: The working environment has changed quite a bit over the years. What have you seen, and have certain positions become obsolete?

RB: Yes, it used to be that, before flextime, work started exactly at eight o'clock and it ended exactly at four thirty.

KL: For everyone?

RB: For everybody. Yes. People needed to be, to show up on time, and everybody left the office right at four thirty. I think that has been, the flextime has been a good change.

KL: How about within your profession? What have you seen change?

RB: The change has been that, in the past, most of the professionals were foresters; and throughout my career I've seen more specialists incorporated in the Forest Service. And that's been a good thing.

KL: What about women in your field? Have you seen more and more, or has that changed, or not?

RB: Oh, that has really changed. When I first started working I didn't know of any women that worked in the Forest Service, except maybe in a clerical job. When I went to forestry school there were two women in our class, and it was talked about quite a bit, as like, you know, how will they, can they really take on the rigors of this profession, and so forth. And then in the '80s and '90s there was a real move to hire more women in the organization.

KL: Someone had mentioned there was a videotape or a special training session they put on for employees, called "The Changing Roles of Men and Women". Do you remember going through that?

RB: Oh I remember going to that in Pennsylvania. I worked in West Virginia at the time. I remember people being a little stressed out that their feelings had to come out to the groups, and so forth. Yeah, I remember that training.

KL: What was it like to have a woman join the team initially, for you?

RB: For me it wasn't really any problem, but for some of the older technicians it was quite different. And they didn't quite know how to act. They were concerned that they would have to give up some of their habits, and their language would have to change, and so forth.

KL: I see. So it was a different world out in the field.

RB: It definitely was. Yes. [Laughter]

KL: One gal had mentioned yesterday that if a single female had just joined the crew, in her profession, they were required to be teamed up with only the married men, and not the single men. Did you see anything like that?

RB: I don't remember seeing anything like that. But I can remember going out in the field with technicians, and they were uncomfortable with the possibility of a woman joining the crew. And then finally when a woman joined the crew and so forth, their comfort level really increased, and things weren't quite as bad as they perceived them to be. [Laughter]

KL: What was the sentiment of the public towards the Forest Service when you just started, initially?

RB: Yeah, when I first started, like I was saying, on the Allegheny National Forest, the Forest Service wasn't very known, and the… There wasn't a lot of activity on the national forest at that time. There wasn't a lot of interaction with the public, and the Forest Service kind of did their thing. And there wasn't some of the requirements to explain activities and so forth to the public. But when the reservoir was built in the '60s, recreation activities then came on line and people started getting exposure to the Forest Service and learned more about it.

KL: During your tenure have you noticed that historical events affected the culture of the Forest Service?

RB: Oh yes. Like, I can remember the clear cutting controversy, when I was going to school in West Virginia on the Monongahela National Forest. And then the National Forest Management Act is kind of a result of that, and the change. And then in the '60s, the later '60s, the National Environmental Policy Act, which really changed how we did business.

KL: What exactly was the clear cut controversy, basically?

RB: Well my understanding of that controversy was that during the '50s the Forest Service overcut a lot of their timber stands on the Monongahela, and then they went back in and removed some of these scattered trees. And it was this, we are the professionals, we know best. And there was no allowances for visual quality and that. So there was like two hundred acre clear cuts on a mountainside faced this community; Richwood, West Virginia.

KL: Okay. So how many years have you worked for the Forest Service?

RB: I have thirty-one years of service.

KL: Thirty-one.

RB: Yes.

KL: And you started out as a rec technician, or seasonal?

RB: Yeah, seasonal, yeah.

KL: Okay. And what other jobs have you had?

RB: Throughout my career I've worked in reforestation. When I worked in Minnesota I was a recreation forester. And then when I came here to the Green Mountain I've worked as a silviculturist.

KL: And what exactly is a recreation forester?

RB: Well, we were doing recreation planning. Managing campgrounds; planning for dispersed recreation sites; snowmobile trails, cross-country ski trails, and also summer trails and so forth.

KL: Do you partake in any of those activities?

RB: Oh yes. I like to do a little cross-country skiing. And just recently family, I should say my wife and I, went to northern Minnesota. With our relatives in Minnesota we took a week trip in the Boundary Canoe Area Wilderness, which is quite enjoyable.

KL: So you did some canoeing and hiking?

RB: Did some canoeing. Portaged our canoe and gear across the portages, and caught several fish and had fish for breakfast. Fish for dinner.

KL: So you mentioned you wife also works for the Forest Service. She's a soil scientist.

RB: Right.

KL: And you have two children?

RB: Two children. My daughter just recently graduated from Clarkson University, which is in upstate New York, and she's working for a consulting engineering firm now, in Syracuse, where she's working as an environmental and civil engineer.

KL: Okay.

RB: Then my son Andy has just finished his second year at Boston University, and he's majoring in biochemistry and genetics.

KL: Great. I understand that you have had a few trips over to Russia.

RB: Yes.

KL: For your position with the Forest Service. Tell us a little bit about that.

RB: Well that's got to be some of the most exciting experiences I've had in my Forest Service career. In 1999 I got an email requesting people interested in going to the Russian Far East, which is, the ecosystem's very similar to what we have here in the northeastern United States. But they were looking for silviculturists that had experience planting white pine underneath oak stands, and they had a similar situation there.

KL: Were there tigers involved with this?

RB: Yeah. The objective of this project was to improve habitat for the Siberian tiger. The tree we were planting is called Korean pine, and it produces a large pine nut about as big as your small finger, and that's eaten by various wild life such as wild boars, deer, and elk, and then they become prey for the Siberian tiger, which there's only four hundred left in the world in that particular area.

KL: So you went there in '99?

RB: Yes, I've been involved with the project for the last five years. I assumed that was going to be my first and my only trip.

KL: So you went back.

RB: And so I kept going back. Yes.

KL: So how did it progress? What did you see?

RB: Well, the reason we went was the Russian foresters were required trees, like five thousand trees per hectare, so they were like every meter apart. And our experience has shown that we could plant less than a thousand trees and could meet their objectives of improving habitat. But the local foresters in Russia knew that they could plant less trees, but they were directed by Moscow to do it in a certain way, and if they deviated from that they would lose their job or the district ranger could actually be thrown in jail.

KL: Wow.

RB: So we established a demonstration area, which the Russian foresters participated in.

KL: So did they end up doing it the other way?

RB: Their plantings now are on the wider spacing. They're using what we call [ecostand?]: an ecological approach to forest management.

KL: So how long did you spend over there each time?

RB: Oh, it varied from two weeks to three weeks.

KL: And what was that like?

RB: Oh it was quite unusual in that I'd never done any foreign travel before, except maybe going to Canada. And where we went was a place called , [Chagulka?] which was north of Vladivostok. And we had to take like three weeks supply of toilet paper with you, because toilet paper wasn't publicly available. And the hotel we stayed at cost us like five dollars a month,

[corrects himself] five dollars a night. We called it the [Chagulka?] Hilton. [Laughter] But the water that they had in the building was on a reservoir on the roof, and it was used to flush the toilets, if you were lucky to have a room that even had a toilet, or had a sink. So once the water ran out on the roof, the hotel was out of water, except for buckets that the babushkas had in the lobby. And so then you would have to go down and get a bucket of water, and that was for your last flush of the toilet. So the water truck may not come for a day or two.

KL: Was that the fanciest place they had?

RB: That was the only place.

KL: The only place?

RB: Yeah.

KL: The best accommodations.

RB: That's right.

KL: What about meals?

RB: Meals, there was a restaurant just across the city center. And it was interesting; they had quite good meals. They had a lot of food very similar to what we ate. But you could get a meal for like two or three dollars. So when we would… Instead of each one paying our bill, we would take turns buying the meal for all the Americans, and then we had interpreters, and the drivers and so forth. So the total bill for like, six or seven people would be like fifteen or twenty dollars. So we would argue about whose turn it was that night.

KL: Now what was the language barrier like?

RB: Well, it was kind of interesting. Most Americans don't speak any other language except English, and the Russians, it was amazing, there was a few of them that were learning English, so they'd try to practice their English on us, and hang around us to try to pick up some of our American slang.

KL: Do you have any good stories about that?

RB: Oh, let me think. Well, I can just tell you that the children in the Russian Far East, about sixty per cent of their programming is on American television programs. And it's English and then they dub it over in Russian. And I think one of the strangest tings I've ever seen, we were in this isolated village and we were watching television, and we were watching Bemis and Butthead.

KL: No. [Laughter]

RB: So we were exporting some of the best and worst of our culture.

KL: Did you visit some schools, did I understand, while you were over there?

RB: Yes. While we were in [Chagulka?]. One of the things I did on my first trip was to take Smoky Bear materials over. We knew that fire prevention was a big problem for the Russian forest service in that area. So I'm a member of my local Kiwanis Club, and they saw it as an opportunity to have an international project.

KL: So tell me a little bit about working, or going into these schools in Russia.

RB: Yes. The first few trips I took I brought Smoky Bear materials and just gave that to kids on the street. And then the second year we were back the English teacher met us and we went into her classroom and so forth. And she took a lot of the Smoky Bear materials and she incorporated it into an environmental education program. And last year I found out that the World Wildlife Fund had hired her as the environmental education coordinator for that part of the Russian Far East.

KL: She had to be excited to meet you. An American forester.

RB: Oh yeah. One of the things we did our second year is we were invited into their classroom after our day in the field. So they asked us questions about life in the United States.

KL: In English?

RB: The teacher did, but most of the children reverted to having to ask their questions in Russian.

KL: Okay.

RB: Yeah. One of the interesting things was that, we had a couple people from Oregon, and one of our guys was form Indiana, and of course I was from Vermont. And I thought, well there's not going to be many kids in Russia know even where Vermont is. And I said, I'm from Vermont, which is a small state in New England. And this little girl said, well how far do you live from Boston? [Laughter] So if you asked people in New England where Vladivostok would be, you'd be lucky if they even knew it was in Russian, let alone the Russian Far East.

KL: True. So in the evening did you socialize with the people in the community, or in the group that you were with?

RB: Yes, we tended to eat dinner with the Russian foresters and their families, and then one of the things we enjoyed the most was going to their homes, and one of the guys had a sauna so we could take a shower. Because there was no shower in the hotel.

KL: Oh, none at all?

RB: No. The only thing we had was cold water from the sink, and then we bought an electric tea kettle so we could warm up water. So we'd go for about four days with our bath from the sink.

KL: So do most people have running water in their homes there?

RB: No, most people don't. [Chagufka?] is like about ten thousand population, and they have wells on the street, or hydrants. And so they have to carry their water to their house. And they're, you know. Except for some of the apartment buildings, most people used outhouses.

KL: Interesting.

RB: Yeah. But during the Soviet era, most of their economy was devoted to the defense. And so all their revenue and so forth went into that, and the people really kind of suffered.

KL: So how has that experience changed you?

RB: Well I'm really appreciative of what we have. And when I have a trip to the Russian Far East and come back home, I always tell my wife I won't complain at least for two weeks. [Laughter]

KL: Do you expect to go back again?

RB: There's no plans for our team to go back this. Most of the international forestry money is going elsewhere. But I was asked to renew my passport for future trips.

KL: Have the Russian foresters that you worked with there visited you here?

RB: Yes, that was really interesting. In 2001 there were four foresters that flew into Chicago, and Ron Overton from Indiana and I met them at the Chicago airport, and we toured them around Minnesota and Wisconsin for two weeks. So we looked at various forestry operations and so forth. It totally blew their mind to go from a small community in Russia to get off a plane in Chicago and see some of our culture.

KL: Was it their first trip?

KL: Yes, it was their first trip for all of them, yeah. We spent one weekend in Minneapolis; we went to the Mall of America; which totally blew their minds.

KL: [Laughs] I bet it did. So do you stay in contact with them?

RB: Yes. One of the foresters in Vladivostok is Vladimir Patinko, and he speaks English better than I do. And so we email each other probably once a month.

KL: And have you learned any Russian?

RB: I've learned Russian, but I tell Vladimir I'm stuck at a two-year-old level. [Laughs] One of the interesting things is, probably about three years ago I asked him, is there anything that I could send you, and I was thinking of research articles or U.S. Forest Service handbooks and so forth. So he thought a while, and he said, I want you to send me a Christmas card with a short letter written in Russian. So he knew that would be, take a little bit of work to do.

KL: Right.

RB: And so I, when I got back I waited 'til after Thanksgiving, and I found a Christmas card, and then I got my book out, and I'd write a little bit, and then I'd write some more. So I got maybe a page. It probably took me an hour to translate it. So I sent it off air mail. And I didn't hear from him, and so I just assumed he got it. And I got an email from him on January seventeenth, and he said, Robert, I received your Christmas card today with most pleasure. And he said, we put your letter on the bulletin board, and many people in our offices have big smiles. They probably were laughing at my poor Russian. [Laughs]

KL: Now they have email?

RB: Oh yes. Yes.

KL: Do most Russians have computers?

RB: In the regional office. They have computers in the big cities. In the smaller communities they don't. Which brings a little, an interesting story, working with the {Chagulfkas?} school is that I raised some money to take five hundred dollars to the English teacher in [Chagulfka]. And I said, our desire is for you to buy two computers. And so the next year, well last year when I went back, they had bought two computers with our money, and they had raised enough money in their community to buy two more computers, that they were so impressed that we would, in this community, take money to them. So I had five hundred dollars more that I had raised for them, and they had desired to buy two more computers.

KL: Great.

RB: And then they actually had a computer class. And it was being instructed by a businessman in that community.

KL: How many children were in this classroom?

RB: oh, there was probably twenty-five to thirty.

KL: Are they all at different ages, sort of like the old one-school?

RB: No. This was like K through eighth grade. Very similar to ours. But they had various English classes, and the group that we were working in when we first went there were in fifth and sixth grade, and then last year they were in about eighth grade.

KL: How many teachers in the school?

RB: Oh, there's probably about a dozen teachers.

KL: Okay. So there are different rooms.

RB: Yes. And it's interesting. They make about forty dollars a month.

KL: Wow. [KL and RB laugh] Are they considered to be…? Are they looked upon favorably as being a teacher? Is that a good job to have in Russia?

RB: Oh, very much so. Education is looked on very highly in Russia. And the teachers look on it as a profession that is well-like by the community.

KL: Talk a little bit more about your forestry background. What initially got you interested in that?

RB: Well, as I mentioned earlier, I took a Boy Scout merit badge in forestry and became interested in it. And I started talking to the local foresters, learning more about it. Always enjoyed taking hikes around my house and so forth.

KL: What do you value most about what you do?

RB: What do I value most? I think what I value most is the projects that I've implemented, and the long-term… meeting some of the long-term objectives. And that somebody else will then be able to take my work and continue it on.

KL: How have changes and advances in technology and communication affected your job and what you do?

RB: Well, it's amazing the change in technology. It's like… When I first started, we used what we called a ready mapper to map areas, or project areas. And before that they would actually take notes and go back to the office and then sketch the map in the office. And the ready mapper allowed you to do that sketch map in the field. So that was considered new technology. And now that ready mapper's so obsolete. They use GPS and GIS. Some of the newer foresters, they look at the ready mapper and they kind of laugh.

KL: Did you have to learn the GIS equipment?

RB: Oh, absolutely. That's been a major change. Yeah. I came from the slide rule era.

KL: the slide rule era. So how are your skills going to be passed down to the next generation?

RB: That's a good question, is that a lot of my knowledge of silviculture, and the interaction of how a forest responds to certain treatment, I'll be able to pass on to others, and it's always an evolving science.

KL: You mentioned a few tools in our discussion here. What type of tools are involved in silviculture? How are they used and what are they?

RB: Well, the primary tool that we use in silviculture is the timber sale, and timber harvesting. And that's the low cost way of implementing our forest plan and some of our wildlife objectives. And so over the years timber sales have kind of evolved from providing wood for the market to wildlife biologists expressing a desired change in the condition of the landscape, and we as silviculturists working with them to reach some of those long term objectives.

KL: What do you think about the future of your trade? What are its challenges?

RB: Well the challenges now is that the public perception of forestry and cutting trees has changed. It's viewed as not desirable on public land in many cases. There's been a real conflict with that; we're finding that with forest plan revision. People are becoming much more polarized in their values than what it was in the past.

KL: Why do you think that is?

RB: In the past the people that knew about the national forests were local people, and they had strong roots in the community and kind of had a rural background. And now as people are moving from larger cities, had an urban background and moving to these more rural areas, they're bringing with them some of their values. So it's a real challenge to, really not change, but open their minds to some of these multiple use objectives that we have on the national forest.

KL: On a personal level, what kind of interests and hobbies do you have?

RB: Well, annually what I look forward to the most is deer hunting, and I either go to western New York State or in Pennsylvania where I grew up.

KL: How about your children?

RB: It's interesting. I never expected my daughter to enjoy hunting. But my son doesn't really desire to do that. And I think part of the reason was, in Vermont the deer herd is so low, and I've taken him out sometimes and we sat in the rain, and all day and never saw a deer, so he quickly lost interest in deer hunting.

KL: But your daughter pursues it?

RB: My daughter has interest in hiking and camping and so forth. She did a little fishing when she was younger. And my son will do some fishing also.

KL: Are you still active with the Scouts?

RB: No, I’m really not. I’ve really become involved with the local Kiwanis Club. And I was a member of the Kiwanis Club when I was in West Virginia, and then when I came here to Vermont I joined the local Kiwanis Club.

KL: What are you most proud of in relation to your Forest Service career?

RB: I would say probably what I’m most proud of is working with the Russian forest service in our demonstration areas that we’ve established there. We probably, we made some major changes.

KL: if you could travel in time, which era, working for the Forest Service, would be the one that you would want to work in?

RB: Well that I’ve thought about. I’ve always thought that the 1930s, during the Civilian conservation Corps, would have been an exciting time to have worked for the Forest Service. A lot of their work during the CCC era is still evident today.

KL: Do you get out in the field much today?

RB: No, I don’t. I’m in forest planning right now, and a hundred per cent of the time in the office, or at public meetings and so forth. But before that I would get out maybe about forty per cent of my time.

KL: Now tell us a little bit about forest planning.

RB: Forest planning. We’re required to revise our forest plan every ten to fifteen years, and it responds to changes in technology, changes in issues, conditions, and so forth. It’s kind of an exciting time. As I mentioned, when I grew up in Pennsylvania that there was very little interest in the Forest Service, and now, you know, like, we had a public meeting a couple nights ago; we had a hundred people… a hundred and twenty people showed up. Next day there’s front page coverage of it in the newspaper. So it’s kind of exciting having a lot of people interested in exactly what you’re doing.

KL: How long have you been doing forest planning?

RB: I’ve been involved with it for just over a year. And I started out as a part-time participant on the planning, and it’s evolved into a full-time job.

KL: Do you miss being out in the field?

RB: Oh I do, yes. But I also understand that forest planning is really important. It sets the direction for the next fifteen years.

KL: What is your relationship as a Forest Service employee to the local communities?

RB: That's a good question, in that I'm probably more involved with the local community here than many other places I've worked. And so people kind of know me first as a person, and second as a Forest Service employee. So they'll ask me what I think of different issues, and how they might get involved with forest plan revision or something like that.

KL: Can you identify a certain Forest Service culture? What do you think makes up who Forest Service employees are?

RB: You know, it's really interesting. I first realized what a culture it was… I was in Milwaukee one time. And I went to a hotel, and down in the basement there were two meetings going on, and one was businessmen and the other one was Forest Service employees. And it was a biologists group. So I looked in the one, and people had suits on and so forth, and I said, that's not my group. [KL laughs] So I went into the next one, and you could just pick out. It seemed like everybody was cloned. They were all wearing the same style clothing, and you could almost swear you could be at any Forest Service office and these were the same type of people that would be there.

KL: Blue jeans…?

RB: Blue jeans. They had belt buckles on that were Forest Service, and the style of their haircut, and so forth. So I think maybe over time, as people come to work for the Forest Service, they evolve into this cloning thing, I call it.

KL: Do you think it's a more casual way of life?

RB: Oh, definitely more casual. Yes.

KL: How has the dress changed over the years? Did you have to wear a uniform when you were out in the field?

RB: Yes. When I worked on a ranger district you were expected [emphasis] to wear a uniform. And you had to wear a uniform properly. I can remember, we were just changing uniforms to a different style. An employee showed up with the old set of pants and a new shirt. The forest supervisor was there, and the regional forester was coming. And he told the employee that he was t go home immediately and change into the new uniform, and that he was not supposed to mix and match parts.

KL: Wow.

RB: Yeah. So the rest of us knew that when we showed up, we'd better be in the right uniform.

KL: How about within the office? Have you seen a lot of dress code changes from when you started?

RB: Yes. There's less people that wear the uniform, even on the ranger districts. And it used to be unacceptable to wear short pants in the office, and now we see more of that occurring. And I

can remember, a woman showed up in the supervisor's office that had sandals on. And the forest supervisor told her she needed to go home and come back with the proper footwear. He considered sandals inappropriate for the workplace, and they actually considered them a safety hazard.

KL: What year was this?

RB: This was probably about 1983.

KL: Wow.

RB: So it's not all that long ago.

KL: Was he expecting boots or…?

RB: He was expecting her to have low-heel shoes.

KL: Low-heel shoes.

RB: Yeah.

KL: Things certainly have changed.

RB: Yes.

KL: What keepsakes or mementos do you possess related to your job with the Forest Service?

RB: Well, I've received some awards over the years. I have those on my wall. I have different books that were given to me when retirees left and said, you need to keep this particular book. I remember I had a book on—published in the 1920s—on logging the United States, and was given a direction: don't let anybody throw this out. And I had one book that was given to me, it was called *Fifty Years of Vermont Forestry*. It was published in 1959. It gave the history of Vermont forestry from 1909 to '59. And then there was a section on the Green Mountain National Forest. And I showed that to Paul Brewster a couple years ago, and he says, can you lend that to me? And I've never received it back, so I know that it's in his office and it will be kept there. [KL laughs]

KL: And there any other stories that you wanted to share with us before we wrap up?

RB: I can't think of any.

KL: Okay. I think we're about done.

[Reorder turned off and turned on again]

RB: One of my favorite memories was that when I was working in West Virginia I was working with Tom Wyatt, who was one of our forestry technicians. He had about thirty years working with the Forest Service. And we were on a mountain called Gauley Mountain. And it was like thirty miles of this really rough road. And we'd go, some sections we could only maintain about ten miles an hour. So we came by this strip mine, and there was some red pine planted there. And I had been given permission and actually bought a couple of Christmas tree permits. And the ranger suggested that I get the Christmas trees from the strip mine. So I was kind of… As we were driving by the strip mine I told Tom, I said, well, I think I'm going to cut a couple of Christmas trees from that area when we come back. And he thought I was going to steal them. [Laughter] So I played along with him a little bit. So when we came back at the end of the day, we had a bow saw and I went out and cut one of the trees, and then he looked around. He found one. So when I was putting the one I had back in the truck, Tom comes out to the road. Of course there's not anybody near for the next thirty miles. But he looks up and down the road both ways, he grabs his Christmas tree, runs down the road, throws it in the back of the truck and covers it with the tarp. So I reach in my pack and I get the Christmas tree permits, or seals, and I put them on the tree. And he says, what are those? And I explained that they were really permits. And he says, gosh, he says, I was having fun thinking we were stealing these on government time. [Laughter]

KL: What did you do with them? Put them in the office to decorate, or…?

RB: We used one at our church, and one went to a school.

KL: Oh. Okay.

RB: Yeah.

KL: What about socializing with employees? Do people do a lot of that these days?

RB: There tends to be less of that. And I think part of that is that… Like Rutland is a fairly large community, so there's more interaction with, more opportunities to do things different. But I've worked in some remote ranger districts where having picnics and parties and so forth at the district were highlights.

KL: So you think the smaller the area, the more socializing?

RB: Oh definitely. That's definitely the case. Yeah.

KL: We've heard tales of international dinner clubs and Friday night…

RB: Yes.

KL: Friday night clubs.

RB: I can remember one of the districts I worked on, the men would get together on Friday night, and they'd play poker. [Laughs. KL laughs]

KL: All right.

END OF INTERVIEW